## Montessori All Day: Gracious Living with Children beyond the Hours of a Typical School Day

## by Connie Black

Connie Black takes a broad view as she makes the case for the all-day Montessori. She assembles Montessori historical literature to give authenticity to a full-day program that is true to Montessori's "aid to life." The Montessori prepared environment provides "care" day in and day out and includes a focus on practical life as routine. In the context of the whole community, the all-day program becomes embedded in the real life of a home.

The first Montessori Children's Houses were all-day programs. Returning to those roots, we will explore the notion of "Montessori All Day" and how we can provide the child with support of optimal development throughout long hours of care without compromising Montessori principles. This is a topic that has been visited and revisited in the United States. I hope we see greater consensus around the topic than in the past, but there remains a great variety of practice and disparate attitudes about how to provide long hours of care for children in a Montessori setting. We still seem to be in search of "the right way" of doing it. I can't imagine that I am going to say anything radically different from those who have stood here before you in NAMTA conferences past. If you search the NAMTA archives you will find a rich collection of proceedings, dating as far back as 1975.

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It is perhaps most important to remember that what we are really providing is a place for children to live, a Children's House, a home. This home-like environment is a place where the child experiences basic trust. It is a place to safely belong. In such an environment the child is able to absorb, to be independent, and to express herself. In such a living community the child experiences choice and freedom and can work and concentrate. With all that in place, Dr. Montessori observed the child to be able to achieve levels of reflection and spiritual awareness

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many did not think the child capable of. Our task, then, is to prepare a living environment that extends beyond the four walls of the Children's House, beyond the hours of the standard school day and nine-month school year. We want to create the possibility for the young child to experience the outdoor environment in a way that extends beyond simply acquiring knowledge of nature, the child comes to live naturally. When the child is afforded the opportunity to live naturally, he reveals his strengths, developing a profound respect and love for the natural world. With access to the outdoors, the child develops an intense interest in the nature outside the door and sees it as something to be observed and cared for.

When we are successful, we have created an oasis that allows our children to grow up whole, contributing to a strong community fabric. As they enter into a society that is increasingly less than whole, they find a frayed social fabric. In a developmentally responsive prepared environment, children who have been afforded an oasis in which to live and develop fully are equipped not only to survive but also to thrive. That thriving manifests in a strong, vibrant thread to reinforce the tattered social tapestry. We are providing an optimal environment for the hope for the future. The tapestry is changed, to be stronger, more supportive to all, and more beautiful. When we are successful, we have not created a school, but a place to live and grow. I would like to give you a perspective that is backed by Dr. Montessori's writings as well as those of her early colleagues, some things I and others around the country have put into practice. I invite you to be open to thinking about some different ways to approach long hours of Montessori. Let this be a real reflection on building community around the exercises of practical life in the context of that community and the socialization around the reality of community work.

While we have to be aware of personal biases, and always open to seeing from a new perspective, I fully admit that I hold a personal bias in how we name these programs. They are often called *all-day Montessori*. For me, that description sounds as if all-day Montessori were somehow a different Montessori that we are offering. Sadly, in too many cases in the United States at least, it *is* a different kind of Montessori that is offered. We see odd aberrations, particularly in the late afternoon, with adults thinking children "need a break from Montessori" and offering less productive activities for children that are not in the least purposeful. My response to the "needing a break" argument is that it must be the adults who need the break! If what we are offering in the name of Montessori is so tiring and taxing that we must afford children a break from it, it certainly cannot be the authentic Montessori that we know to be developmentally responsive and that children have thrived in for over one hundred years.

