

# what makes montessori work?

ISSUE 1, SPRING 2019



## **Welcome Spring**

Newsletter #1

Welcome! What Makes Montessori Work? is the title of this newsletter because it is a question I love to ponder in our classrooms. Just last week on a college trip with our seventeen-year-old son, I had brief conversations with Montessori graduates we know in each of the places we visited. There is something about them...what is it? They are kind, inquisitive, 'together' and 'grounded.' They love what they do, they love people. They do not brag, and yet they accomplish a great deal. They are unique. "They really know themselves," is a comment I hear often. When I asked one of these graduates what he thinks Montessori gave him and his colleagues, he said, "resourcefulness." So, what is it about the environments we prepare and the approach of helping children take from them what they need for their lives, that helps them develop such strong traits? As Montessori educators, the better we can explain what we see, the more clearly we can show what happens, the further we will extend opportunities for Montessori education to more children.

Meanwhile, all Montessori teachers and school leaders also need inspiration, support and resources to keep doing their work in classrooms. My hope is to provide a little dose of that here in this newsletter. Please feel free to email me if there's a research report, article, book or YouTube video you think would fit into this conversation.

In February, I listened to AMI trainer Ginni Sackett's excellent lectures at the AMI Refresher Course in New Orleans for the Primary Level teachers. Ginni dove into many insights and explored the depth of Montessori's **Sensorial Materials**. Thinking about the materials' order and precision that support the development of children's scientific minds as they distinguish between subtle differences and begin to sequence and label them, their clues for making sense of all the impressions children collect from their early experiences in life, deepened my appreciation for these materials and presentations, and as always, for Montessori's gifts to us.

Now it is spring, at last. When I taught a Primary class and it was raining, I would walk slowly on the line or begin playing the bells softly as my Primary trainer had suggested that we sometimes do. If you are a teacher, I encourage you to play some Bach quietly during lunch and talk about it. Bring botanical specimens into the room and label them with the children, then go outside to look for them on another day. Bring a toad, an insect, or a salamander in for a day to observe and release it afterwards. And walk outside to talk about the smells, the sights and the sounds, and help the children name the sensations they are discovering. Spring might be a time for you to try something new and to explore.

When I was teaching Primary, a little boy with thick glasses was the first one to come into the room in the morning; he shook my hand and we said hello, then he stood by the large glass window to remove his coat. I was standing further back in the room, listening to the classical music I had playing softly and feeling a little down, as it was the dreariest day you can imagine: cold, wet, dark, grey... again. As we stood looking out, he said quietly with awe, "My, what a beautiful day." I'll never forget it! In a child's mind, there is never a day that isn't beautiful. Enjoy!

## The Newsstand

If you aren't familiar with Dr. Angeline Lillard's 2017 groundbreaking study, *Montessori Preschool Elevates and equalizes Child Outcomes: A Longitudinal Study*, I highly recommend referring to it. This is an excellent piece of news promoting the benefits of Montessori, especially in public schools.

Print out a short piece describing the study and hand it out to parents and anyone you work with.

*Shunned and Admired: Montessori, Self-Determination, and a Case for Radical School Reform*

A new article by Dr. Angeline Lillard, just released this week! An excellent discussion of Montessori education.

## Insights from Maria

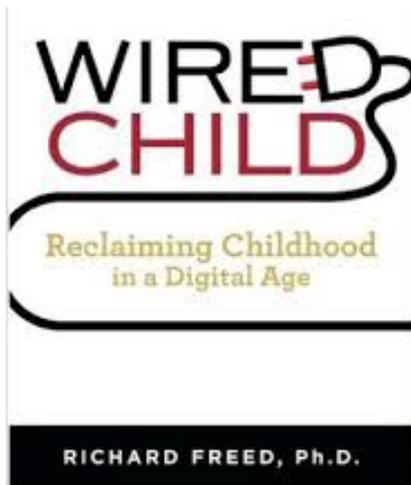
If you've never read ***Education and Peace***, I encourage you to, it is fantastic! David Kahn led us trainees in discussions about this book in the Adolescent Orientation at Beacon Academy last summer, and I realized I had always overlooked a very rich resource. Try Chapters Three, Seven and Eleven – they are packed with quotable lines about education as an aid to life and are full of inspiration for why we are doing what we're doing.

Dr. Montessori writes,

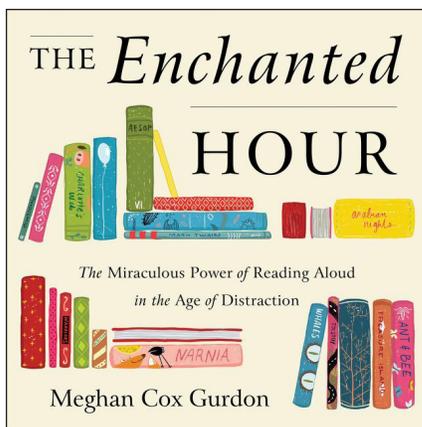
*"Education must take advantage of the value of the hidden instincts that guide man as he builds his own life."*

- p. 41, Kalakshetra Press

# Food for Thought



*Wired Child, Reclaiming Childhood in a Digital Age*, by Richard Freed, PhD., is a book we used for a book discussion with parents last fall that helped us to dig into the issues for children growing up with overdoses of screen time. (And honestly, most doses are overdoses to the sensitive developing minds of children!) Parents cannot make educated decisions without having access to the best data, and this book offers just that. It gives educators a neutral discussion platform for finding out how parents are feeling and struggling around this issue. Of all the many books I've read about screens and children, this one was perhaps the very best.



*The Enchanted Hour, The Miraculous Power of Reading Aloud in the Age of Distraction*, by Meghan Cox Gurdon, is a delightful new book that solidifies what you may have suspected about the importance of reading out loud to children of all ages. At our school, we are using this book for a seasonal book discussion with our parents, and also for our book discussion as teachers. It makes us all want to get back to reading more, just in time for summer!

## Events

**NAMTA conferences:** If you haven't attended a North American Montessori Teacher's Association Conference, this would be a good time to! These conferences are open to everyone, and they provide excellent speakers on various topics we can all learn from.

**NCMPS courses:** Another great resource for schools is the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector. As a school leader, I attended one of their training workshops last spring thinking I was going to learn more about public Montessori. But I became so intrigued by the fantastic ideas and techniques I could bring back to my private Montessori school, too! I found the format and conversations to be eye-opening and inspiring.