



## CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

Its spring again and by now 2011 must seem like a distant memory! It was wonderful to meet and see so many members attending these events and I hope that all of you enjoy and feel that they are of value to you in your Montessori classrooms.

Now is a good time to plan your professional development for 2012. The Programme of Events 2012 contains a vast arrange of workshops and meetings scheduled countrywide through the year.

I look forward to seeing you all at our Conference which is being held on Saturday 24th March 2012 in the Hilton Hotel, Dublin- a day not to be missed!

For further information on the St. Montessori Society of Ireland Conference and other events please visit our website [www.montessorireland.ie](http://www.montessorireland.ie).

Kate Gray *Chairperson*

### I'M A VERY SPECIAL PERSON

I'm a very special person  
'cause there's no one else like me!  
There are lots and lots of reasons  
why I'm very proud of me:

The Creator just made one of me  
And then He broke the mould,  
So that's why I'm exceptional,  
And that's why I'm so bold.  
There is only one original for anyone to see,  
And I am that original, that original is ME.

When I come to Montessori  
it's the best part of my day,  
I have time to work and concentrate  
and even time to play.

I come to pour and wash and peel  
and match and grade and sing,  
I come to speak and write and read  
and count and add and bring.

A happy smile to share  
with all my classmates and my Guide,  
To make them feel as happy as I always feel inside.

When I come to Montessori,  
I go right to work, you see,  
For it's here that I am working  
on the best Me I can be!

The Montessori Student Pledge  
by Dr. Feland L. Meadows,  
written at 2.00 a.m. on March 5th, 1993,  
after a long day's work.

## THE PREPARED ENVIRONMENT AS FAITH

*Dr. Feland L. Meadows, Pan American*

"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Hebrews 11:1

The carefully prepared learning environment which Dr. Maria Montessori created for her students in the first Casa dei Bambini in the San Lorenzo district of Rome was noticeably different from the school classrooms which children attended at the turn of the century. The public schools of that day provided cold, dark, poorly ventilated and funereally decorated classrooms where the floors and half the walls were painted black, so that the grime from 2dirty little hands and feet" wouldn't show.

In contrast, Montessori's classrooms were spotlessly clean, like an operating room, well ventilated and filled with sunlight, Instead of the traditional tow-pupil desks screwed to the floor in long rows, Montessori's Children's' Houses contained low shelves and small, child-sized tables and chairs in light colours, so that the children could see when they got dusty or dirty and thus, could have the singular opportunity to dust or wash them as an exercise in motor development which became a routine part of their daily care for their own environment.

The tables and chairs were lightweight so that the children themselves could transport them and so that they would move and make a noise scraping the floor, if a child carelessly tripped over or bumped into one of them. Montessori called this "the control of error".

Thus, Montessori designed an environment in which every stick of furniture, every piece of material, every quality and characteristic was considered and introduced only if it served the best interests of the child. The public classroom,



with its dais and teacher's big desk up front, are still designed to serve the teacher. In Montessori's classroom, the teacher has no desk or personal property, for the class belongs to the children.

Today, the Montessori classroom continues to be a carefully prepared learning environment designed to serve and belong to the children. It is an environment in which each child has the opportunity to discover the intimate relationships between freedom and responsibility between order and learning and between work and joy. It is in this environment that each child has the opportunity to develop to his fullest potential, through a process of individualised activities which match his own personal needs and rate of development. And all this is achieved in a group setting within which there is a harmoniously rich and purposeful social life.



## THE PREPARED ENVIRONMENT AS SEEN BY MONTESSORI

Montessori considered her emphasis upon the prepared environment to be a primary element of her method. She described this environment as a special place where a child could be “nurtured”, for its design meets his needs for self-construction and helps him reveal his personality and growth patterns to us.

Montessori designed a learning environment in which every piece of furniture, every material, every quality and characteristic was considered and introduced only if it served the best interests of the child.