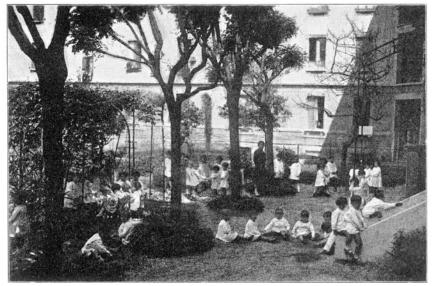
Here's what Dr. Montessori had to say on the matter:

Our observation of children has made us realize that work is man's fundamental instinct and that the child can work from morning till night without ever feeling tired, as if his labor were part of the order of nature. (*Education and Peace* 96)

She says elsewhere in that volume:

The child likes neither to play idly, nor to waste time doing useless things, nor to flit about aimlessly, as most people believe. He seeks some very precise goal, and he seeks it with an instinctive directness of purpose.... When he has freed himself of the oppressive adults who act for him, the child also achieves his second goal, working positively toward his own independence. (55) I much prefer the term *Montessori all day* to make it perfectly clear that it is authentic Montessori we are offering, all day long. All the developmental gifts with which the child is endowed do not switch off at 3:00. We don't see sensitive periods suddenly stop at some magical point in the day, whether that is 11:30, 12:30, or 3:30. We don't see all the human tendencies suddenly evaporate into thin air. I've never seen a child suddenly become less curious or less intent on making discoveries simply because the clock indicates late afternoon. Simply put, these children are fully engaged in living, and they don't stop living at any point during the day, they never take a break from life. We have made a commitment to live with them and to support their process of self-construction. Our Montessori training has put us in the best possible position to do that.

Historically, at least the first five Children's Houses Dr. Montessori opened offered care to children in what we would today call *all-day* formats. Indeed, she was probably living with the children not only well beyond the hours of a typical school day, but beyond what most of us would even think of in terms of an all-day program. In *The Montessori Method* she writes about being with the children as late as 7:00 p.m., so it is quite possible that she had shared three meals with them in addition to the snacks in between (32). That's a lot of living



The garden at Casa dei Bambini, San Lorenzo, Rome, around 1913

together! In those early environments, the guide actually lived in the housing where the children lived, right among their families (and we see that again today in environments like Crossway Montessori Communities (MD), providing housing and serving mothers and

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children). We have returned to those roots here in Minnesota, working to identify training candidates from within the community to be served when at all possible in our *Montessori Partners Serving All Children* programs. If they don't physically live among the families being served, they at least look like them, coming from within the community and sharing cultural roots.

So how did we get away from this practice of being embedded in the community and partnering for long hours of care? Let us remember Dr. Montessori's words about the purpose of the Children's House:

> We do not say that we want to prepare a school for the [child]; we wish to prepare an environment for life, where the child can develop a life. That is why we call this institution a House of Children. The idea is to give the children a house of their own, a house in which they are the masters of themselves. (*Creative Development of the Child* 52)

Remember the passage in *Discovery of the Child* where she so eloquently speaks again of this house of children:

We Italians have elevated our word 'casa' to the almost sacred significance of the English word 'home,' the enclosed temple of domestic affection, accessible only to dear ones. (37)

Not only did she advocate for a new approach to early education, giving us an exquisite developmentally supportive approach, Dr. Montessori knew this was indeed a second home for these children, who spent many long hours there. For some of the children, they were in the home of their Children's House more of their waking hours than they were with their own parents at home. We still see this to be true for some of the children in our care today. The prepared adults who live in this Children's House are much more than the dynamic link to the materials and many activities. They form significant bonds and relationships with the children, serving as role models and performing in ways that might traditionally be thought of as more like parenting. In many ways, they become a part of each of the families, an extended family member. How many of you have heard stories from parents about being blessed in nightly prayer rituals right along with all the members of the immediate family? How many of you have been asked by children to be present at their birthday celebrations? This is an important relationship.

