

Peace, the Unknown
By Molly O'Shaughnessy

I have struggled with this talk more than any other. Once while expressing my frustration someone said, "Of course it is difficult, it's such a broad topic and everyone talks about it over and over, they all say the same things, and we still don't have peace." The reality is this statement is true. I realize how easy it is to become fatalistic about the possibility of peace. I fall into myself at times. I guess more than anything, I am afraid of saying nothing, of offering only feeble hope to a desperate state of affairs. And perhaps this will be true, but ultimately I realized I was willing to take the risk because it matters so much to me. I am willing to stumble in order to find surer footing.

I think we all feel a sense of despair. I feel the crisis the world is experiencing and I don't know how to penetrate it. This is my crisis – how do I wrestle with the despair and cynicism that permeates society, when, at times, in my heart I feel such incredible hope. I believe it is hope that carries us forward. I always return to the "hope and promise" that Dr. Montessori talked about so elegantly, the hope that fills me with joy – the wonder of the child and our greatest possibility for peace.

We face a tough dilemma – how do we break through, how do we take the gift of vision that she has given us and make it real? Some of the means are known to us and some remain in the unknown, or at least unknown to us. The unknown can be transformative if we are open to it. Humans have searched into the depths of the unknown throughout the course of evolution. The desire, instinct, or tendency, as Dr. Montessori calls it, to explore the unknown has helped shape civilization and has allowed humans to create over and above nature, what Dr. Montessori describes as "Supernature." The unknown can also cause a kind of arrogance in us – often out of fear. Things that are unrecognizable or unperceivable to us can keep us ignorant, closed, and unwilling to see or seek truth. We are often resistant to believing that which we do not know.

We are faced with many unknowns and we feel we are flailing as we seek solutions to today's woes. But perhaps out of chaos we may find a humble start if we are willing to enter into the human condition as we find it today – with honesty, integrity, and courage.

"Peace, the Unknown" is derived from Alexis Carrel's title *Man, the Unknown*, published in 1935, posing the ultimate questions also asked by Dr. Montessori, which go to the heart of her theory into practice. "Who is man?" "How do we become who we are?" "What is our purpose?" Carrel sounds an alarm about the very survival of these great questions about the human species. He tells us that our material and technological advancements have superseded and

overshadowed the spiritual search for truth about our inner development. Like Carrel, Montessori concluded: “The basis of the reform of education and society, which is a necessity of our times must be built upon the scientific study of Man the Unknown” (*Formation of Man* 8).

Both Carrel and Montessori were convinced that the future of civilization was in danger. Indeed we find our world in 2002 no better suited for the spiritual aims of humanity. In fact the true nature of humans continues to be camouflaged by the reflections of our contemporary values. Dominated by terrorism, environmental damage, ethnic cleansing, religious wars, materialism, and self-centeredness, many parts of the world already express disconnection, isolation and despair. And when it comes to children, the prospects remain dim. Simply looking at titles of currently popular books demonstrates the plight we feel: *The Connection Gap*, *Bowling Alone*, *An All Consuming Century*, *The Abandoned Generation*, *Raising Children in a Socially Toxic Environment*, *Selling Out America’s Children*, and the list goes on and on. Montessori titles are somewhat different—*To Educate the Human Potential*, *The Formation of Man*, *The Absorbent Mind*, *The Secret of Childhood*— all are explorations into the goodness of natural growth—the inevitable reward of being touched with the deepest understanding of human nature, and of knowing oneself.

Peace, the Unknown. Why “Peace, the Unknown”?

- If the child’s nature remains unknown to society, then peace will remain unknown.
- If Montessori’s revelation of the role of the child in society remains unknown, then peace remains unknown.
- If the definition of peace remains “the mere cessation of war,” peace will remain unknown.
- If the connection between educational reform and social reform is not placed into the awareness of the Montessorian of the twenty-first century, then Montessori as a social movement may be separated from its fullest realization – the realization of a peaceful, unified personality ready to step into a peaceful and unified world.

Montessori states:

We are a single organism, one nation. By becoming a single nation we have finally realized the unconscious spiritual and religious aspirations of the human soul, and this is what we proclaim to every corner of the earth...in a word contemporary man has citizenship in the great nation of humanity – a citizen of the universe. (*Education and Peace* 28)

If we do not understand and materialize a new definition of world peace devised by Montessori which rallies around the new child, then the whole issue of education and peace is simply a topic for a cocktail party, and little more. The

poor will still get poorer, and does not poverty infringe on childhood? There can be no peace where hunger reigns. The environment is more threatened; will our children raise their children on a devastated planet? Will spiritual aims be gobbled up by a sick youth culture, consumerism, and egocentrism? These questions must do more than interact with Montessori principles. Montessori principles must be transformed into agents for real change. But how? That is what I mean by the phrase Peace, the Unknown.