If the prepared environment is to function in the prescribed way, it must not only contain everything the child needs for his growth and development, but it must also be devoid of all obstacles to his growth (The Absorbent Mind, pp. 227-348).

Montessori placed great emphasis upon the environment but at the same time, she kept three important concepts in mind

1. She regarded the environment as secondary to life itself – “It can modify in that it can help or hinder, but it can never create... The origins of development, both in the species and in the individual, lie within.” (The Montessori Method, p. 105).
2. The environment must be carefully prepared for the child by a knowledgeable and sensitive adult.
3. The adult must be a participant in the child's life and growth within the prepared environment.

### The Eight Key Elements of the Prepared Environment

#### 1. Freedom and Discipline

Only in an atmosphere of freedom can the child reveal himself to us.

Montessori believed that the child possesses within himself the pattern for his own development; this inner guide must be allowed to direct the child's growth.

True freedom, however, can only be experienced within the context of respect for the rights of others. Without personal discipline and social responsibility, freedom would degenerate into licence and social relationships fall prey to anarchy and chaos.

#### 2. Structure and Order

The underlying structure and order of the universe must be reflected in the classroom.

This will allow the child to achieve an inner sense of mental order which will direct his intelligence.

Order in the environment gives the child a sense of security for he soon learns to trust his environment and to interact with it in a creative way. Order ensures the possibility of purposeful activity.

The materials themselves are always ordered

- Where the child can easily find them.
- According to the interest to which they appeal;
- In sequence with regard to their difficulty or degree of complication;
- With regard to the senses or skills they are designed to develop.

#### 3. Reality and Nature

If a child is ever to be emancipated from a world of fantasy and false illusions, he must come to understand the true qualities of nature and the limits imposed by reality. The classroom furniture, apparatus and materials are all designed to bring the child into closer

contact with reality. The tables and chairs are child-sized and lightweight in order to reveal errors related to their use or misuse. The practical life materials are all real and they function the way they are supposed to.

- Real food is prepared and served.
- A real knife is used to peel and cut fruit and vegetables.
- Glass jugs are used, they can fall and break.
- Silver and brass objects become tarnished (oxidized) and must be polished.
- Just as in the real world, the child learns to await his turn, for there is only one item of each kind in the room.
- The child, who “still belongs to nature”, learns about nature in a creative way by caring for plants and animals.

#### 4. Simplicity and Beauty

Simplicity of design and fine workmanship are essential qualities of the materials and apparatus used in the classroom. The beautifully crafted, brightly coloured materials invite the child to take them into his hands and to use them. Montessori believed that the need for beauty called forth the child's power to respond to life. She observed that the aesthetic quality in the objects and in the environment were a “great spur to the activity of the child”, making him redouble his efforts. Montessori also spoke of the teacher as beautiful, clean, neatly dressed and sweet-smelling.

#### 5. The Montessori Apparatus

The role of the Montessori material is often over-emphasized in relation to the other elements of

the prepared environment. The very purpose of the material is often misunderstood. The materials are not “learning devices” in the conventional sense. Neither are they toys to be played with. They do not have an external aim of developing skills or teaching concepts to children who use them properly. The material has an inner purpose, to assist the child in his own self-construction and in his physical, psychological, intellectual and social development. The material provides the stimulus which captures the child’s imagination and helps him to initiate and expand the process of concentration. This means that, if the materials are to be effective, they must be properly presented to the child at the right moment in this development. The material is limited in quantity and there is only one of each of the materials in the classroom.



#### 6. Normalised Children

The prepared environment would be incomplete without the presence of normalized children. Peer influence, for good or for ill, occurs in any school environment. Thanks to the presence of normalized children, peer influence in the prepared environment is always favourable for the child that has just enrolled. Normalized children serve as peer tutors and are good role models for other children. New children observe the behaviour of their normalized peers and are moved to emulate them, thus becoming normalized themselves with less effort and in less time. Recent arrivals are quick to note the relationship of mutual trust and respect between the teacher and the normalized child and they soon seek to establish the same relationship for themselves as well. Normalized children help to create the quiet and tranquil

learning environment in which both they and their classmates are able to concentrate fully upon their chosen work.

