



Montessori - A Vital Approach to Education for Children and Potential Teachers in Remote Areas of Australia

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Presentation given at the 2005 International Montessori Congress, 14-17 July 2005, Sydney Australia

My English name is Jean and my tribal name is Gaarkamunda. This means Bush Fire Hawk. I was born at home in Mapoon where I was delivered by women elders. My Education was fourfold prior to embarking on a career in Nursing. Teaching was by my elders, the wives of the different Missionaries and Primary correspondence school. A short part of this was at the Thursday Island State School at the age of twelve. I am passionate about Community Development processes and the value of facilitation as I believe this allows all individuals to learn to own their contents and processes and ultimately their own lives.



What I experienced at the Montessori conference in Sydney in 2004 convinced me that the process used was very similar to that used by my old people to teach me when I was a child and it felt psychologically safe. I went away from that conference feeling greatly excited about Montessori education and I continue to be excited. The complimenting factors that align the two methods of teaching are in the very principles utilized. These principles embrace trust, process, strategy, wisdom, safety and space for children to move physically and psychologically within the identified and accepted boundaries where teachers become the facilitators and catalysts for change rather than the controllers in the process of just imparting information.

Boundaries and the knowledge of the importance of these to the process of teaching and learning at the very beginning sets the right scene for teaching and learning safely in a holistic way.

On observation, the Montessori Method of teaching is also linked very much to the value of relationships between teacher and student; student and teacher who are the important stakeholders in this process. The other profound aspect of your Montessori principles is that you acknowledge the importance of the families who are naturally pivotal in their children's education and include them equally as stakeholders because you accept that at the end of the day, children do go home. I applaud the fact that Montessori has high expectations of the families input in their children's education. This is very refreshing.

Relationships between teacher and student; student and teacher are vital to this teaching and learning process; so too is the teacher's high expectations of family members who are acknowledged to have ultimate responsibility for the continuing education of their children within the correct partnerships.

What I learned that weekend, has been positively thought provoking for me as it actually defined the reason why Montessori education is successful throughout the World. The listed teaching principles included at the beginning of this paper are implicit in the processes I observed. I would like to reiterate here that this method of teaching has marked similarities to that of the teaching of our old

people coupled with the significance of the levels of our relationship structure that has profoundly complemented this.

It is important to draw comparisons between the different ways of teaching and learning especially when we are looking at the fit of education within the different cultures and the significance of these structural values together with the meaning of different relationships for the best outcomes to occur.

Having weaved the messages of our old peoples' principles of teaching into this paper; I would now like to briefly expand on these through headlines focusing specifically on their teaching principles and the value of relationships in our customs as this will emphasize the natural fit of our children into the Montessori education process.

First, Relationships: We have a structure of five levels of relationships that has a purpose implicit within each level.

These are:

1. Children
 - a. Biological
 - b. Nieces and nephews
 - c. Cousins children
 - d. Adopted
2. Brothers and sisters
 - a. Siblings
 - b. Great grandparents
 - c. Great grandchildren
 - d. Cousins
 - e. Adopted
3. Parents
 - a. Biological
 - b. Aunts and uncles
 - c. Adopted
4. Grandparents
 - a. Biological (on both sides)
 - b. Extended families
 - c. Adopted
5. Taboo
 - a. Parents in law
 - b. Fathers and mother's in law
 - c. Brothers and sisters in law
 - d. Parents older brothers and sisters
 - e. Adopted

Within each of the levels there is a purpose and a role. Level two is especially significant because it relates to the area of play where the great grandparent is a part of the play relationship and is able to apply discipline and teaching skills within a natural, safe and acceptable boundary because the adults at this level are an intricate part of the children's world. This illustrates the wisdom of our ancestors to combine great grandparents and great grandchildren at this play level to ensure that mutually planned learning through natural safety, trust, respect, caring principles and strategies were implicit. Also implicit in this relationship is the bond that is ensured throughout the generations.

Different relationship structures have profound significance within the diverse cultures of our world as a method of providing for the survival of those who are taught. At the end of the day if we analyze the outcomes, we find that there are more similarities across cultures in relationship to outcomes to ensure children's learning occurs; rather than differences. It is about acknowledging, understanding, embracing and celebrating these aspects of similarities and differences rather than just discarding these.

Our old people formally taught us through the senses of touch, feeling, active listening and observation. It was a protocol within our culture to refrain from asking our elders questions. When we did ask questions this was considered rude and it showed them we were not being attentive enough to their teaching skills as in their wisdom they knew to develop our senses is to survive when we are alone. Verbal learning is only one method of learning; the expansion of our senses is another method for we as human beings are all endowed with the senses mentioned and this holistic learning process is as important today as it was in the old days.

Protocols are alive and well in all cultures. Observation of these varies across cultures according to the level of respect human beings have one for the other. Cultures too evolve and so do our attitudes to protocols!

To continue to facilitate the Montessori teaching method in Australia and especially in isolated areas, it is very important for all children to be recipients together rather than just Aboriginal children on their own. This is crucial today to allow our children to interact with other children and so learn together. Children of all cultures have so much to share. So too do their parents.