Again, how did we get away from this practice of setting up a house, of creating a home for dear ones? I think, in the United States at least, we got away from the notion of living with children and supporting optimal development and began thinking in terms of "schooling." We became engaged in trying to *teach* children rather than *supporting* their self-construction. We operate from a place of fear that drives us to "get them ready for school" rather than working toward getting school settings appropriately ready for children. That's probably the origin of the idea that children need a break. Many of us have experienced school as tedious and tiresome and we all needed a break from it. But we aren't supposed to be "schooling" children. We are supposed to be supporting development. Instead, we started offering a "break from Montessori" and started wheeling out shelves and bins full of traditional toys in the late afternoon.

By contrast, in Dr. Montessori's original Children's Houses, there were no toys. In *Dr. Montessori's Own Handbook* she tells us that rather than providing an endless parade of dollhouses, dolls with wardrobes for the dressing and undressing of the dolls, play kitchens where the children pretend to cook, toy tea sets for pretend tea parties, and so forth, Dr. Montessori tells us we seek "to give all this to the child in reality–making him an actor in a living scene" (44-47). Isn't this a much more respectful response to the child's burgeoning development? In those early Children's Houses, Dr. Montessori tells us the children themselves did everything, including sweeping the rooms, dusting and washing the furniture, polishing



all the little objects made of various material, whether brass, silver or wood, laying and clearing the table for meals, washing dishes and perhaps a few items of clothes, and cooking eggs (44).

We must constantly self-reflect on our own attitudes and be aware of all our biases. Is the notion that our work day should be a regular 9 to 5 or 8 to 4 day merely a bias on our part? My doctor is a highly regarded professional, and I am grateful I can count on her outside those traditional "work day" hours. We, too, are well-trained professionals, although not as highly regarded as our physicians by society in general. If children and their families need us before 8:00 or 9:00 a.m. shouldn't we be willing to make our services to support optimal child development available when it is needed? We are, after all, that dynamic link between the child and this carefully prepared environment with its many developmental materials and activities. These children and their families are rising early and arriving to our buildings. Shouldn't they be greeted and welcomed into their home away from home and their great task of self-constructive work by those of us best prepared to support them? Don't they need and deserve the same dynamic link in the later hours of the afternoon? Proper presentations, no matter what the time of day, ensure purposeful, self-constructive activity (Verschuur 64).

We must make sure that we are not passing judgment about children and their families. We went through a period of bias in the United States that "children belonged at home with their mothers." Montessori programs were designed so that it was expected that the youngest went home at the end of the morning, which we know necessitated that many went to other child-care options as more and more mothers were working outside the home. Remember, this is not at all how those first Children's House environments functioned.

Then we started to provide "care" on site, but it was down the hall from the Children's House. We had "before care" and "after care," even "lunch care," and we came up with all manner



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of catchy names for each session of care. Sometimes each of these was staffed by different people and might even have occurred in different rooms. So we set up a lot of transitions for children throughout the day, and we know how hard transitions can be. While flexibility and the ability to handle transitions well are valuable skills, we were asking children to practice this far too many times a day, without adequate tools and knowledge to do so well. When do we observe the highest number of meltdowns? During transitions, of course.

We set up a constellation of relationships, each with perhaps a slightly different set of expectations for ways of being within a particular environment. We talk so much about the importance of community and how it is so beautifully manifested in our environments, yet we were breaking up the Montessori community and sending children who were not staying in the Montessori prepared environment for the afternoon down the hall or to the basement to another room. In some cases, the younger children of other Children's House communities joined in, creating a new group, which may or may not have successfully created a second community.

Children napped and then played with traditional toys often in the supervision of staff that was not Montessori trained. Then another transition occurred as the older children who had stayed in the Montessori prepared environment for the afternoon now joined this group for late afternoon after care. Again, it might be older children from more than one Children's House community so now there was a third group dynamic that this young child had to fit into. Throw in the possibility that elementary aged children might be included in this late afternoon "after care" group, and you can see that we have definitely stretched to the limits our developmental support of these young children.

