

A Vision of the Montessori Movement for the Next Century

By **Molly O'Shaughnessy**

Any vision, by its very nature, must begin with an image of hope. Hope comes in the face of no evidence and is the force that impels the whole of life forward. It is easy to become consumed with images of horror and destruction. They bombard us every day of our lives. It is easy to fall into despair and hopelessness. We can become so overwhelmed that it causes a kind of paralysis within us. Fortunately, when confronted by such a powerful emotion, the human spirit has the potential to evoke from within a positive reaction. The reaction is a call to *action*. It is only through *action* that vision becomes reality.

Many social movements were led by, and for, people who experienced despair and oppression. And yet, they were inspired by hope. These people were driven by hope for a change, for a new beginning that would redress the causes of their despair. Hope is not simply wishful thinking or cockeyed optimism. Hope must be grounded in reality. It requires clarity of mind and a vivid vision of what is possible. For us to proclaim that our vision is “world peace” without any notion of the process and steps required to achieve it, makes it unattainable, resulting in cynicism and despair, not hope.

If we desire to be successful in the 21st century, we need to envision a stronger future. That future will require us to have, among other things, sufficient hope to believe the future is worth pursuing.

Hope remains viable only within the construct of action. Hopelessness becomes entrenched with inactivity. Action is multi-dimensional. There is concrete action—what’s next, how many, by when, and how will I be accountable for the results? There is action of the mind—how do I need to think, and what do I need to learn to be effective? And there is action of the heart—who and how do I need to be to carry the vision forward?

If action is one partner to hope, *connection* is another. “The fullness of hope can only be found where there is the spiritual interconnection called love” (Blain 94). The “I hope in Thee for us” is the spiritual mantra of hope (94). Without deep connections it is impossible to move any vision forward in a meaningful way. Deep and sustained connections bring unity and community. They create the possibility for open and authentic dialogue, a critical prerequisite for the fulfillment of a shared vision. In his Afterword to *The Community of the Future*, Elie Wiesel describes a future without connections:

For one who is indifferent, life itself is a prison. Any sense of community is external, or, even worse, nonexistent. Thus, indifference means solitude. Those who are indifferent do not see others. They feel nothing for others and are unconcerned with what might happen to them. They are surrounded by a great emptiness. They are devoid of all hope as well as imagination. In other words, devoid of any future. (275)

Another partner to hope is *commitment*. Genuine commitment springs from a deep and intense passion toward a desired outcome; something one is willing to dedicate one's life to. Michelangelo's commitment to his art required untold hours lying on his back, literally leaving him blind from paint dripping in his eyes. His commitment resulted in giving great pleasure to millions for centuries (Van Ekeren 66). Maria Montessori's undying commitment to a social movement around the child has brought about "the single largest pedagogy in the world with over 8,000 schools on 6 continents" ("Montessori Movement"). Her vision has also led us to pursue and commit ourselves to other ventures supporting the innate rights of children.

When we commit ourselves to something, it literally transforms us. Commitment focuses our attention to the necessary actions to create something new. "The moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too" (Van Ekeren 67).

Commitment builds community and unity. A collective focus precludes cynicism, pettiness, control, and competitiveness. A shared vision, by its very nature, requires authentic collaboration and respect for the talents of each.

Commitment focuses our energies and provokes a willingness to live in the question and not become discouraged when roadblocks are placed in our way. It eliminates hesitancy, allowing us to thrive on courage and take risks. The will of a person committed to a larger purpose has been described as a "cry from the soul which has been shaken and awakened" (Senge 172).

Moving into the 21st century, hope and its partners—action, connection, and commitment—must be at the center of our vision, for as powerfully stated in *Dimensions of Spirituality*, "For the man without hope, time is closed; the future, a vacancy, a place of pure repetition. Hope, on the other hand, allows a man to pierce through to a real future, to something new" (Blain 94).

