



FOR MONTESSORI SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

An excerpt from *Perspectives on Montessori:
Indigenous Inquiry, Teachers, Dialogue, and
Sustainability*

Central Research Question:

“What insights on implementing the Montessori educational concept can experienced practitioners offer to Montessori teachers?”

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The Braid

The braid illustrates how coresearchers ultimately responded to the central research question:

What insights on implementing the Montessori educational concept can experienced practitioners offer to Montessori teachers?

One strand (blue) represents Montessori becoming a way of life and one strand (green) the abilities effective Montessori teachers need to cultivate.

The ribbon (pink) interwoven through the two strands represents the support teachers need from teacher educators and school administrators on the path to becoming effective or able to fully implement the concept.

The website montessorispeaks.com was created to disseminate the research free of charge to the Montessori community at large.

You are encouraged to download and print the excerpts and use them in ways that cultivate dialogue. Downloads are formatted to be printed as a booklet by a printing service provider that can be stapled and distributed for a more pleasurable read.

Background

The main research question asked: “What insights on implementing the Montessori educational concept can experienced practitioners offer to Montessori teachers?” To explore the research question, the following two subquestions were asked to small groups of Montessori educators during six different dialogues:

1. What is the essence of Montessori?
2. How would you describe Montessori teachers who are able to implement the Montessori concept effectively?

The six dialogues occurred over a period of five months (July 2016 to December 2016), involved 20 experienced Montessori educators, and were held in five different locations—four in the continental United States, one in the Czech Republic. The participants (considered as coresearchers and elders) represent a collective 770 years of experience in Montessori, have worked with Montessori teachers in 30 countries, have experience in Montessori classrooms that cover all levels of instruction, and hold credentials or diplomas from either AMS (14) and/or AMI (9). Three of the 20 contributors are non-native English speakers. The insights of these elders add to the literature; the dialogues with the elders were held specifically to inform the Montessori community. For more information on the elders (including their names) see Chapter 4 of the research and for the limits of selecting only 20 participants, see **Number and accommodation**, p. 62 of the research.

The research involved gathering responses to the two dialogue questions and communicating them as a collective; direct passages cited from the dialogues are not attributed to

any one participant. The nature of dialogue is to open opportunities to share individual and collective consciousness in a spirit of discovery, free from fragmentation and judgment. Themes and patterns were gleaned from repeated, thoughtful, and manual review of the transcriptions. Fifteen of the coresearchers read and affirmed the analysis and findings.

The intent was not to distill nor ascribe more value to any particular insight. It seemed fitting to include what had been spoken in its essence because it could not be known what thoughts might become meaningful to the reader.

Last, this research intended to deepen understanding of effective teachers and does not profess to cover all aspects that might define and support effective Montessori teachers nor cover completely what the essence of Montessori involves.

The perspectives offered for Question 1 provided the philosophical base established by the coresearchers. Responses to Question 1 also revealed information relevant to the question that followed about teachers who are able to implement the concept effectively.

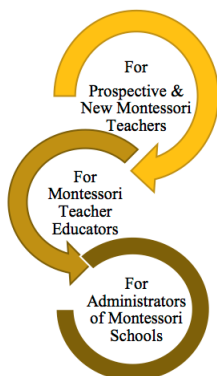
Summary of findings for Question 1: What is the essence of Montessori?

Coresearchers appeared to believe that Montessori essentially becomes a way of knowing, being, and doing that exhibits respect, peacefulness, and love and embraces the interrelatedness of everything. Montessori as a way of life appeared to mean having a viewpoint that values each child for their place in the universe, the importance of community, and learning environments that attend to developmental, physical, and psychological needs. The elders seemed to believe that for Montessori to become a way of life, most people undergo a transformation that leads to viewing the world with a deeper level of consciousness.

A full excerpt of Question 1 findings also is available.

Question 2: How would you describe teachers who are able to implement the Montessori concept effectively?

Data that addressed how effective Montessori teachers implement the Montessori concept became allocated into three groupings: prospective and new teachers, teacher educators, and school administrators.



Contributors' thoughts about how teacher educators and school administrators might support effective teachers appeared equally important as the insights provided for prospective and new teachers.