This talk will suggest and question how we can turn our heads collectively toward Peace, the Unknown, first by finding out what Montessori meant about linking education, psychology, peace, and social reform through highlighting her own life's journey of ideas and places. Secondly, it will examine what we already know about materializing prepared environments from childhood to adolescence, nurturing healthy personalities--that will be the basis of moving from the known to the unknown connections between Montessori education and the "spiritual reconstruction of society."

The Montessori Historical Persona – Searching for the Unknown

In stepping into the Unknown, we must capture Dr. Montessori's historic work without idealizing it, and without putting her on a pedestal while forgetting the difficult thinking and work one must do to actualize the relationship between Montessori principles and broader concerns of social reform.

Connecting with Peace, the Unknown is a process, not just a glittering list of platitudes about how peaceful children make for a more peaceful world. Today, we must take a hard look at Montessori's own way of direct encounter with the realities of social decay, as she wrestled with the contradictions of human nature. She knew the duality of the human condition, its penchant for self-destruction side by side the natural constructive tendencies of the child's self-formation.

In her *Raison D'Être [Rationale] of Educateurs sans Frontières*, Renilde Montessori explains:

Dr. Montessori was a scientist of a competence akin to genius. It was not her desire that her pedagogy be followed blindly as dogma. Having assiduously and consistently studied children during many years, observing the universal characteristics of their development, she acquired the absolute faith that within the child lies the power which will allow humanity to fulfill a potential as yet unattained.

Montessori was a genius scientist.

Her vast educational background, including medicine, hygiene, natural science, psychology, and physical anthropology, informed her scientific pedagogy and psychological understanding of the child. Physical anthropology, differing from social anthropology, is more of a biological discipline, studying the classifications of the races and requiring minute measurements, detailed observations, and

extensive recording. Certainly this work helped her form habits of mind that resulted in her astute observations regarding the psychology of the child.

Her interest in the education of “mentally deficient children” gives us a glimpse of what is yet to come. She gave several lectures on the horrific conditions these children were subjected to and fought for better living conditions as well as for education rather than medication (*Discovery of the Child* 22).

Her intent was not merely for better conditions for these children; she saw it as a step toward social reform, for the betterment of society. She argued that education and training could make them productive citizens who in turn could make a positive contribution to society (Kramer 77). Her articulate and passionate words at the Turin congress influenced delegates of the congress to propose a resolution to the minister of education to approve her “proposal for the establishment of separate classes and medical-pedagogical institutions for the various kinds of deficient children as well as special courses designed to prepare teachers to work with them” (Kramer 77-78).

Even prior to Dr. Montessori’s famous experiment with the children in the San Lorenzo quarter of Rome, resulting in what was called “a miracle,” she was already thinking about and influencing others to think about social reform. We witness a “missionary spirit” in everything she undertakes. We see evidence of her defense of the underdog early in her career.

In 1896, the same year she became the first female doctor in Italy, she was invited to speak at the feminist congress held in Berlin. She spoke on behalf of the rights of the working woman. Over the next several years, she would continue to speak out on women’s issues.

Several years later, in an inaugural address at the opening of one of the Children’s Houses in 1907, she speaks about the Children’s House not only in terms of how it provides for children, but how it provides peace of mind for the working mother. She refers it as “the first step towards the *socialization of the house*” (*Discovery of the Child* 53).

But wait. The opening of San Lorenzo was not really about social reform; it was a gateway to something fantastic. The miracle of San Lorenzo showed Dr. Montessori a greater glimpse of human truth. Her penetrating focus on childhood now strips away the commonly held prejudices of the times regarding the preschool child’s capacity for learning, attention, and memory.

Her understanding of concentration as a key factor in the process of normalization of the child is discovered early, although she does not name it as such until later. In a lecture delivered in 1916 she states, “each time such a polarization of attention took place, the child began to become completely transformed, to become calmer, more intelligent, and more expansive; it showed

extraordinary spiritual qualities, recalling the phenomena of a higher consciousness, such as those of conversion” (*Basic Ideas of Montessori’s Educational Theory* 11). She also discovered that “all that was disorderly and fluctuating in the consciousness of the child seemed to be organizing itself into a spiritual creation, the surprising characteristics of which are produced in every individual” (11).

In the slowness of child’s time, Montessori had patiently experienced over and over again this veritable altered state of children at work. Can you imagine how this “polarization of attention” fascinated her trained eye—the pursed lips, the engaged countenance, the steadfast eyes, the whole body engaged, the loss of self-consciousness—every time the same deep concentration bound by the work of the hand.

What always impressed Dr. Montessori, even more than the method’s being pedagogically sound, were the striking human characteristics revealed by the children in these environments, such as love of work, generosity, love of silence, and so forth. In a lecture in 1934 she states, “for us, these peculiar characteristics were always the most important fact, and it was because of this that the method has spread in the world, as it has done” (“Spiritual Regeneration of Man” 172).