Visionaries start with the end in mind. The commitment of a Montessori life is made or not made in the preparation of the adult. The vision-making process puts the developing human in view. Montessorians "rally around the cause of the child" while gaining mastery of the materials which will meet children's needs at every developmental turning point, receiving the grace of hope.

Children embody the fullest dimensions of hope. They are natural inventors and discoverers "with an inner drive towards the future" (Blain 97), possessing the power to create a new reality yet invisible to us. This is what gives us hope.

We have many reasons to be hopeful. As I stand here before you, near the close of this International Congress, I am filled with hope and my heart is happy. Each of us here came to this Congress with hope in his heart. Each of us has a vision of our future work together. Each of us has a vision of the possibilities that exist within the child and what that means for the future of humanity. Armed with this knowledge, we remain hopeful that our *past*, *present*, and *future* actions will contribute to the continued evolution of what Montessori called "a revolution in education." Of course "education" in its fullest dimensions goes well beyond mere schooling. In reality, it is a spiritual and social

revolution of the highest magnitude. It represents a transformation of humanity as we know it today.

Now more than ever, we need to focus on the goodness of humanity. We must remember that “Even in the darkest of times in our history, people of extraordinary character have lived among us, showing us a way out of the deplorable cycle of hatred and aggression” (Hunt 3).

A strong and stable character is also a necessary companion to hope. Sound moral stability, a keenly rational mind, and consciousness of the wisdom gained from the past enables hope to thrive. Dr. Montessori was one such person of extraordinary character. Children coming from Montessori environments, and those nurtured in the *spirit* of Montessori, demonstrate this kind of character in human beings.

As has been stated, Montessori’s discoveries began a revolution in education. A sudden, radical, and completely different worldview of childhood and human nature emerged in many parts of the world as a result of her work. And yet, this revolution, by its very nature, remains *unfinished*. It remains unfinished on a multitude of levels. It also remains *unknown* on a multitude of levels. Bringing it into the *known* is one of our greatest challenges in the 21st century.

Dr. Montessori herself reminded us that our work is still in its infancy: “Although it is quite true that man as an individual can improve and that society can be based on principles of justice and love, all of us are aware that these goals do not constitute a reality just beyond our grasp but rather an aspiration whose fulfillment lies far in the future” (*Education and Peace* ix).

The evolution of progress is often slow and may take years or generations to succeed. It is vision and faith that empowers people to work toward a long-term dream, knowing it may not come to fruition in their lifetime. Peter Senge states, “The cathedral builders of the Middle Ages labored a lifetime with the fruits of their labors still a hundred years in the future” (210). Many social movements such as women’s suffrage, civil rights, cultural rights, and child labor laws took many years to be fulfilled. Like other successful social movements, our actions must be thoughtful, deliberate, strategic, and courageous. It requires us to step out of our comfort zone, continually asking ourselves, “*What results do we want to create?*”

Rooted in the word *revolution* is the word *evolution*. We can look at evolution as a “spiral unfolding as one continuous process of transformation” (Hubbard 25). Evolution is organic in nature, with the power to bring conditions to a higher, more complex, and better state. The Montessori movement for the 21st century must continue *its* evolutionary process, sensitive to the needs and nature of the present, inspired by knowledge and wisdom of the past.

The idea of evolution requires us to learn from our past—to see how we are deeply connected to it. Václav Havel, leader for the struggle for human rights and freedom in Eastern Europe, suggests, “The only real hope of people today is probably a renewal of our certainty that we are rooted in the earth, and, at the same time, the cosmos. This

awareness endows us with the capacity for self-transcendence” (*What Does It Mean to Be Human* 55). This view is deeply embedded in our Montessori pedagogy, and the great evolutionary thinkers of today, from scientists to theologians to philosophers, continue to explore its significance for our future well-being.

Increasing understanding and concern regarding the vulnerability of the earth affords us the possibility of our pedagogy being examined on a closer level by a greater range of constituents. We must find ways and opportunities to provide for this new possibility. With our current global state of affairs, the time is ripe. Victor Hugo’s famous adage may be providential for our movement today: “There is one thing stronger than all the armies in the world, and that is an idea whose time has come” (qtd. in Bornstein 91). *Our time has come*.