This excerpt represents the section For Montessori School Administrators. It is preceded by summaries of what coresearchers offered For Prospective and New Teachers and For Teacher Educators

Summary of findings For Prospective and New Teachers

Coresearchers seemed to determine that effective Montessori teachers are those who have trust in children, the Montessori process, and self. Effective teachers seem to cultivate observation skills that require mindfulness and enhance self-awareness so they can take those abilities and create a caring and emotionally supportive psychological place to learn as well as a physical environment that is safe and provides all the materials for learning that is developmentally appropriate for the children/adolescents. Contributors seemed to believe that teachers need to balance their drive for perfection with the ability to discern the less important aspects of the work, letting lesser things go. Finally, coresearchers described the importance of being diligent in developing verbal and written communication skills, including good record-keeping practices.

A full excerpt of Question 2 findings For Prospective and New Teachers also is available.

Summary of findings for Montessori Teacher Educators

The insights coresearchers offered for Montessori teacher educators addressed the importance of patiently giving adult learners time to process and unfold as learners themselves and the role inspiration plays in support of a teacher's development. Making the learning relevant to adults included being responsive to changing demographics of adult learners, maintaining current experience with children in the classroom, and openly seeking discussions with fellow educators to foster continual learning of effective instruction strategies.

Coresearchers seemed to believe in the importance of creating a sense of community among the cohorts to replicate the sense of community they want teachers to create in their classrooms. The importance of providing adult learners with clear and realistic expectations involves making acute judgments about which core philosophical basics to emphasize, raising the need to express oneself effectively in written and oral communications, and recognizing the demands of the job are challenging, especially in the first few years in the classroom.

Overall, coresearchers acknowledged that creating the psychological environment during the teacher preparation course that mirrors the student classroom psychological environment that teachers are tasked to create is optimal.

A full excerpt of Question 2 findings For Montessori Teacher Educators also is available.

The insights elders offered to school administrators proved similar to those for teacher educators in the need to create a school culture that reflects the desired culture created in each classroom. Because the relationship between teachers and administrators usually becomes more established than the relationship between teachers and teacher educators, however, the insights offered to administrators considered ways to sustain longer relationships.

Note: The recorded responses have been consolidated and relay numerous reflections from the transcriptions with select passages represented directly. Short passages taken directly from the transcripts are cited in quotation marks and are not ascribed to a particular elder. Longer direct passages are italicized and are not ascribed to a particular elder. Use of ellipses indicates the need either to reduce a long passage or to omit superfluous phrases or names. Brackets replace pronouns or clarify phrases a reader might not understand.

Insights for Montessori School

Administrators

School administrators are the people considered directors, principals, or heads of school who do the hiring and oversee the entire faculty for a school or the Montessori program that might be embedded within a larger school. Sixteen of the coresearchers had been or were school administrators.

School administrators often hire a prospective teacher, perhaps contingent upon the new hire enrolling in a Montessori teacher education course. As Montessori programs grow, especially in the public sector, school administrators are not always aware of the Montessori educational principles and concept. Whether hiring a prospective, new, or experienced teacher, school administrators have a vested interest in the success of each teacher. The success of a Montessori program, elders recognized, as in any educational program, is most often determined by the number of effective teachers.

Contributors acknowledged the importance for administrators to understand differences between the Montessori and conventional educational approaches. Several Montessori training centers have added courses for administrators because not all administrators for a Montessori school have a Montessori background. There could be a disconnect with the Montessori concept, coresearchers acknowledged, when an administrator does not understand the philosophy, and that disconnect could have long-term negative impacts. One elder explained,

I mean that's the whole reason we got the administrator's courses. We felt that we were doing a great job with working

with the teachers, but they were going back to environments that the administration wouldn't let them do that . . . wouldn't nourish them.

Coresearchers explained there exist obstacles beyond the control of a teacher and an administrator. State requirements, for instance, often must be met in public Montessori schools. If administrators do not recognize the challenge of navigating state requirements with Montessori principles, teachers could feel lost and unable to discern what they must do and how they need to function in the classroom. One contributor shared the importance of teachers “not being punished [by an administrator] for doing it a different way.”