In describing terms used by others, such as “miracle children” or “the new children,” she explains, “such expressions do not indicate merely a new method of education, but rather new forms of the child’s personality” (172). She further states that these characteristics have enormous importance because they give us the key to human nature or “normality” (172).

She proclaimed, “either education contributes to a movement of universal liberation by showing the way to defend and raise humanity or it becomes like one of those organs which have shriveled up by not being used” (*Formation of Man* 14). There was a possibility that the full capacity of the human potential would remain untapped unless these manifestations of the human personality were understood, nurtured, and protected.

Here at last is born a connection, between these individual manifestations of normalization and normality and the whole of the human spirit. The child reveals to us what Abs Joosten called a “burgeoning of the human personality” (45). Montessori’s explicit skill of seeing the timeless, cultureless, classless, economicsless, universal pattern of all of humanity through normalized work of each child meant that at long last she could proclaim the universal constructive forces of every person born alive, for the whole human family.

Dr. Montessori was a pioneer in her conviction that individual formation was the foundation for peace. She saw the stabilization of motivation and engagement as a catalyst and our greatest hope for social change. She never visualized peace

as merely the “cessation of war” and explains, “Inherent in the very meaning of the word peace is the positive notion of constructive social reform... The fact that we mistakenly call the permanent triumph of the aims of war ‘peace’ causes us to fail to recognize the way to salvation, the path that could lead us to peace” (*Education and Peace* 5).

Peace, she said, is not a “partial truce between separate nations, but a permanent way of life for all mankind” (70).

Another historical path to peace is Montessori’s direct contact with the power of oppression. Sandwiched between two world wars, witnessing the rise of fascism, and having to flee to London from Barcelona at the start of the Spanish Civil War, Montessori was deeply disturbed at the state of the world. She was directly affected by the devastation of war. During Fascist rule all her schools were closed, and under Nazi rule her books were burned in a public square (Standing 85). Hitler’s regime closed down her schools in Germany. Even so, because of the inherent power of her work, such actions brought only “temporary eclipses, but were followed by a vigorous resumption as soon as conditions permitted” (Joosten 45).

Montessori saw the real tragic dimensions of war when she saw war as interrupting the child’s great work as it did her own. Because she envisioned the child’s self-construction holistically, with both its individual and collective potentialities, war meant collective destruction of the universal building of a normalized human personality around the world. It was not just the devastation of each place where she lived, it was not just her forced exile from country to country, but it was the very severe break in the continuity of the child’s whole spiritual direction as an international positive contribution to civilization that I think upset her the most. This sense of loss was captured, for instance, in the reflection about a child remembered from the late 1930s by the Montessori teacher Margot Waltuch, who worked with Maria Montessori in France, Holland, and Austria during her years abroad during Europe’s ideological turmoil. She describes a child from her first class, Amos:

They gave him a biblical name: “Amos,” one of the prophets. He was a member of my first class. His young father was a talented artist in Paris. His mother did various kinds of work to pay the small amount his scholarship did not cover. They adored this child. So did I. To me he was everything Dr. Montessori taught me about children. One has sometimes the good fortune of meeting in life one of those rare human beings who is able to convey a forceful and unforgettable message of human truth. Through Amos, I entered the Montessori world with an ideal. To teach and to guide him became a joy, not based on mere intelligence, knowledge and skill, but of the heart, a commitment to doing good by helping this child to develop.

Amos, when 18 years old, was killed on the very last day of the French-Algerian War. (7)

War, all human war, whether it be political, racial, war between adult and child, or war against the planet, snuffs out development, terminates contribution, and presents to the child a cultural model of “might makes right.”

Further adding to Montessori’s increasing awareness of the child with the world as backdrop was the fact that pre-war conditions forced her to move around the world. This exposed Maria and Mario Montessori to people of all cultures. Her work in countries of diverse social and cultural backgrounds such as Italy, the United States, India, Sri Lanka (then Ceylon), Pakistan, France, Germany, Holland, Ireland, Latin America, Spain, and Austria elicited the same astonishingly striking results confirming the unity and oneness of mankind.

In particular, her seven years spent in India with her son Mario from 1939 to 1946 “is a period that looms above the others for its dramatic nature and for the completion she attained in her vast vision” (Montessori, Mario, “The Impact of India” 27). Just like the first Casa dei Bambini, certain unique conditions led to new revelations. Mario said, “Indeed, it began to look as if Divine Providence had willed this restriction to our freedom so that we should concentrate on completing the missionary work Dr. Montessori was destined to carry out” (28). Living in the complex of the Theosophical Society gave her the opportunity of extended time with children of all ages as well as diversity of “peoples, languages, and mentality” (28). In the words of the Italian editors of *Education and Peace*, “Montessori’s many years of unhindered work in India ... gave a scientific basis to her thoughts about the restructuring of society and about peace and enabled her to build the solid and cohesive philosophy in *The Absorbent Mind*” (ix).