Our Montessori prepared environments inherently support the creation of minds and spirits capable of self-transcendence, minds capable of coping with a rapidly changing world, minds capable of acting intentionally for the ethical and responsible advancement of humanity. The vision of the child as the *renewer* of a new world order, of a new society, is enormous in its scope.

Montessori herself, in trying to set forth her vision, admitted the vastness of its scope:

It is always very difficult for me to set forth my argument, because this argument is not a simple conception like a line, but is immense, if you will, like a desert or an ocean. This desert or ocean is not a creation of my mind, my soul, my knowledge, my evolution, but it is education—not the education that you know, but an unknown education that is new, that is efficient, that gives help and a new orientation, a new knowledge, a new wisdom to the world. (Reconstruction in Education 1)

Just as Dr. Montessori did not want the educational method to be named after her, I doubt that she would want the vision or movement to be limited only to “her” vision. She was an interpreter for the unknown child, the forgotten citizen, who revealed a better path toward the evolution of humanity and culture. Each of us must join with her and continue to be an active interpreter for the child, informed by perpetual observation and an open mind in search of truth.

This vision, our unfinished revolution, remains an active process—a work still in construction, which will be for years to come. It requires undying patience on our part. Montessori reminds us, “This ideal is universal in scope. It aims at the deliverance of the whole of humanity” (*The Formation of Man* 15).

Perhaps now, more than ever, our work needs to be revitalized once again around the “social question of the child.” The Montessori movement needs to take its lead from the past, or, to use a phrase from popular culture, “Back to the Future.”

The poet T.S. Eliot, during the destructive war years, expressed concern that humans were not duly attentive to the relationship of the past to the present and to the future. He powerfully expresses the interdependencies of time and space, as did Montessori in her writing on “Human Solidarity in Time and Space.” The following stanza begins the first of his Four Quartets, entitled “Burnt Norton”:

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future,
And time future contained in time past.
If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable.
What might have been is an abstraction
Remaining a perpetual possibility
Only in a world of speculation.
What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present. (117)

Often during times of social and political flux, humans tend to look inward for inspiration, guidance, and hope. As we look to “time present and time past,” we may recognize that we are once again in a period of flux. Once again, we witness a turning in, a period of deep reflection and accountability for our actions.

“All time is unredeemable.” We can’t change the past, but we can learn from it and it can help inform and create our future. The idea of “perpetual possibility” is embodied in Montessori’s vision of the human potential, for the adult to see in children what is not yet there but what represents the redeemable in them.

Our future work continues to demand a revolutionary zeal. The destiny of the Montessori movement in the 21st century is in our hands; it requires concrete action, action of the mind, and action of the heart. It obliges us to be intellectual explorers, social entrepreneurs, and spiritual seekers. It thrives on connections, and flourishes when approached with unwavering commitment and steadfast work.

Action of the mind is twofold—it requires our own *adult* intellectual expansion, as well as better access to our collective intelligence, made evident through collaboration, enhancing our capacity to build the necessary infrastructure to put the vision into meaningful action.

And secondly, as advocates for the child’s work of building a “new humanity,” it demands our continued fight for justice around the freedom for the *child’s* mind to develop. Sustained intellectual development on our part, sound organizational systems, and genuine dialogue deepen our ability to protect the child’s right to develop his innate genius and spiritual characteristics. The two are inseparable. Without this protection, the vision becomes unattainable.

Although many of Montessori’s ideas have been absorbed into the educational mainstream, some very fundamental ones have not. For example, the protection of the child’s mind to develop fully and creatively has not. In recent times, at least in the United States, the educational focus surrounds informational or “mechanical” knowledge, rather than nurturing the growth of creative, original, flexible, and innovative thinking. If unimpeded, the attuned mind is inspired by the world, by the aesthetics embedded in all aspects of the universe, including science, mathematics, technology, literature, and so forth. The inspired mind is allured to the interconnectedness of all things and develops a moral and ethical responsibility toward the whole of civilization.