The youngest do need the opportunity to rest or nap, but why not come back into the prepared environment as they wake? Why not keep them as vital members of their own Children's House community of mixed ages and use that late afternoon time for more complex exercises of practical life? Why can't they be engaged in care of the environment, doing the laundry, cooking for tomorrow's lunch or snack? The authentic possibilities are endless! Rather, we have set up circumstances where children are on site for long hours (up to ten hours or more in many programs) and they are in their prepared Montessori environments for only three of those hours. So the youngest children, with the most development to accomplish, are spending far more time in daycare type rooms, with staff of varying levels of experience and few with Montessori training, than in the developmentally supportive environment that I'm sure Dr. Montessori expected they would be in for the entire ten or more hours. We do have some programs that have taken a leadership role in changing some of these practices, but in far too many instances what I have just described continues to happen every day.

So I would like to describe what I think the ideal Montessori all day looks like. What are the physical aspects of this environment? My ideal Montessori all-day environment is based on words from Dr. Montessori herself in *Dr. Montessori's Own Handbook* to guide us. She says,

It ought to be a real house; that is to say, a set of rooms with a garden of which the children are the masters. A garden which contains shelters is ideal, because the children can play or sleep under them, and can also bring their tables out to work or dine. In this way they may live almost entirely in the open air, and are protected at the same time from rain and sun. (37-38)

Rather than one room, it is probably a series of rooms; but they are all connected, under one roof as it were, so that children do not have to be shepherded from one environment to another. Instead they move from room to room just as we all do within our own homes. Remember that she called it a home. She was very specific about the fact that this new way of being with children was not a school. We are not teaching; we are supporting development.

We are all familiar with the prepared environment and its full complement of developmental materials, the traditional Montessori materials. Dr. Montessori referred to this as the "room for intellectual work" (38). Lili Peller, a close friend of Dr. Montessori and a designer of spaces to serve children, spoke of the importance of the preparation of this space:

The [prepared environment] can become the [guide's] most valuable assistant. The [guide] that wants to give

her group a great deal of freedom yet does not want this freedom to degenerate into chaos, and one who wants to make her guidance more and more subtle, will find that time spent with the room and equipment [to create a prepared environment] pays ample dividends in improving her work. (21)

Let's consider some of the others "areas" necessary to create a homelike atmosphere for the children.

The cloakroom is the bane of existence for many a guide or assistant. Some guides complain bitterly about the cubby areas or cloakroom being located within the prepared environment. They want it entirely removed from sight, located out in the hallway, so that it does not interfere with either "their" physical space or the routines of the work cycle. I see having this area under the roof of the Children's House as a golden opportunity for authentic work. Older children can offer help to younger ones in how to hang, fold, and organize all their personal belongings within the space. It might contain a small table with a mirror that the child can use to take care of the hat-hair we experience in Minnesota, retrieving their own comb or brush from their personal storage to groom themselves before entering into the work cycle.

In Minnesota we remove our outdoor shoes or boots and put on indoor shoes or slippers when we come into the house. In the Children's House, muddy shoes or boots provide a lot of authentic work for cleaning and polishing. I've seen young ones deeply engaged and finding great joy in lining up the boots perfectly, all standing at attention. By the end of the day there is often debris that has dried and fallen off boots, providing the opportunity to again have a communal response to the environment and sweeping the whole area. Isn't that an authentic response to the care of the environment? If the cloak area is within the Children's House, as opposed to being somewhere removed "out in the hall," peers are readily available for assistance when needed.

In addition to what we might call the *intellectual room* or what we all know as the prepared environment that holds all the Montessori materials, there is a dedicated dining room where meals are taken together. Some of the children will choose it as their work during the morning work cycle to set the tables, laying the table cloths, putting out place settings with china and cutlery, arranging flowers, etc. We provide attractive storage to orderly arrange all the linens and tableware needed for shared meals, all accessible to the children.