It is in India that we see an expansion of the work with the younger children from birth to three and the crystallization of “cosmic education,” which now, in contrast to the focus on the individual, culminates in her belief in the idea of human solidarity as a basis of the evolution of civilization – past, present, and future. A deep understanding of bonds that have always existed among humans can ultimately result in harmony among individuals, among groups, and among nations, if recognized from a more spiritual perspective. In a pivotal lecture given at the Congress in San Remo, 1949, entitled “Human Solidarity in Time and Space,” she explains the interconnectedness of humans that exists out of the need to transform, to progress, and to “create more comfortable conditions of life” (25):

All nations depend upon each other for survival and any physical barriers for sharing resources have been abolished. Now, more than ever, the speed in which resources can be dispersed has grown tremendously. Each person, in some way or another, contributes to the life of others through his work here on Earth. (25)

Yet, In spite of this “necessity of union,” Montessori explains, we continue to feel the lack of “that spiritual understanding which alone can lead to the union of all men (25).

What needs to be aroused is “a feeling of gratitude in their minds towards other men who work for us” and this “must begin with the children, making them reflect upon the social value of work and the ideal of work done for others, so that the common effort shall enrich the life of all” (26).

Such cooperation, she states, “makes it possible to take part in the universality of good” (26). We must help children understand in detail the history of civilization, the men and women who contributed in the past, and how *they* might contribute in the future. Our great task in the education of children is to “make the child aware of the depth of this union” (29). We must help them understand that we all have a relationship with the rest of the world and a responsibility towards its health. This is embedded in our approach to the child at all levels.

Stepping Stones to the Known

Not all of us have practiced Montessori in different cultures, and this to some degree is a limitation in understanding the universal child as the basis of human unity. The projection of human solidarity seems distant, abstract, sentimental, yet eminently what all humans wish to do but do not know the next, meaningful step. Montessori suggests that the first step to finding an international peace begins with the child:

The child is the only point on which there converges from everyone a feeling of gentleness and love. People’s souls soften and sweeten when one speaks of children; the whole of mankind shares in the deep emotions which they awaken... In the vicinity of children mistrust melts away; we become sweet and kindly, because when we are gathered about them, we feel warmed by that flame of life which is there ... and if this gift is realized to its fullest extent, humanity would take a giant leap forward. (*The Absorbent Mind* 359)

This gift can be realized to its fullest extent only if we generously provide for the developing human being.

Our work then must begin even before birth –with parents. We must develop environments suitable to the nature of the child. The idea of the prepared environment is nearly one hundred years old. The Montessori educational culture has carved out a series of almost sacred spaces for children from birth to fifteen. Even though each prepared environment in succession is differentiated from the previous environment, there is a fundament theme of unity, again stemming from the idea that children around the world experience the same stages of

development in every culture. The unity is highlighted by seeing children in different cultural settings but with the same prepared environments showing the same manifestations. This multi-cultural vision helps us see that we have a common humanity which may be striving in some way towards the same goal.

Very simplistically speaking, Montessori states that the road to normal, healthy development follows a twofold objective: “Constructing a suitable environment and bringing a new attitude toward children on the parts of adults” (*Education and Peace* 91).

These objectives seem simple enough, and yet, in reality, their interpretation and execution are complex. There are endless forces working against the possibility of their full realization. Helping to counteract some of these forces is an important aspect of making new discoveries that bring us closer to Peace, the Unknown. We in effect continue Montessori’s work by creating further investigations through working with children in these prepared environments.

“*Constructing a suitable environment*”: What did she mean by this?

A suitable environment is an environment that is congruent with life. We must begin with the notion that creating environments that are congruent with life goes well beyond the idea of simply executing an educational method. Throughout her writing, Dr. Montessori proposes various metaphors to describe her understanding of “a method of education.” There is one in particular that is well suited to the idea of “universal solidarity” and the image of peace. She refers to education as the “science of the cultivation of man” – the cultivation of human life from birth and beyond (“Human Solidarity in Time and Space” 25). If we look at the definition of *cultivate*, we see that it means “to protect and encourage growth; to improve by labor, care, or study; to bring to culture, civilization or refinement.” Is this not precisely what we do in a Montessori environment? We study the child, his internal energies and outward manifestations; we protect and encourage his vital work, encourage the creation of an adult who can adapt to the conditions of the world, and we contribute to the child’s careful refinement of human virtues that foster a healthy, peaceful human being.

An environment that is congruent with life provides love.

The power of love, both in the realm of education and that of peace, is trivialized, looked upon as a romantic notion, or something to be left to poets and philosophers. Certainly it is not a major topic of discussion in curriculum planning, at school board meetings, or at peace negotiations around the globe. Perhaps it should be. In reality, love may be our most potent ally in our search for human peace.