I recently heard an interview with Sir John Polkinghorne, a Cambridge physicist and Anglican priest. He spoke about the importance of mathematical beauty. Scientists, he explained, have “found in theoretical physics that the fundamental laws of nature are always mathematically beautiful. In fact, if you’ve got some ugly equations, almost certainly you haven’t got it right and you should think again.” So beauty, he said, “is the key to unlocking the secrets of the physical world.”

He explained that it is very difficult to “describe almost any form of beauty. In some sense you have to perceive it ... and you have to be able to speak the language.” He expanded on this idea:

So mathematical beauty is connected first of all with things being elegant and economic. You don’t write a great sprawling equation that takes half a page to write down. It’s very concise ... but it turns out that it’s also very deep, so that when you explore its consequences, you find this very simple-looking thing.... And if it’s a successful part of mathematical physics, it will imply all sorts of phenomena happening in the world.

Dr. Montessori deeply understood the connection between beauty and knowledge. The etymology of *aesthetic* lies in the Greek word meaning “sensitive,” which derives in turn from the verb meaning “to perceive.” Finely tuned perception is *key* to a full understanding and appreciation of all aspects of the world. Perception requires a keen attentiveness to things. Economy and simplicity of stimuli enhances the ability to perceive the details and nuances of the world. This approach to assisting perception is supported from the earliest moments of life in our Montessori environments.

Creative, scientific, and original perceivers manage to retain and cultivate their innate capacities. Such thinkers have a burning desire to understand the secrets of the universe and of humanity. They are on a quest to penetrate the unknown and use their discoveries to intelligently participate in the wholesome and ethical advancement of civilization.

The whole notion of originality is key to progress in any form. Renowned physicist David Bohm’s writings on creativity and originality outline the characteristics *key* to this kind of mentality, those we see develop naturally within the child in an authentic Montessori environment. These include the ability to acutely perceive information without imposing one’s own preconceptions, as well as the ability to perceive minor, yet significant, differences, a willingness to try new things and not be afraid to make mistakes (5). Bohm states, “Real perception that is capable of seeing something new and unfamiliar requires that one be attentive, alert, aware, and sensitive” (4).

Freedom to develop our minds to the fullest creates a new level of perception resulting in new mental structures capable of thinking in more profound ways.

Babies, and very young children, spontaneously learn in this manner. They make the necessary modifications as they experiment with “trying something out and seeing what happens” (Bohm 4). Many parents, and teachers alike, perhaps out of fear that their children will lag behind, neglect to focus on these qualities and “ways of being” inherent in the most creative minds, instead focusing on the accumulation of knowledge deemed appropriate to succeed in life.

Bohm concludes that “what we learn as children, from parents, teachers, friends, and society in general, is to have a conformist, imitative, mechanical state of mind that does not present the disturbing danger of upsetting the apple cart” (20). Furthermore, he explains, “The mechanical and uncreative character of most human activity tends ... to lead to what may be called a ‘general mess’” (22). Montessori took it a step further and called it a “*diseased humanity*.”

Closed minds, “utilitarian intelligence,” and information-gathering knowledge can never transform society. It was Montessori’s genius and creative mind that allowed her to have the insight to be able to use the words “messiah” and “the hope and promise for the future” when speaking of children. One does not throw those words around lightly. She viewed infancy as the “eternal Messiah” capable of reconstructing humanity (*The Child*).

Last year, in the beginning of the training course, after speaking at length about Montessori’s vision of a revolution in education leading to a better world, we moved on to the Exercises of Practical Life. After the tedious work of analyzing our movements for days on end and realizing there are some thirty-five steps to folding a napkin, a student raised her hand and asked, “What does folding napkins have to do with world peace?” At that moment in time, I knew the best response was “*Everything, you shall see.*”

Montessori compares the complete state of deep concentration found in great thinkers, who subsequently are inspired to solve the great problems of the world, to the intense concentration we witness in a child manually involved with a compelling task. She says, “studying the phenomenon we see there is a close link between the manual work which is accomplished in common life and the profound concentration of the spirit” (*The Child* 18).