An example of a challenge one group of elders offered recalled a practice known as QRIS (quality rating and improvement system) that many conventional education programs support in the United States for early-school-age students and is in direct opposition to nonverbal practices and respect for not interrupting a child's work that a Montessori teacher is expected to employ and honor. QRIS, for instance, an elder said,

requires teachers to put a thing around [their] neck [that] counts how many words [the teacher says]. Doesn't matter what the words are, but they count. And if you don't have enough words, you don't get checked off on that category. . . . Another one about interruption is that this [Montessori] teacher got marked off because she didn't announce, disrupt the whole class to tell them she was leaving the room to cut the paper. So she was supposed to say, 'I'm leaving the room now.'

The examples indicate tensions and misunderstandings that could arise between a teacher and an administrator. Elders

noted that an administrator unfamiliar with the philosophy behind Montessori practices might find it challenging to be supportive of their faculty just as the teachers might find the relationship with the administrator challenging, both of which could impact the quality and effectiveness of a school program.

The comments shared in this section for administrators were mixed in with other thoughts participants shared in the two research questions they had been asked. The findings presented in this section are insights coresearchers offered during the dialogues that might assist administrators in nourishing effective teachers and include how to (a) select the best teacher candidates, (b) support new and experienced faculty to be effective Montessori teachers, and (c) prepare themselves as administrators to be effective role models for their teachers. Figure 5.5 illustrates the areas that coresearchers revealed throughout the dialogues that pertain to the role administrators can play in cultivating effective Montessori teachers.



Figure 5.5. Coresearchers in the study on Montessori perspectives provided administrators with insights about (a) selecting effective teachers, (b) the importance of supporting teachers continuously, and (c) ways to prepare themselves as administrators in creating a culture that fosters Montessori teacher effectiveness.

The collective thoughts about administrators surfaced during the dialogues and reflected what coresearchers had learned over a period of many years in Montessori education. Their thoughts are shared for the purpose of providing insights that might prove helpful. A reminder that passages cited directly from the transcripts are not ascribed to a particular participant.

Selecting Teachers

Of the numerous challenges school administrators face, coresearchers considered that perhaps the greatest challenge arises when hiring teachers. Many times an administrator is hiring someone who already holds a Montessori diploma or credential. However, as one reminded, “You can go through Montessori training, you can be a certified Montessori teacher, but it doesn’t make you a great Montessori teacher.” One coresearcher, a head of school for many years, talked about the anxiety hiring can bring about:

Even the prepared environment, the [physical] prepared environment cannot overcome the adult’s weaknesses. It’s really a deficit that I think I have. I never am really sure when I am interviewing if I’ve been able to ascertain whether this person’s really going to be the right person for the classroom which just scares me every time I do it. So there’s a lot of exploration that I have to do.

Elders understood that many times, administrators must hire teachers who have not taken the requisite Montessori teacher preparation course. In those cases, the hiring school might pay for the teacher education program (or a portion of the tuition) and might ask for a two- to three-year commitment after the teacher has earned a credential or diploma. Coresearchers noted that when a school invests that kind of commitment in hiring a prospective teacher, the risks intensify beyond the normal angst of hiring someone who would be effective.

Coresearchers revealed insights about interviews they had held with prospective teachers who had become highly effective teachers. The perspectives came from disparate experiences, yet each situation disclosed practices that

generally might prove beneficial for administrators to follow. The suggestions involved spending more time conducting interviews, how to elicit indicators that applicants might be a good fit as a Montessori educator, what they look for in a candidate, and the role administrators need to take in explaining Montessori expectations.

Spending more time conducting interviews was explained as holding several sessions with each applicant. Some coresearchers acknowledged that while the tasks with which administrators are responsible are wide and numerous, the time taken to hold several interviews with a prospective teacher is warranted. One elder shared interactions that occurred with a person seeking an internship and the realization that the advantages gained from the multiple meetings with this intern also would be effective in the teacher selection process:

So we did spend more time, several sessions actually, and that was different. So I might want to take that away as a thought. We had a volume of criteria to cover . . . that was my first interview. There [were] certain documents that I had to interact with. Then we met with [the lead classroom] teacher, then we met a couple more times and [the applicant] was living out of town so it was more formal than usual. And in this case [the applicant] had somebody else saying they had expectations of [this intern] and of this school in terms of helping with [the intern's] growth. And in the course of that [I learned] more detail about [the applicant's] experience. We had more time for you know conversation [and that proved very helpful].