Children learn what they live and where better than within the natural environment of the education system for this to occur on a daily basis. Here, both positive and negative peer leadership and pressure emerges. This is what life is about. In isolated areas it can be quite easy to resist this natural occurrence by placing emphasis on separate teaching and learning based on where children of different cultures are seen to fit within the education system. When this occurs, children of a particular culture become marginalized.

Culture evolves and, within the not too distant future we as tribal people of Australia will integrate into this society ultimately losing all links with our past. Will the wider Australian people value our culture enough to adopt its' principles too, finally recognising that both principles can combine to facilitate our emergence as one proud people with mutually rich backgrounds to support our long walk together into the future? Once we as the original tribes lose our past, where will our place be in Australia's socio, economic structure? How will education generally benefit our children of the future? What part will Montessori play in breaking down barriers for our children to learn and achieve alongside others in the whole of the Australian education approach?

I believe the challenge for Montessori Education is as a partner in remote areas of Australia so as to allow for the occurrence of integrated learning by remote area children and their families. I place emphasis on Montessori and integration because that is what we require especially as marginalization prevents and/or reduces our potential. Having Montessori embedded in these areas will prove to provide a balance for upholding the principles of teaching and learning so that people in our sections of the world will have greater choices as to how their children are to be educated.

There is an urgency for all Australians to walk together; to understand and acknowledge each others culture so as to facilitate the growth of all children in Australia and especially those in remote areas. All remote area children need stimulus from each other so as to aspire to greater heights within and without their local area.

Having a background in nursing, I draw parallels to the different cultural responses to health care and delivery of services. One cultural response that will always had a profound effect on me is the

approach that acknowledges that as individuals our bodies respond uniquely to different methods of treatment therefore we should cater for the individual's needs rather than that of the masses!

Montessori approaches its care on the individual child. So too must the response be for children's education in the different parts of Australia where I sincerely believe that Montessori does have a place in the overall framework of children's education and their ultimate achievement.

From my perspective, remote areas with unique and diverse infrastructure support encompass people of all cultures and it is this factor that is important. Education approaches must be aimed at uniting all children and adults in the learning framework at the very beginning and not aimed at the marginalization of just one cultural group of people whether it is for affirmative action or otherwise here in Australia. Montessori, like the State Government Education System has its own circle of influence and it is this circle of influence that can facilitate to the best of its ability an inclusive process for all children's learning in remote areas and have an important part in the overall education process.

As an adult, I see and feel more and more that we live in an adult world in our isolated communities. One aspect that shows me this is the way we design our buildings including our sports, entertainment and function centres that we cater just for adults, NOT children and adults. I would like to reiterate the fact that I believe Montessori caters for the needs of the whole family in a holistic way with children in mind.

In the area of Community Development which is a great passion of mine, children must be a part of the process. We have so many definitions of Community Development with diverse meanings. My definition is that it is people development rather than physical infrastructure. My definition of Community is also different in that I believe it is a group of people with a common concern not just the geographical location and size in the physical sense.

In our modern world in the Western Cape Region our parents continue to be placed in the "too hard basket" with very low expectations of them and no exposure on how to be a parent, hence I believe they are set up to fail.

I feel privileged that I have gained more new knowledge of the Montessori Education at this your International Congress and in so doing, look forward to continuing to network with you and learn from the strengths and weaknesses you have experienced and encountered in your journeys throughout the different parts of the world from which you have come.

I have another definition of leadership that I would like to share with you all by first stating that I believe poor leadership is that when the leader leaves the post, the work stops.

On the other hand, I wish to pay tribute to the great Founder of the Montessori Education, Dr. Maria Montessori in stating that she was the greatest leader in the development of the child and ultimately all children in the manner that her work continues through all of you wonderful people who continue to utilize these rare gifts in your work with children. And it is in this process, I define her leadership in the positive way by stating that it is evident that when she as that leader left us the work that she had commenced has continued to extend from good to better, to even much better because it is alive. The leadership of Dr. Montessori is a positive and effective one.

Renilde Montessori I also have the privilege of paying tribute to you by thanking you for being here with the eloquent essence of another great leader who commands respect. Your passion for the right way for all children's education is greatly applauded. It is amazing that you are here with us to bear witness to the great work of your beloved grandmother in the 21st century, wow! Thank you so much, it was a privilege to meet you.

Thank you Megan and Pam for facilitating my input into your Montessori International Congress and to Carol, Roelie, the beautiful photographers, Letitia, all speakers and delegates for making my visit at the incredible Congress a memorable one.

I now look forward to the challenges you have for all children and increased potential of Montessori teachers following this International Congress, especially for Australia in Remote areas with challenges that I believe to be realistic, difficult and yet very possible. In saying this I would also like to add some questions for you, as I believe your approach to education is unique and vital to children of all cultures:

If not you, then who;

If not now, then when;

If not here, then where?

Thank you for facilitating my input into your International Montessori Congress.

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