This developmentally directed energy marks the beginning of the creative mind. The successful building of this mind depends upon an intelligent and loving assistance on the part of all adults. It requires physical and psychological environments protecting the justice of the mind, freeing it to stay enthralled with the world. If we stay enthralled and inspired by the world, we will fight to safeguard it from harm. An inspired mind helps establish a new social order geared at justice and protection of human rights. “Indeed,” writes David Bohm, “no really creative transformation can possibly be effected by human beings, whether in nature or in society, unless they are in [a]creative state of mind” (23).

A creative and flexible mind produces appropriate action of the heart. Only an intelligent heart is open to a new worldview, capable of the courageous risk-taking required to challenge closely held beliefs that interfere with healthy progress in the world. At all costs, we must protect the child’s freedom to fully develop his mind. This is best achieved if we sharpen and expand our own minds along a parallel path.

This is one essential aspect of our unfinished revolution. It requires us to be insatiable intellectual explorers throughout our lives. Through our continued learning, we, once again, like the child, become enthralled with the world, becoming more mindful of the childlike qualities required for transformation. We begin to see in *ourselves* glimmers of the “new personality” that Montessori spoke of, and we embrace “ways of being” that allow us to become leaders and spokespeople for the child and the Montessori movement

of the 21st century. It is literally impossible to be in this work for any period of time and not be spiritually transformed. Visions that have a spiritual foundation provoke correct actions of the heart and mind and are deeply rooted in shared values.

As an international movement, organization of the effort sometimes appears daunting. The loftier and more overarching a vision is, the more challenging the execution can be. As Montessori reminded us, “There never was a social question as universal as this. No social question was ever called upon to solve the problem of such widespread and indiscriminate oppression as that which weighs upon the child.... the social question of the child ... knows no limits of caste, race, or nation” (“The Blank Page” 4).

To reach a point of collective consciousness, where there is a systemic shift in attitudes and perceptions regarding the child and his function in the world, our efforts must infiltrate the whole of society in all parts of the world. Wherever our efforts require us to go—be it political, economical, or social—it must always revolve around the question, “How are the children doing?” Jim Wallis reminds us that in every arena of society—be it educational, medical, social, or economic—if this question can be answered in the affirmative, we will be traveling the path toward reconstruction and healing (29). “*How are the children doing?*”

To mobilize the movement in the coming century, we will have to work on parallel tracks. Just as we have parallel activities in our Montessori environments that reinforce each other and deepen understanding, our vision requires work at different levels. It requires us to work from both the inside and the outside. As we make a concerted effort to expand the availability of quality schools, teachers, and teacher trainers throughout the world, we must also forge partnerships with others working on behalf of children. Dr. Montessori’s *proactive* commitment brought her together with people from all walks of life.

Where could the Montessori social revolution be taking place? In adoption homes, children’s museums, the United Nations, hospitals, child advocacy law firms, orphanages, tenement houses, refugee camps, and so forth—the mission for the evolving Montessori paradigm can be found anywhere, igniting a new perception of children’s needs in the context of the whole of humanity. The Montessori movement has its hand ready to aid life with a vision of the *past* blended with the *future*.

We have to become social entrepreneurs. Social entrepreneurs are “practical visionaries who possess qualities traditionally associated with leading business entrepreneurs—vision, innovation, determination, and long-term commitment—but are committed to systemic social change” (“Ashoka Questions and Answers”). Bill Drayton, founder of Ashoka, an organization that financially supports social entrepreneurs, explains, “Social entrepreneurs are not content to just give a fish, or to teach how to fish; they will not rest until they have revolutionized the fishing industry” (“What Is a Social Entrepreneur?”). “Social entrepreneurs demonstrate the power of building things instead of destroying them” (Bornstein 281). They know what they are for rather than simply what they are against. Social entrepreneurs are people who thrive on the “how-to” questions, helping to bring an idea out of the theoretical realm into the reality realm (Bornstein 19). Dr.