Children are born with the need to be loved. We know a lack of it can physically cause death. The child also has a need to love. Both of these remain throughout

life and without these structures in place, no other human virtues can evolve. Ashley Montagu says love is “the humanizing need; beyond all others it makes us human... Without love, there is no ability to love, and without the ability to love, it is impossible to live a full human existence” (107, 109).

Dr. Montessori observed the child to be the source of love. In the last chapter of *The Absorbent Mind*, she says it is from “this love that comes the child’s power for unity” (358). The reciprocal process of love establishes the feeling of belonging, the feeling of being connected to the family. It involves the give and take of sharing a home, of respecting the needs of others, of adult and child coexisting peacefully. True love is the end of the war between the child and the adult.

We witness another kind of love within the child, a love that is “the secret of all man’s progress and the secret of social evolution,” (*Education and Peace* 106) and Montessori called it “love for one’s environment” (106). The intense love of his environment inspires the child to want to know everything about it, to engage with it, and to work upon it. The tremendous tendency to work, particularly work of the hands, is what has helped shape civilization. The child loves whatever he takes in, absorbs it into his life, and uses it to create himself. Montessori says “love spurs man to learn and it leads to intimate contact between the thing that is loved and the human spirit, which in turn leads to production. Labor, life, and normal human development results” (107).

Love of the environment encompasses the natural world and must be deeply connected to our work with children throughout development. Montessori says, “When individuals develop normally, they plainly feel a love not only for other things, but for all living creatures” (*Education and Peace* 68). The patterns that children establish with nature throughout childhood influence their actions throughout life. The loss of the natural world may put development at risk. As John Sawhill concludes, “In the end, our society will be defined not only by what we create, but by what we refuse to destroy” (qtd. in Wilson front page). The great questions of the environment are integral to the questions of the constructive role of the human being and unity of purpose.

A congruent environment provides constructive activities that correspond to the child’s developmental needs.

The first span of life, from birth to six, is the most critical because it is the period of basic psychic construction and formation of character. Its contribution is a normalized child. The prepared environment is nurturing, protected, and offers means for individual construction. All our efforts are directed towards independent functioning – “Help me to do it myself.”

In the process of forming a strong individuality, the child must see himself as the center of the universe, but even in this period of egocentrism the prepared

environment respects and responds to the needs of the group, laying the seed of the social being of the elementary years.

The second span of life, from six to twelve, is directed outwardly and includes social, moral, and cultural interdependence of “all the cosmic agents to the deep understanding of human interdependence and the building of human solidarity” (Montessori, *Title of Work* 62). Cosmic education is an understanding of the origins, context, and responsibilities for life on earth. The “history of civilization is an indispensable element ... the interdependence of interest and needs.” We must “vivify the barren accounts of text-books” (“Human Solidarity in Time and space” 27). We must show children the nobility of the altruism of those before us in all areas of culture (27).

Camillio Grazzini differentiates these first two periods of development by saying, “The cosmic ‘subject’ in the Casa is the ecology of the person and concerns, above all else, the interior dimension of the human being, whereas in elementary, the cosmic ‘subject’ is the ecology of the world and this concerns the exterior dimension of the being” (41).

The third span of life, twelve to eighteen, encompasses a rebirth of the social being. There is a need to establish a firm inner life. The adolescent not only wants to join society, he wants to change it. Again, like the first period, adolescents need movement; the earth; integration of nature, education, and community; a life’s mission; work of the hand, and economic experience. They come face to face with the dual components of good and evil and must make choices. During this fragile period we witness a reformation of the inner life leading us away from the need to place emphasis on knowledge toward a new emphasis on wisdom.

The structuring and scientific development of these environments brings the Montessorian to the cutting edges of the profession. The adolescent begins to play back Montessori values as they are internalized as outcomes of Montessori education. Adolescence belongs more to adulthood than to childhood. What now emerges on the horizon is a new human face.

In series of outcomes derived from Montessori theory into practice, David Kahn has isolated moral, cognitive, social, and emotion outcomes which begin to etch in the Adolescent, the unknown. It is his emotional outcomes which relate most closely to finding Peace, the Unknown:

At the threshold of adulthood we find a human being who is:

- Self-sufficient, able to take care of himself and others
- Has a feeling of belonging to the world human community and to the earth
- Experiences inner harmony and happiness due to personal contribution, love of work, and a personal participation in the work of society

- Has hope for the future of world progress
- Demonstrates personal discipline, creativity, productiveness, and appreciates beauty
- Feels a sense of vocation and commitment to ones work and life
- Believes in the human capacity to solve problems and overcome adversity (Needs page number)

The emotional dimension of the adolescent (twelve to fifteen) stage of development might be viewed perhaps as the end state for childhood, now setting up terms for the unveiling of just what joining a society of adults really means. The work is a “great work,” a natural work having the intense emotions of a “vocation,” not in the career sense, but in satisfying a psychic need to meet real-life challenges, to grow, and to make a contribution to the whole of humanity.