Margot Waltuch has wise words for us about the importance of mealtime in the Children's House:

We had a full-course meal daily. We ate with the children and discussed their experiences in the parks, the museums, their parties, etc. They talked about future events and past events, always making laughter and jokes. The French children were masters of conversation at the table. Also typically French was the style of waiting on the table. The eating and talking alone usually took an hour. (50)

Margot certainly is not describing an aggravating, difficult time of the day that we all just have to "get through." She is describing a most pleasant, gracious event, to be looked forward to each day, treasured and participated in by all members of the community, even the community's adults. For me it was always one of my favorite times of the day. It was when I really heard about their lives, "between the peas and the carrots" so to speak. We shared stories over this mid-day meal about our pets, our siblings, and our travels. It was frequently when I became aware of particular interests or special experiences on the part of individual children, and could make plans to respond to those interests with authentic pieces of work for them to choose during the work cycles, at any time of the day.

Especially in an all-day environment we have the opportunity to really engage in exercises of practical life in the context of the community. This is the real heart of the purpose of the exercises, and reaches far beyond the simple activities on trays that we find on the shelves in the practical life area. Every morning there are basic preparations for the work cycle that children are perfectly capable of taking care of themselves. Things like preparing the tasting bottles, refreshing the smelling bottles, and preparing the thermic bottles. These are activities usually held for the guide or assistant, or are not present on the shelves at all because they are considered too tedious

and time consuming to prepare each day. There are pouring vessels to be filled, sponges to be dampened. There are paper supplies to check and replenish. There are pencils to be sharpened. There is laundry to be done daily, complete with ironing, folding and replacing to storage. Ideally there are laundry facilities on site, but if not, the laundry

The prepared adult who leads an effective all-day program is also skilled at relating to parents and providing sound parent education and deep parent engagement. This communication is imperative for the guide as well, learning about the family life of the child and any special circumstances that might require a new level of understanding or support. In this way, a true partnership is forged, with guide and parents sharing information and knowledge in support of optimal development of the child.

has been taken home by one of the adults or the family of one of the children. A lot of laundry is done by hand. Cloth washing can be just as beautiful as any other exquisitely prepared exercise of practical life. It can go well beyond simply using plastic Rubbermaid tubs to offer historical galvanized tubs, interesting pitchers and of course the lovely little washboard that I watched my own grandmother use for small items of hand washables. She knew nothing about Montessori (to my knowledge) but I spent many hours in her kitchen washing, starching, and ironing doilies by hand in her enamelware tubs. The ironing was done with the small, heavy iron made of iron, which has long since been put into service as a doorstop, but with which I gleefully ironed as she used her hotter, electric iron.

The child has the opportunity to really explore beyond meeting merely her own needs, but how to function within the community. The child starts to feel that she truly is the master of this environment, and that this environment belongs to her and her peers rather than the adults in the room. Many of us are in the habit, first of all of calling it a classroom, and then referring to it as "my" classroom. Giving these opportunities for the child to be involved prepares the conditions for the child to begin to have a communal response to care of the environment. He will love this environment, his home, and he will want to take care of it. If we have appropriately prepared the conditions he will have all the needed protocols and tools to do so independently and joyfully.

It seems that in order to do Montessori all day really well, we need to invest in a working kitchen as a part of the Children's House. Rather than cold food packed in lunch boxes, in the all-day environment we have the opportunity for all to experience the graces of a shared meal, part of which might have been prepared by the children themselves, but all of which is certainly served by the children. This entails real table linens (tablecloths, napkins, bread basket liners, etc.), real china, glass tumblers, and a complete setting of flatware, including knives. Can we provide more complex exercises of practical life around cooking, with children independently choosing and engaging in cooking activities from beginning to end, rather than the "cooking project" where several gather around an adult and simply get to take turns dumping and stirring ingredients? Have we provided recipes tailored to result in individual servings as well as enough to be shared with the group? There are inventories of the pantry to complete, and shopping lists to be made, just as we do at home, giving rise to authentic practice to the budding writers in the group.