Montessori was recently acknowledged by Ashoka as an historical example of a leading social entrepreneur (“What Is a Social Entrepreneur?”).

Increasingly Montessori’s work and her vision for social change are surfacing in a variety of places. In particular, we see references in periodicals dealing with social change, human rights, and spirituality. Perhaps more are becoming enlightened and inspired by the true message of her work. Once again, we get glimmers that *our time has come*.

The spirit of the social entrepreneur is not dampened by the enormity of his task. Rather, he embraces the challenge. One thing all social entrepreneurs have in common is a tenacious drive to do whatever it takes to get the job done. They recognize the value their work contributes to the whole. They are driven by clear vision and passion, living the words of poet Robert Frost:

My object in living is to unite
My avocation and my vocation
As my two eyes make one in sight. (261)

When Isaac Newton was asked how he had managed to discover the physical laws of the universe, he answered, “By thinking about it day and night” (qtd. in Norton 2).

Dr. Montessori thought about the child day and night. She thought about the spiritual reconstruction of society day and night. She worked passionately day and night for the cause of the child. She was an active crusader for social justice and children’s rights. She spoke around the world on behalf of children.

When the lens of our world is deeply focused on an idea or issue, it expands our consciousness and understanding of it. We gain new insight and begin to have sparks of intuition around new possibilities that were not available to us in our more mundane and uninspired way of thinking.

Inspiration, derived from the Latin word for “spirit,” means “to breathe, to give life to.” In a recent article, again one in which Montessori was featured, Lance Secretan states, “after forty years of research ... it has become clear to me that inspiration plays a central role in helping people live fulfilling lives and creating good societies.... inspiration comes from the love inside us” (41). As jazz master Charlie Parker said, “If you don’t live it, it won’t come out of your horn” (cited in Secretan 43).

We are the current keepers of the vision and have a tremendous responsibility toward the future. Our work is an individual and collective journey, a spiritual quest. We represent a global community with a shared vision around the child. The nature of what constitutes community has changed dramatically in the last hundred years, since the first Children’s House. Communication and traveling to other parts of the world took days or months. Today, it’s a matter of pushing a button. But the *idea* and *function* of community remains of paramount importance toward the evolution of a civilized, cohesive, and loving global community. Helping individuals and groups stay connected, living in community is of primary importance in furthering any vision or social reform.

Advancement and progress of any kind always has *connection* at the heart of it. People come together around an idea or ideal that moves them deeply and inspires them to take

action. Leaders and conveners emerge, rallying the forces to organize, strategically putting systems in place, and passionately telling the story, to inspire others to join the cause. There is often a personal side or a story that calls people to take action. If we go through history, we see many examples of this. In Australia, the “stolen generation” led to activism, apologies, and the beginnings of reconciliation. The “Amber alert” in the United States, which activates an emergency alarm system immediately on radio and television when a child has been kidnapped, resulted from legislation passed due to the efforts of a small group of people outraged by the kidnapping and murder of a nine-year-old girl named Amber.

Our story is around the child and our storytellers must continue to be heard. Stories are central to our pedagogy and they are central to our movement and our collective wisdom. In *Leadership Is an Art*, Max De Pree tells a story illustrating this point. The story takes place in the 1960’s in Nigeria and is the experience of a good friend of his:

Electricity had just been bought into the village where he and his family were living. Each family got a single light in its hut. A real sign of progress. The trouble was that at night, though they had nothing to read and many of them did not know how to read, the families would sit in their huts in awe of this wonderful symbol of technology. The light bulb watching began to replace the customary nighttime gatherings by the tribal fire, where the tribal storytellers, the elders, would pass along the history of the tribe. The tribe was losing its history in the light of a few electric bulbs. Every institution needs tribal storytellers. The penalty for failing to listen is to lose one’s history, one’s historical context, one’s binding values. (82)

Listening to one’s history is reminiscent of Eliot’s poem. It is critical that our history be documented and our “tribal stories” be permanently recorded in written form.