Our view of the new adolescent grows our capacity to encompass the unity of human purpose.

As we evolve our prepared environments to the limits of our developmental knowledge (twelve to fifteen), we see more of the hidden human norm as the cultural masks fall away. This is a driving force in Montessori education to get at the core of human values that encourage human engagement and a new kind of happiness in finding one’s usefulness to the whole of society.

Alexis Carrel predicted that the emergence of Man, the Unknown would not be easy:

Our renovation can come only from the effort of all. To progress again, man must remake himself. And he cannot remake himself without suffering, for he is both the marble and the sculptor. In order to uncover his true visage, he must scatter his own substance with heavy blows of his hammer. (xvii)

The second objective, bringing about a shift in attitude toward children on the parts of adults, may be more difficult to accomplish.

Dr. Montessori says, “the revelations of the child are not at all so difficult to obtain, the real difficulty lies in the adult’s old prejudices concerning him” (*Formation of Man* 16).

She tells a story of young shepherdess who planted two new plants. One was for herself, the other she dedicated to God. She was extremely careful with the latter, watering it constantly, sheltering it from the sun and insects. She neglected her own plant, leaving it to the care of others. The plant she dedicated to God died, while hers grew beautifully. In despair, she wondered what happened. She got this answer: “You gave too much water to the plant, and you kept it away

from the sun and the insects. But the plant needed the sun for its coloring and the insects for growth and reproduction. You yourself, by your care, destroyed it.” Without even being aware of it, the same thing can happen in our dealings with children, both in the home and in the school. Often our intervention becomes an obstacle to “free development of the creative powers and stifles the inborn energies of the child” (“Human Solidarity in Time and Space” 24).

Cultural influences and prejudices regarding the child vary according to the historical period. In our current technological and information age, the tendency to overload a child with meaningless facts runs rampant. The pressure to “perform” on tests runs the agenda in many school districts. These tests scores often determine the value of teachers and schools.

In the book *Education for Creative Living*, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi compares this stuffing of knowledge to force-feeding a child:

The detrimental effects of force-feeding a small child can be easily seen because of the small body’s inability to metabolize an undigested waste. Or worse, it may lodge in the digestive tract, slowly putrefying and poisoning the whole system. Unfortunately, the effects of psychological toxification are not immediately visible. (21)

In order to nurture the inborn energies we must understand and respect the differences between the nature of the child and that of the adult. If we are blind to these differences, personal battles ensue between the adult and the child, forcing the child into early defenses. Continued conflict and misunderstanding can have long-term devastating effects. The adult’s mistaken belief that he must “mold the child in the pattern that society wishes” begins to inhibit the child’s ability to develop a strong will. Montessori says, “This ... misconception is the source of the primary conflict, even war, between human beings who by all rights should love and cherish one another - parents and children – teachers and pupils” (*Education and Peace* 16).

Dr. Montessori’s concept of the helping adult in the prepared environment provides a safeguard against the displacement of a child’s inner life. Her description of the new child often alludes to self-discipline and freedom, to being a disciple of one’s own will, to following the inner truth of one’s own evolving nature.

The powerful will of the adult must never void the efforts and tendencies of the child. An understanding of the child’s need to act through his own volition helps the adult to develop necessary virtues such as patience, humility, and faith.

The feeling of belonging, of expression, of unconditional acceptance, of tolerance develops first and foremost in our families and in our prepared environments when the child is not manipulated, but cultivated.

Connecting the Known with the Unknown

We have a vision that leads to highly cultivated humans, and we have seen the potential harvest. This is what gives us hope. This is why we stay deeply engaged in our work. Today, more than ever, we are presented with major obstacles of a different sort that prevent the full cultivation of humans. Many of the obstacles are directly related to human values.

A recently published book, *Affluenza* (DeGraff, Wann, and Naylor), encapsulates the symptoms of a nation (the United States) that has abandoned many of the values that we desire to cultivate in our youth - responsibility, generosity, work, civility, and intimacy in relationships. Looking at the findings is disturbing. The values that are being embraced have more to do with wanting more materialistic items, selfishness, and instant gratification, and less to do with self-restraint, good will, creating strong relationships and communities. And our children are the victims of this all-consuming effort. The findings show:

- The time parents spend with their children has declined by as much as 40% (45).
- Americans now spend nearly seven times as much time shopping as they do playing with their children (41).
- For the first time in history, children are getting most of their information from entities whose goal is to sell them something, rather than from family, school, or religion (52).
- The average twelve-year-old in the U.S. spends forty-eight hours a week exposed to commercial messages (52).
- At a marketing conference called “Kid Power” the keynote address was entitled “Softening the Parental Veto” (53).
- Asked about their highest priority at the University of Washington, 42% cited “looking good/have good hair.” Another 18% said “staying inebriated.” Only 6% said “learning about the world” (p. 58).