Perhaps there is another room, an alcove, or just dedicated area where children might sit and engage in conversation, observe a tank of fish or aviary of birds, or listen to music. Dr. Montessori suggests in Dr. Montessori's Own Handbook that this is an ideal space to house a piano, a collection of small musical instruments, and a perfect place to invite a small group of children for stories, which invariably attract a circle of interested listeners, especially in the later hours of the afternoon. Every child in the Children's House is in a sensitive period for language development, and we should be offering exquisite spoken language experiences throughout and right up to the end of the day. Dr. Montessori tells us that the furnishings for this area "should be especially tasteful" (40). Beautiful child-sized pieces of wicker furniture can be used, as well as leather club chairs. Look for small, upholstered settees and wing back chairs, little area rugs and side tables. Most floor lamps come with a sectioned pole, and if the middle section is not included when it is put together, it fits perfectly next to this child-scaled furniture.

There is also a napping room: a place for the youngest to rest and sleep if need be after lunch. Again, this room is attached so that as children awake they simply fold their bed linens and re-join the group already engaged in the afternoon work cycle. And there are of course the requisite bathrooms with facilities for toileting and washing.

There is an outdoor environment immediately accessible from the indoor environment; this is the garden she spoke of. Not only is this a viable workspace, where one might choose to bring material to sit in the sun and work while being serenaded by the birds, this outdoor environment itself is full of opportunity for meaningful activity. There are as many means to care for this outdoor environment as there are for the indoor environment. We have to self-reflect about our preparation of this aspect of the prepared environment. Are we in the habit of relegating all the chipped, cracked, stained or otherwise less than perfect vessels to the outdoor space? We are well-trained to prepare developmentally supportive exercises of practical life. Are we preparing the necessary tools and analyzing the necessary movements and protocols, offering beautifully attractive, purposeful activity in the outdoors? There are plants to be cared for, pots to be scrubbed and stacked, garden tools to be cleaned and oiled, patios or pathways to be swept, woodchips to be raked, birdbaths to be cleaned. There are bird feeders to be maintained. There are observations and data to be collected as children watch carefully what birds come to the feeders. There are decisions to be made on the basis of those observations. Do we see more of a particular species if we fill the feeder with a particular mix of seed over another? Do we have plants that attract butterflies, birds, or even mammals? Do we know all the proper names of every living plant species in our outdoor environment? Are we prepared to share all this botanical vocabulary, as well as that of all the species of mammals, birds, insects, amphibians, reptiles, and perhaps even fish that might be found in this environment? We must never forget the importance of this connection to the outdoor environment and the necessity for the free flow between the indoors and outdoors.

In addition to the "man made" outdoor environment that we might create including swings, slides, and a climbing apparatus. It is important to remember that children need to navigate natural spaces. This means there might be large rocks or stumps that the



Courtesy of Cornerstone Montessori School, St. Paul, MN

children might climb and jump from. Well-developed outdoor spaces are particularly important for children who are living with us for most of their waking hours.

There should be open spaces for running, but also small spaces in which children can seek solitude. There should be a variety of plants and trees, and it is our responsibility to know the names of every one of them and to be able to share this information with the children. Are we making connections between the indoors and outdoors with first experiencing plants and animals and then finding card material relating to those experiences on the language shelves?

We have to be acutely aware of how the needs of the child in long hours of care differ from those enrolled in the traditional half-day preschool program. Lili Peller, had these words for us:

> The children whose nursery day is longer than three or four hours need several rooms. For the child who comes for a half-day only, the company of others is the main need; but if he comes for a longer period, privacy is as important as company. Both are needed for social and emotional balance by children no less than by adults. (12)

Most of us can probably conjure up memories of those sacred little places we used to retreat to as children. I had several: one under the stairs in a coat closet, one in the attic by a window that looked out onto the street, where I could observe the comings and goings of the neighborhood, one in the calf stall in the barn of my grandparent's dairy farm. Children need these spaces that they can retreat to of their own accord, by choice, to find the serenity that comes with reflection and relaxation. Within that delicate balance of freedom and discipline, then, the child in Montessori all day should be able to freely choose activities from among the "rooms" of this house without interference from adults or the dictates of schedules.