Our core values keep us connected. Connecting around a vision brings us together. As the vision is put into action, more and more people get involved. This Congress is one example. There was a minimum of a hundred people involved in the planning and execution of this Congress. They now share a deep connection with one another. They have generated ideas of how to forward the vision through the collective intelligence and wisdom available to them as they worked together, laughed together, ate and drank together, and dreamed together.

Educateurs sans Frontières (EsF) is another example of a community of people coming together to immerse themselves in dialogue around the writings of Dr. Montessori with the vision of reaching out to touch lives and communities using Montessori principles as the foundation of their mission. Its activities and focus brings us out of the classroom, into other realms of child advocacy that support the full dimensions of Montessori’s “education for a new world.”

The instinct toward community is everywhere in life. If we look to nature, we see that “communities of diverse individuals live together in ways that support both the individual and the entire system. As they spin these systems into existence, new capabilities and talents emerge from the process of being together... these communities are the webs of relationships called ecosystems” (Wheatley & Kellner-Rogers 10).

As we continue our grassroots efforts around the world, we are weaving new *human* ecosystems, strengthening the fiber of the whole. Connections such as these are happening all over the world. They begin in our own intimate communities, and grow and expand beyond to the larger community, eventually infiltrating the consciousness of more and more people. Once we become aware of something on a new level, it becomes impossible to retreat.

In our community in Minnesota, we began an expansion project eighteen months ago. The different organizations that now know and care about our work have generated tremendous excitement and planted a kernel of newfound knowledge about our vision of the child. City planners, city councilmen, child advocacy agencies, heads of non-profit foundations, heads of banks visited our center and want to “play” with the materials. Many comment on the peacefulness of the environment and wish they could work in such a place. It gives me the opportunity to ask, “What do you think it would be like for a child to live and grow in a place like this?” Sparks begin to fly and something new is revealed, something they had not conceived of before. And they begin to say, “*That’s a really good idea.*” A new link is formed, creating new partnerships and outreach programs directly affecting the quality of support for children. More evidence that *our time has come.*

Our collective journey requires reaching out beyond the safety of our Montessori communities. Facilitating partnership opportunities with colleagues in the human rights field, with policy-makers, with business and corporate leaders, and with philanthropic organizations will increase the social impact of our work at all levels. We can have a grand plan in place, but without the necessary resources—both financial and human capital—we cannot attain our goal. Financial advancement should be thought of as an investment in the future, a vehicle toward accomplishing our goal. My grandfather, a philanthropist and astute businessman, always said, “Money is like manure, it does no good unless you spread it around.” Growing up in a family with strong philanthropic values afforded me the privilege of seeing the *goodness* that money can provide. It also instilled in me a cogent understanding of the responsibility that comes with it.

The heart of philanthropic individuals and organizations revolves around change. They also have a vision of what is possible in the world. They realize that vision requires action, and action requires resources. Many support issues regarding children with the realization that “what we do to children, they will do to society.”

One foundation that I am familiar with, the Hiawatha Foundation, designates all its funding toward helping establish Montessori schools for children at risk. Both daughters in the family attended Montessori schools and were deeply influenced by it. When they got together as a family to discuss what was valuable to them, they decided to focus on Montessori education for less fortunate families. This demonstrates more evidence of the kind of character that emerges when development is protected and obstacles removed.

The establishment of the Montessori Children’s Foundation here in Australia is yet another example of putting resources towards the vision. It becomes a concrete vehicle for committed action, an organizational support system for important projects to further the vision.

Sharing our vision with these and other organizations of like mind strengthens the viability of our work as an *agent for change*. When resources are made available and responsibly managed, we can solidly and steadfastly build the inner structures required for thoughtful and effective activity toward our goal. Financial resources also support our ability to build the necessary human capital required for the dissemination of our work. As with any vision of this magnitude, it demands the talents and work of many. It requires an organization of the efforts. Through the generosity of others, we are able to endow our future. As Dr. Montessori said in *The Absorbent Mind*, “We serve the future by protecting the present” (177).