Allowing for several interview sessions could provide more opportunities to ask questions that reveal an applicant's

outlook on life in general. One coresearcher found it revealing to ask a candidate to “talk about someone who has struck a spark in you.” Another elder shared,

I always ask potential employees about their early school life, fondest memories, best memory of a family vacation or time together, a favorite grandmother story, and of course, what they like doing best and . . . what was the funniest things that might ever have happened to them. [I want to know if they] still enjoy playing the games they played as a child and having fun in some of the same ways they did many years before. Those descriptions of that joy for life fit how children move through their lives. I want my staff in sync with the children and their joy . . . and the joyful mentoring in our program has helped develop many fine, empowered, actualized teachers which allows them to stay happy in their work, myself included.

This coresearcher explained an example of one applicant who “shined as she talked about her life encounters. Her face was animated . . . she was able to well articulate her story.” The elder continued, “She walked in the door gifted, whole, humble, able to make good choices and evolved into an amazing inspiring teacher and Montessorian.” Another described characteristics that seem to signal a candidate is not a good fit as a Montessori teacher: “They don’t trust the children or they can’t, you know, and they cannot communicate with the adults.” One contributor spoke, as did several others, by cautioning,

If [the teacher applicants] have to have the answers, if it's A plus B equals C for them and they cannot be comfortable with anything other than, in other words they can't be comfortable

in the gray. I think the best Montessori teachers live in the gray.

A few coresearchers reflected on how important they believe it is for administrators to meet certain responsibilities in the interviewing process. One elder explained, “We need to tell them what we expect.” Expectations included “simple things like don’t ever leave the children alone in the room, even to step out and get something and go back in . . . you are in *loco parentis* and you have to always have the children in your sight.” Another added the importance of conveying “the patterns and the routines and always knowing what is supposed to happen at school with the administration and the schedules, the parents, all of the above.” The elder continued,

I think knowing how to do the proper sharing of your organization and your philosophy and your outlook on what a team looks like and what the expectations are . . . if adults don’t know what’s expected of them then I guess I would have to say I’ve had many lessons on gee I guess I should have told you that. So it really depends on the preparation of the administration how well they can support you in your pathway to success.

For administrators, the coresearchers believed, the interview process is critical in distinguishing adults who are (or could become) able to implement the Montessori paradigm for educating students. During the hiring process, conveying the individual school’s expectations as well as the adherence to the Montessori philosophy that is expected remains incumbent upon the administrator.

Supporting Teachers

The insights elders offered to administrators included what to consider for teachers who are in the process of taking the teacher preparation course, teachers who have just completed the preparation course, and tips for sustaining an entire faculty. The thoughts coresearchers offered included ways of bridging relationships with parents and growing the well-being of the whole school community.

Supporting New Teachers

A teacher is considered new when the teacher is undertaking the training or has been in the classroom for less than five years after completing the teacher preparation course. One contributor clarified that being considered new in Montessori meant “not just for one year but you know multiple years to grow in their craft . . . it usually takes five years, the sixth year [is when a new teacher] has arrived.”

Speaking about the responsibilities new teachers face, one reminded,

Not only do you have to be, do your Montessori practices and parent communication and all of those things, you often have to follow all of these rules that are set forth by the state. And so it's really, it's so, it's a big interconnected web. It's a scaffolding and a spiral, and it goes up and down and back and forth.

That contributor concluded, “So it's a lot to assimilate at one given time. I feel very lucky that I had a lot of people to surround me that truly had the essence, that kept that ember alive and helped it to grow [when I first started teaching].”

One elder considered the difficulties in expecting an administrator to provide support for new teachers:

What listening to you is bringing up for me is that to help teachers get it they really need to have the support of the administration, an active administration, and involvement. Which it's really hard to do that because the, all of the other things that are on your plate as an administrator.

Those comments were followed by another contributor who offered cautionary advice:

However, the weak link is still I think from the administration to that new teacher or that adult learner entering, because [the new teachers] don't know what they don't know, they don't know the questions to ask until they get into a crisis. And then once you're in a crisis there's emotions.

In another dialogue, one of several participants who had been both teacher educator and school administrator reflected,

[Administrators can] assume that because [the teachers] were trained they know what to do now, [yet new teachers] have the hardest time. And they need the kind of the most support in setting themselves free to be able to make mistakes and be open to somebody who can support them. So I think that first, that kind of embryonic year is really key in my experience. Because if they don't trust the process and trust themselves some of them just leave and they don't really give a time for the method. Or they right away will go astray and start doing things that they fall back on. Worksheets, you know, things like that. So I think that there is even the most inspired, transformed adult there's a very fragile period I think, a vulnerable period, at least one to three years and that's when I think that when they have really experienced people with great insights they can get the kind of support that they need.