Certainly similar findings may also be relevant in other countries. Many nations who do not necessarily have these particular influences are compromised by other kinds of destructive forces, such as poverty, hunger, and military conflicts.

As has been demonstrated by Montessori and others, purposeful activity leading to deep concentration is the most pivotal factor in normalization of the person, yet our culture kidnaps opportunities for authentic concentration at every turn. From television to Internet to over-scheduled activities to insufficient time in nature to limited work of the hands, our children are robbed of precious opportunities for meaningful and peaceful engagement. For many children, the only uninterrupted time is in the Montessori environment. Paul Fleischman sums it up in his book entitled *Cultivating Inner Peace*: “Restlessness, inability to be alone, ill-ease with

solitude are the products of a pervasive cultural milieu in which human bodies are appendages to electronic toys, driven achievements, and consumer passion” (40).

The Montessori work continues to be counter-cultural – we need to help others realign with nature and the nature of the child. The natural child is less accessible to us. The question of peace through education may seem like a distant, remote, and unachievable goal. The idea of a social movement commanded by the child may not even be discussed anymore except perhaps in training. This concept remains at a distance from our daily work with children. For many, the struggle is to remain on top of things in the classroom, to deal with parents, communicate with colleagues, and maintain some balance in our lives.

Of course we are concerned with the global situation, but we cannot always directly connect it to our work with the children. Dominating cultural influences seem to have altered and interfered with the developing character of the child. More than ever, we lament that children are increasingly difficult to deal with and lack the ability or interest to remain engaged in their work. Adolescent depression, suicide, and violence continue to be on the rise.

We must remind ourselves, Dr. Montessori’s work – this great work—is still in its infancy. She herself states this by saying, “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* xi).

We have a choice. We can degenerate or we can carry the vision forward. How can we get the vision out in a bigger way? How does it become a viable social movement? How does it reach a critical mass? What’s the tipping point?

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 peace. She spoke around the world on behalf of children. We see this from the brief history I presented today. She was *proactive* in thought, words, and action.

We are that future she speaks about and the younger generation in the audience and the generation after and the generation after that.

So how do we begin?

We begin in our own unknown potential – our own incomplete work. Montessori said internal transformation is the first step in assisting life. From a Buddhist perspective, Daisaku Ikeda, an ardent peace activist, says the first path to peace must be taken alone: “The ability to see ourselves penetratingly enables us to transcend national boundaries and ethnic lines” (12). Only then, he states, can we go down the second path – the path of dialogue. The ability to engage in meaningful dialogue requires cultivated people, so our own continued cultivation must be never-ending. There are people who, when finished with their formal education, never study again. This can stifle open-minded dialogue. He continues by stating, “to abandon dialogue is in fact to abandon being human; and if we abandon our humanity, we cease to be the agency of history, relinquishing this authority to something of a lower order, a kind of bestiality” (12).

There must be a *willingness* on our part to struggle with our own Unknown, and the questions and challenges that confront us, both individually and collectively.

We have looked briefly at how Dr. Montessori lived her life in order to accomplish her vision. How can we live our lives to help our vision become a reality? Here again, we can learn from children. Many of the qualities they possess, such as open-mindedness, flexibility, generosity, and tolerance, are qualities that will help our mission if cultivated in ourselves. What are we doing now to help children live in harmony? How do we connect what we know about assisting children in their development to the rest of society? How do we spread ourselves thickly without spreading ourselves too thin?

Begin with the family. It is the developing will of the child that must be seen by the parents who inadvertently superimpose their own expectations onto the natural development of children. Bribes and threats create false compliance in children. Extrinsic motivators outpace inner motivation. False exteriors extend into adulthood. The breaking up of these false identities leads to mid-life crises, to career upheaval, to divorces, to unrestrained consumerism—these all might be viewed as part of the need for authentic development of the child’s will.

I tell my students that we must all be advocates for children in every arena of our life. It takes courage to take an unpopular stand in defending the rights of children. Stanley Greenspan is one such person. In his most recent book, *The Four-Thirds Solution*, he speaks out about the damage being done to children because of inadequate care while parents are away. Yet he does not simply lecture and impose guilt, he proposes a reasonable plan. He explains that we are in a new “experiment” with society - we are moving “away from deeply cemented familial ties and our growing reliance on outside services in almost every aspect of our lives is a new experience for our culture” (9).

He also warns, “There are already signs children are struggling in this new world” (11). There are many such advocates for children and we must align ourselves

with them and unite in our efforts in making way for the child's self-constructed personality.

Maria Montessori and her son Mario had another way to cultivate humanity, and that was in the international dissemination of Montessori education. Look today at the new expansion of Montessori in Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, South Africa, the Pacific Rim (Australia and New Zealand), Japan, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, etc.