To ensure and safeguard the longevity of our work and vision, we must have inspired and authentic leadership at every level within each organization. In *Leadership Is an Art*, Max De Pree sums up the progress of an artful leader: “The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between the two, the leader must become a servant and a debtor” (11).

This brief description of leadership encapsulates our core Montessori values. Leadership requires deep contemplation of the future. Leaders must contemplate the world they will leave behind. All choices must consider the legacy left to the next generation. Leaders are stewards, rather than owners, of the vision, safeguarding it for those yet to come.

A good leader is able to liberate and inspire others to be and do their best. Good leaders are able to weave relationships and collaborate with others. Again, connection is at the heart of leadership. In *The Fifth Discipline*, which outlines how organizations must be continually learning in order to thrive, Peter Senge stresses the need for connection:

Vision can die if people forget their connection to one another. The spirit of connection is fragile. It is undermined whenever we lose our respect for one another and for each other’s views. We then split into insiders and outsiders. When this happens, the visioning conversations no longer build genuine enthusiasms toward the vision. (230-231)

Leaders embrace diversity of opinions and thoughts. Authentic dialogue deepens creativity and the capacity for problem solving, which helps to forward the vision in a powerful way. The key difference between dialogue and discussion is the ability to “suspend assumptions and enter into a genuine thinking together” with the intention of benefiting the collective good (Senge 10).

Leaders must pay attention to their own inner growth. When we look at examples of great champions of social change, the commonalities of character that we witness are respectfulness, reverence, service, and integrity. Integrity is the glue that holds people and groups together. When we act with the utmost integrity we are able to build the necessary trust required to act as a cohesive whole. This does not mean that we will always agree on a path of action, but it guarantees that all opinions will be honored and respected.

Reverence is at the heart of both leaders and followers. It is central to all of our work. Reverence for the work of the child is what brings us together. Reverence is demonstrated through profound respect mingled with love and awe in all that we do, say, and think. Reverence is the key to connection; it crosses all barriers.

Without connections, without a feeling of community and unity, we will not be called to *act*. Inspired action of the mind and heart leads to inspired concrete action, mobilizing society step by step around the social question of the child.

If each of us went home, to the thirty-six countries from which we came, and made one new connection—one ripple in the water—the effect would be phenomenal. Small individual initiatives become widespread and weave themselves into the permanent fabric of society. As Robert Kennedy said in a 1966 speech to South African students, “Those ripples build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance” (“About Robert F. Kennedy”).

I invite you to think about our work from a new perspective. I invite you to think about the vision as *your* responsibly, each and every one of us responsible for this movement, being mindful that we can’t do it all at once, but as Dr. Montessori said, piece by piece, “sowing seeds, sowing seeds for hope.”

The Montessori movement of the 21st century must keep the “evolution” of the “revolution” moving forward in a positive, responsible, intentional manner, always informed by our past, standing on the shoulders of those who came before us.

We have a choice. We can degenerate or we can carry the vision forward. In times such as these, it is easy to become cynical. Cynicism protects us from dashed hopes. As Jim Wallis describes in the book *God’s Politics*, “Cynicism protects you from seeming foolish to believe that things could and will change. It protects you from disappointment. Ultimately, cynicism protects you from commitment. If things are not really going to change, why try so hard to make a difference?” (346-347).

He ponders:

Perhaps the only people who view the world realistically are the cynics and the saints.... And the only difference between the cynics and the saints is the presence, power, and possibility of hope.... Hope is not a feeling; it is a decision. And the decision for hope is based on what you believe at the deepest levels—what your most basic convictions are about the world and what the future holds.... You choose hope, not as a naïve wish, but as a choice, with your eyes wide open to the reality of the world. (347)

Our Time has come; and we choose hope.

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