Understanding the demands administrators face and realizing the vested interest administration has in developing new teachers, coresearchers offered suggestions for how administrators might cultivate a new teacher's desired performance. The elders believed it is important for administrators to understand what the training involves, bridge communications among those working with a teacher in training, recognize the fragility of teachers in the first few years, let new teachers make mistakes, and remain as supportive and encouraging as possible.

Coresearchers emphasized that adults taking the teacher education course need support from a school's administration. The administrator-teacher relationship benefits when the administrator understands what the teacher education course requires and when there is open communication between "the field consultant, the school administrator, and [even] the classroom lead teacher." One elder who teaches adult learners/teachers disclosed,

And it was the feedback that I got from all three administrators [who] emailed and said I had no idea that [the teacher training] was so detailed, so intensive . . . every part of the adult learner's experience is guided and protected and nurtured, but also they're held accountable. So [the new teacher's] feet are put to the fire to do the things that are on their assignments and to put it into practice in their classroom. So if they're being thwarted in any way then the field consultant [can work with] the administrator [to] help softly get everyone onto the same track.

As elders reiterated the vital role administrators play in supporting new teachers, one bemoaned the fact that some

new teachers “go to these one-classroom schools, they don’t really have a head of school, and it can be really isolating.”

Contributors elaborated upon the need for administrators to honor the fundamentals in the Montessori concept and allow new teachers to make mistakes:

I think the development of a teacher is pretty much like a development of the children. Just like in the classroom you’re not gonna go and correct them before they make the mistake . . . It’s the same with a teacher, you know the way we learn and I speak from experience is I have to make some choices and to live with the consequences of those choices and say oh that worked great, or yeah no I might want to make a different choice because this is really not working for everybody.

I think there’s a lot more value in your experience as a teacher when you make changes because you know you need to make them, and not because somebody came to your classroom and told you that.

Another coresearcher commented,

[Administrators need to] give people a couple of years to fall on their face and pick themselves up without too much intervention. I don’t ever wanna eliminate the idea of help, but when you’re a brand new teacher you’re loaded with stuff, you understand that twenty percent of what you learn in training you remember. So you don’t know it all but you know there’s a lot, and you’ve just gotta be given a little time to work out how you’re gonna do this work without too many other personalities coming in and shepherding you this way or counseling you that way. Unless you’re disastrous, and then obviously you need help or you’re falling apart and whatever. But I think there’s some wisdom in that for the after part of

training . . . I certainly think we need a more vigorous support system for after training.

Coresearchers described ways that administrators could effectively encourage new teachers. One contributor shared an exchange she had had with one new teacher, reminding the teacher of the larger context of the teacher's work:

What I told her is that you know first of all you have to be kind to yourself. You're comparing yourself to teachers who have been teaching for seven, 10 years, who have classrooms who have already that Montessori culture that we talked about established, and it's not fair, you know, for you to compare yourself to them.

The elder continued by sharing a way of redirecting the new teacher to consider her own strengths:

So I told her, I want you to think about what is your gift? Nobody, I don't know of any one teacher that can do it all. Each of us has a gift as a person and as teachers, and you need to learn to identify that gift. And that's the one you nurture. I'm not saying you should exclude growth but this is the one thing that you have that nobody else can give to the children. So it is your responsibility, it is your duty to the children to share that gift with them because that is the one thing that you can be passionate about . . . It just comes natural to you, and children pick up on that. So maybe down the road they'll have another teacher that has another gift, and that will bring balance to their lives. But to you this is it, and especially as a new teacher, you know maybe once you become seasoned you'll find that oh I have this other gift too . . . So you know I think for new teachers . . . it's, I think it would have been helpful to me when I was a new teacher for somebody to ask me to reflect on what is your gift, rather than you know trying to do everything.