But the cultivation of Montessori education must not simply grow into the four corners of the earth, but also reach those who need it the most. Jon Osterkorn writes in 1986:

The rich and the powerful, the elite and the famous have for eighty years surrounded and supported Montessori education. However, before all these illustrious people become interested, Montessori work was quietly born and tenderly nurtured among the poor and disabled. It is here, among the rejected and forgotten, that Montessori is truly at home: most welcome and most successful. (1)

Osterkorn cites numerous areas of development among special needs children over eighty years:

Successful applications of the Montessori approach have been demonstrated with blind children in Padova, Italy, with children with cerebral palsy in Hellerup, Denmark; with deaf children in New York city. Montessori work has also been undertaken with brain injured children in Washington D.C. and Chicago, Illinois. A current focus of interest has been on Montessori with learning disabled children in Toronto, Canada. The recent book *Montessori: Prescription for Children with Learning Disabilities*, by Marjorie Coburn, further details work in this area (6).

Today, almost fifteen years later, many fewer are cataloguing Montessori achievements with special needs children. Although there are active pockets of Montessori work in Munich and Phoenix, it seems that work with the disabled and the impoverished has gone unnoticed.

One may look at the "Save the Children Fund" founded by Muriel Dwyer to set up Montessori schools in Africa, or Orcillia Oppenheimer's significant support of Montessori schools in the most destitute of places in the settlements and shanty towns of South Africa. One may look at the NAMTA projects in Romania, Somalia, and, most recently, back to South Africa. The social challenge of bringing Montessori to the under classes of world certainly qualifies as cultivation of humanity. Montessori education then becomes a connection between the powerful and the disenfranchised.

What can the schools do to implement a social movement? Perhaps each school can develop its own “cosmic task” to bring the work to an international level. What about the training centers? This is part of my own incomplete work. I personally have a vision for expanding services and awareness in our community and beyond. I sit on the board of the largest community foundation in the area in order to keep a pulse on the needs of the community. I have invited the leaders of the Head Start programs to come and visit the center. In the 1970s many of these programs were Montessori programs – how can we encourage and facilitate a return to that? What about the public sector? Should we be helping and not criticizing the public schools’ efforts to bring Montessori to all children?

To bring our work to a critical mass will require multi-leveled actions. We must penetrate society at all levels, economic, social, political, and educational. We need to forge partnerships in order to accomplish this. Another very important effort is the work of *Educateurs sans Frontières*, that you will hear more about this weekend.

We must work diligently to support and expand projects around the world focused on the assistance to infancy, elementary, and adolescent environments so the developmental cycle can be completed. Projects like The Hershey Montessori Farm School and the other almost two hundred adolescent programs need to be supported because the adolescent has a powerful potential for influencing change as he or she enters society as a young adult. A healthy, socially conscious human being has a deep desire to make a contribution.

Outside the prepared environment, we need to go beyond Montessori education for Montessori’s sake. If enough people can experience the essence of Montessori, if collectively we can partner with others who are working for the social cause of the child, we have a better chance of evoking a collective consciousness. There appears to be a strong movement toward an evaluation of human values, a questioning of actions.

Montessori has demonstrated that even the power of one can make a tremendous impact. She has alerted us to virtues of missionary zeal for Montessori. She has placed her emphasis on connecting the child’s inspiring inner work with that of the adult’s need to focus on outer humanitarian aims. We have made the inner construction of the child the guiding principle to solving the world’s need for peace on earth.

We must *will* the triumph of self-construction, as Maria Montessori did in the last century. It is all a matter of our willingness to make cultivation of the human spirit our daily mantra.

I mentioned will as willingness to enter into the human condition, a willingness to enter into territory that might be easier for most to leave uncharted. In the book *Will and Spirit*, Dr. Gerald May differentiates between willingness and willfulness:

Willingness implies a surrendering of one's self-separateness, an entering -into, an immersion in the deepest processes of life itself. It is the realization that one already is a part of some ultimate cosmic process, and it is a commitment to participation in that process. In contrast, willfulness is the setting of oneself apart from the fundamental essence of life in an attempt to master, direct, control, or otherwise manipulate existence. More simply, willingness is saying yes to the mystery of being alive in each moment. Willfulness is saying no, or perhaps more commonly, "Yes, but..." "Willingness and willfulness do not apply to specific things or situations. They reflect instead the underlying attitude one has toward the wonder of life itself. Willingness notices this wonder and bows in some kind of reverence to it. Willfulness forgets it, ignores it, or at its worst, actively tries to destroy it" (6).

Montessori said yes, and so must we.

When we join forces to liberate the very best of the child's great work, it is then, and only then, when the sun does rise, and Peace, *the Known* will be as necessary to life as the seasons and as comprehensive as the Universe.

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