#### 7. Life in Community Requires Responsibility

Children soon learn that this classroom truly belongs to them and they gladly accept responsibility for the orderly care and maintenance of the prepared environment.

After children have taken materials from the shelf and worked with them, an emerging sense of mutual responsibility motivates them to return materials to their place and to make sure that they are clean, ordered and complete, ready for the next child that wants to work with them. A keen sense of community life emerges as children take responsibility for their own behaviour through the sharing of grace and courtesy lessons and through their imitation of the behaviour of older, normalized children and of the teacher.

Life in community is also enhanced by the presence of children of different ages and of both sexes in the class, just like the real world, where people of different ages and both sexes live and work together. This community promotes mutual respect, shared responsibility, civic collaboration, social well-being, solicitous concern for one another, true friendship and great affection for other classmates and for the teacher.

#### 8. The Montessori Guide

The Montessori teacher is herself the indispensable ingredient which makes the prepared environment possible. All of the above elements of the prepared environment are created, ordered, modelled, presented, promoted or guided by the creative and obedient work of a sensitive adult, the teacher/guide who becomes the dynamic link between the child and the environment she has prepared. (Paula Polk Lillard, ‘Montessori, a Modern Approach’, pp. 50-90).

In her short essay, ‘The Child’, written in Adyar, Madras, India, Dr. Maria Montessori sums up her thoughts about the importance of the prepared environment with these words:

*“Let us therefore discard our role of prison warden, and let us instead preoccupy ourselves with preparing an environment in which as far as possible we shall try not to harass him by our supervision and by our teaching.”*

We must become persuaded that the more the environment corresponds to the needs of the child, the more limited becomes the activity of the teacher. But here a very important principle must not be forgotten – giving freedom to the child does not mean to abandon him to his own resources and perhaps to neglect him. The help that we give to the soul of the child must not be passive indifference to all the difficulties of its development. Rather, we must second it with prudence and affectionate care. However, even by merely preparing with great care the environment of the children, we shall have already done a great task, because the creation of a new world, a world of the children, is no easy accomplishment.”

For the Montessori Guide, the creation of a new world, a world of the children, becomes an act of faith. It is her faith in the effectiveness of the prepared environment which makes this different and creative educational process feasible. She is and interacts with this new world which she has so lovingly prepared for him; he will be healed by his own work within and upon the prepared environment.

The Montessori Guide no longer sees the deviated child that stands before her, through the eyes of faith in the power of the prepared environment, she already sees the beautiful, normalized child within, that is even now struggling to emerge.

Reprinted from St Nicholas Montessori Society Newsletter April 1997 but you’ll agree well worth it.

#### **Bibliography:**

Lillard, Paula Polk, ‘Montessori, a Modern Approach: New York: Schocken Books, 1973  
Montessori, Maria, the Montessori Method: Cambridge, Mass., Robert Bently, Inc., 1964  
Feland L. Meadows, Ph.D. Pan American Montessori Society

# ST. NICHOLAS MONTESSORI SCHOOL

We are now midway through the school year and have had a very eventful and successful period. The Christmas Plays for each of the classes were enthusiastically received by parents, relatives and pupils alike. The annual collection for our chosen charity 'The Lauralynn Children's Hospice Foundation' amounted to a very generous sum of €1020. All classes in the age groups of 3-9 attended performances in the Pavillion Theatre. The children in the 6-12 age group enjoyed the Young Scientist Exhibition in the RDS. They are presently working on a wide range of projects which will be presented shortly. Confirmation, which was celebrated by Archbishop Diarmuid Martin, took place on the 9th February. The school continues to go from strength to strength and we already have a waiting list for September 2012.



Noreen Tierney *Principal*

## PICTURE GALLERY



Science Workshop (Cork)



Language Workshop (Castlebar)



Music Workshop (Dublin)



Language Workshop (Castlebar)



Maths Workshop