Other contributors reflected that as an administrator, it is important to guide teachers in understanding the reason (and research) behind each interaction with students and the work given to students. Administrators could encourage new teachers to step back and observe the classroom when children are not performing as intended, supporting a teacher to determine what the classroom needs. One contributor recalled a conversation held with a new teacher:

Know why you're doing it. You know, so that if anybody has a question about why you're sitting there not doing anything about this thing, you tell them, I am not sure what is driving this child to do this. I don't wanna react to it. I wanna be helpful. And before I can be that I need to know what it is. So . . . I'm gonna sit here and observe until I feel satisfied or something else calls me off my seat.

Another, speaking about the crucial role of an administrator, concluded,

Having a supervisor that can tell you it's okay to make mistakes. It's okay not to know what to do, you know. It's okay to be wherever you are at that moment and that's how you keep people inspired . . . so I think that's [the] support we're talking . . . what practices keep people, keep teachers inspired and feeling safe, feeling like they can work, you can develop just like the children. And I think it's that type of support.

Support All Teachers

Coresearchers reminded of the need for administrators to be supportive of all teachers, new and experienced ones, for the health of the entire school because, as one elder said, “an effective school is a school that has sustained its faculty over a longer period of time . . . You know the schools that have

teachers that come and go every year, they never quite gel.” Another coresearcher exclaimed, “The most impactful way to establish a strong Montessori program involves supporting those at the core of implementing the concept—the teacher.” Another referenced the importance of administrators supporting all teachers:

One of my takeaways is the idea that our teachers in the field have such a burden when you think of the responsibilities that they have to their classroom community, not just the children but the whole community. And the support that is available to them is vital to their thriving, because we want them to flourish and thrive and grow. And when they feel like they are supported and they are thriving then it comes right back to their director, their support.

Elders believed the best way for administrators to support their faculty is to consider the faculty as they (administrators) want teachers to consider the students. They suggested that administrators need to create opportunities for faculty collaboration, hold meaningful faculty meetings, establish regular team level meetings, use creative exercises in teacher evaluations, encourage teachers, and utilize strategies that keep teachers inspired.

Some suggestions elders made for practices administrators might implement included administrators cultivating the faculty’s desire for lifelong learning and creating opportunities for faculty collaboration. Collaborating with faculty on issues could be supportive for the entire school’s well-being:

[Administrators want to give] time for people to collaborate in their own schools, because there’s so much talent and you know just being together and looking together and using

different points of view is an important piece . . . just to keep learning.

Several coresearchers addressed the importance of working together with the faculty to build relationships with parents. They stated that often teachers find dealing with parents the most difficult part of the job. One remarked,

Probably though one of the fears that new teachers have in Montessori or any teachers is talking with the parents. You know, because as a Montessori teacher you're learning all of these different subject areas, you're learning you know how to manage a classroom, how children can communicate, and then you know parents, that's like a whole other thing.

For those teachers, administrators might be proactive in talking about parents with their faculty and in recognizing the critical role parents play in the education of the child and the dilemma in how to nurture relationships with the parents:

Involving [parents] in different ways is critical. So many teachers have even said I love teaching, if it only weren't for the parents, forgetting what you said earlier that if it weren't for the parents we wouldn't be teaching . . . we oftentimes forget how important it is for the parents to truly understand what we're doing.

Another coresearcher continued,

[Parents are] such a vital part of [the child's education] and how to bring them in in a way that they don't feel like it's just another meeting that they have to go to, but how can we really engage them so they can be inspired to be able to have that same feeling at home and bring in those kinds of attitudes. And how to be able to create their own community in the home and

help the child have that same sense of I can do it . . . The hardest part of our task is educating the parent . . . parents are also under so much stress these days, so there's the parent that wants to do too much, and the parent that is so busy that they can't do much of anything, but I think we succeed because of the overall abiding truth of the love of the child and our process of eventually getting that across. And once that mountain is climbed then the parent is doing an aha.

One elder offered a practice that has proven to be most beneficial for parents, students, and teachers, though coresearchers qualified that the practice works when a faculty consists of more experienced teachers:

In order for parents to really be part of the movement to change education and to demand that better education, first they need to see what a good education looks like, right? So how do we do that? Come in the classroom. This is not something you do in parent education night or you know in the Saturday picnic . . . [parents need to] see the children work and see when things fall apart and how they get put back together. What do you do when a child is disrespectful, when they don't wanna work, because we can't sit here and tell the world that in a Montessori classroom everything goes perfect all the time . . . it doesn't, so what do you do when it doesn't? I had an open-door policy. Not only that every time we had the Great Lessons, you know, in lower elementary, parents were invited. I wanted them there for the lesson, I wanted them there for the discussion after the lesson, you know.