As we take a closer look at the opportunities for authentic exercises of practical life, it is important that we understand the significance of these exercises, and their constructive nature for the child. According to Joosten, the adult participates in these dailyperformed practical life activities

> in order to maintain and restore proper conditions. His purpose in doing so is, therefore, purely conservative and utilitarian; they have an "outer aim" as far as the adult is concerned. They serve this preservative and restorative function not only with regard to things (conditions), but also with regard to persons (relations). (1)

The child engages in these exercises for entirely different purposes of course. Joosten goes on to tell us

> In the young child's case these very activities have a more important and more personal function. They are not merely preservative and restorative; they are truly constructive, not with regard to the environment of course, but with

regard to the child himself. Those simple daily activities are for the child, DEVELOPMENTAL, even CREATIVE activities. In that function we call them "exercises of practical life." (1)

Why then, would we limit the child's access to these vital exercises to his self-construction to the morning hours only?

## Margot Waltuch wrote,

All the aims of Montessori education can be developed through the Exercises of Practical Life – concentration, normalization, repetition of the exercises, refinement of movement, independence, social development, and freedom of choice. Practical Life is the soul of the Montessori [prepared environment].

She goes on to note,

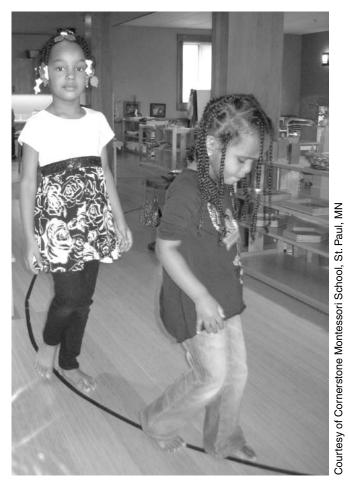
Many times children find their place in the community by the service they offer others. Practical Life entails real tasks where there is challenge and a quality of "grownup-ness" providing for the young child "that sweet feeling of being needed." (52)

We have the opportunity to reflect on the exercises of practical life that we offer. Have we become complacent, with the same repertoire of exercises always available, or in limited rotation?

Some programs in the United States have fallen into the habit of excluding the younger children from the Montessori prepared environment for the afternoon hours. Wouldn't those same programs be quick to identify the mixed age group as one of the hallmark principles of the Montessori approach? Beyond the "needing a break argument" some of them cite that the younger children are somehow "not ready" to be in the presence of the trained guide and their older peers for the afternoon. What better way for them to "be ready to be there" than to *be there*? They can continue to develop their language, to develop their hands, to journey the path towards normalization in the afternoon hours. We can continue to provide a nourishing, protective environment for this social embryo with the built-in experiences provided by the mixed age group for the entire day. The benefits of that mixed age group are just as important to the older children in the environment, who do not have the opportunities for leadership and guidance of younger peers when they are not included.

Of course this all-day environment is led by a Montessori trained adult. I'm going to suggest there should be two trained adults. I am not advocating a team teaching situation. That second trained adult serves as the "trained assistant," assuming the traditional role of the assistant, but of invaluable service to the lead guide in terms of making appropriate observations, and supporting the process of recordkeeping. This is a model now being used by many programs in the United States, including in our Montessori Partners Serving All Children collaborative. With these two adults bookending the day, with one of them there as the first children arrive and the other one there when the last one leaves, we assure that the children are under the observant eyes of one who, through careful study and preparation of the self during a Montessori training course, understands child development and how to respond to it within the framework of the Montessori approach. The first children to arrive in the morning are immediately supported should they wish to begin their work cycle. There is no waiting around for the real Montessori guide to arrive. The child's work with the Montessori materials can begin immediately within the partnership with the Montessori guide. In the late afternoon, after the lead guide has departed for the day, this trained assistant can continue to support children as they work with the materials, leaving careful observation notes for the lead as plans are made for future presentations for individual children. The allimportant aspects of rich spoken language experiences can continue throughout the long hours of the day, with the second adult trained to understand its importance and how to use it responsively.

We bridge the center portion of the day with a traditional, untrained assistant. This allows for the three adults to be present for the children during lunch and nap, with the opportunity for either the assistant or second trained adult to step out of the room to work on the creation and maintenance of materials, take a child along to attend to the laundry, etc. This also allows for the second trained adult to be with children through the nap routine. This is again a time of day that is frequently turned over to the person with the least amount of training, when it can be a crucial place for understanding and responding appropriately to child development.



Does it take a different kind of adult to successfully implement an all-day program? Not necessarily, but if we are to uphold the highest Montessori standards and provide days uninterrupted by specialists, it does take commitment to become facile in providing daily experiences in music, art and literature. Just like practicing with the developmental materials before presenting them to the child, this means practice in singing all manner of responsive songs, telling exciting stories, reciting beautiful poetry, providing means for expressive movement through simple dance activities. The guide then is an exemplary life-long learner, self-aware of his or her own spiritual needs and tending to them with the same focus and attention as tending to those of the children, constantly developing his or her own talents and interests. In this way, the guide daily brings into the environment the flame of inspiration, and truly becomes a beacon of light.

The prepared adult who leads an effective all-day program is also skilled at relating to parents and providing sound parent education and deep parent engagement. Parents who have their children in long hours of care are sometimes riddled with guilt, or are just desperate to know that they have made a good decision and that their children are in good hands and thriving. So the all-day guide must possess extraordinary communication skills, readily putting parents at ease and making them to feel that they know about their child's day. To that end, parents should be encouraged to observe, so that they see first-hand that their child is thriving. And this communication is imperative for the guide as well, learning about the family life of the child and any special circumstances that might require a new level of understanding or support. In this way, a true partnership is forged, with guide and parents sharing information and knowledge in support of optimal development of the child.

When most of us think about parent education we focus on what we can tell parents and caregivers about Montessori. It's easy to become stuck in patterns of presenting the various areas of the prepared environment and our materials. There is so much more parents need to know. Education events can be developed to enhance parents' understanding of child development in general and the Montessori approach to that development.

We also need to shift our focus from being the experts who can offer education to being partners who can engage with parents and caregivers. Consider activities that can be offered within the social context of the community (e.g., family fun nights, potluck dinners, etc.). What kinds of community-building activities can we offer that might become traditions for the community? If the children are in long hours of care, it means that their parents and caregivers are in long hours of work. Sometimes they, too, need a social context in which to make connections with others in the community. What a relief to know that their children are preparing a simple supper in the Children's House and they will be able to join them after work for a time of getting to know the rest of the community, without having to hurry for pick-up, getting a sitter, getting everyone fed and only to return to the Children's House for another "education" event. And how gratifying for parents to see first-hand the competence and confidence of their young children as they go about serving a simple meal, with grace and courtesy, that they may not witness in the home environment. This is how we begin to influence a shift in the home environment to embrace Montessori principles, not by having instructed parents at an education event but because we have engaged them as fellow members of a community.

So if I had it as my task to create that oasis, that living, breathing, dynamic prepared environment to provide a residency for our children of 3-6, a place for living, that is what I would strive to create. Dr. Montessori and her early colleagues have left us some pretty clear standards against which to measure our practice and to guide our reflection. I have the pictures to prove that there are many who are indeed successful at preparing and staffing these remarkable environments that serve our children as oases.

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