The elder continued by describing other ways of bringing parents into the classroom effectively and the benefits it might bring for the students, with the same caveat that a

teacher has to be experienced enough to feel comfortable following the suggestion:

I had a bunch of helicopter moms that they just wanted to know, [so I thought] if you're going to be in the classroom just like the children you need some meaningful work. And this is the kind of work I need you to do, and this is how you do it . . . they were coaching children with multiplication tables, or helping people that needed one-on-one reading or whatever, but there was a structure for how to do it . . . They could come in and out, [but] they had got enough training, you know a crash course on this is the way you come in, this is where you leave your things, this is your spot. This is where you sit. You don't move, the children come to you. And the children respond to that . . . When they see their parents in their classroom working side by side with the teachers, not just you know I'm here to see what you're doing . . . I'm here to do, just like you do.

The same contributor concluded with these remarks that revealed how parents are part of the prepared environment and should be included in school practices as much as possible:

Parents are an essential part of classroom culture, an essential part of the prepared environment. The teacher's work [can be] a lot easier [when parents are there to support some of the children] and then there's that continuity in the learning experience for the child because parents pick up, they pick up the language that they hear in the classroom. How to redirect, how to encourage, how to point out things, and then that goes home. So it's so much better for the child to hear that all the adults are, you know, on the same page. So that's one strategy that worked in terms of creating a successful environment.

One elder offered an anecdote that administrators and teachers might find helpful in terms of recognizing the value of building relationships among students, parents, and teachers to the benefit of all, improving the entire school community:

I think often it's the child who teaches the parent . . . But [the parents] have to be open. I remember this one woman, always screaming at her little guy, and one day she came over and she said you know I notice that every time you talk to him you go over to him and you get down, and he seems to listen to you better. I think I should try that. And she did. And then this same child, we were doing Christmas gifts for families that couldn't afford many things, and he came home and said mom we've got to clean this place up just like it is at school before they come over. So [Maria] Montessori talks about that too in that first children's house; [parents] learn a lot from their children.

In two different dialogues, coresearchers discussed the value of an administrator establishing meaningful faculty meetings. The elders shared that they typically hold faculty meetings (or staff meetings, as some referred to meetings with teachers) every week or biweekly.

We were talking about staff meetings and how in many schools you know staff meetings are just to announce new administration practices or whatever. I made it a point when I had the opportunity to be head of school, I don't wanna have that kind of staff meeting. It's a very small school, it's isolated from the rest of the organization, so these teachers don't have the opportunity to hang out with other teachers. So we use at least three quarters of the staff meeting to talk about Montessori philosophy and how it applies to your classroom in

primary, to your classroom in toddler, to [interactions] with the parents.

Another participant/administrator spoke about the importance of fostering the relationship between lead teachers (those who are responsible for creating the prepared environment) and assistants (those who assist the lead teacher) and holding regular instructional level meetings:

We've been implementing required team meetings and then lead teacher team meetings, and I'm at every one of those. Because I learned that from one of my heads of school. And this year we started also having a meeting with the support staff. They would meet together and they would have their 15, 20 minutes, and then I would join them, and then we have an agenda because if it's not on the agenda you don't talk about it because you want to be prepared. And it's been very fruitful and it's very empowering. One of my lead teachers has said this is like the best system because I don't feel like I've dropped the ball. I get feedback from who's helping me and who's leading . . . you can sort of gauge the barometer of peacefulness and successfulness in the classroom from the person who is the support staff . . . And so that's been very revealing I think as far as the empowerment of the lead teacher.

As coresearchers discussed the effectiveness of teachers, the issue of teacher evaluations arose. One shared a practice that has proven to be inspiring for both the teachers and the administrator. Teachers were given a one-page adapted version of the Teacher Self-Efficacy Self-Observation survey, "in the manner of Albert Bandura," to complete. The survey covered instructional self-efficacy, behavior management self-efficacy, communication self-efficacy, efficacy to create a

positive school climate, and efficacy to enlist parental involvement. On the survey it was written, “Your ratings are for you only.” On the backside of the survey was a form for the teacher to decide on one strategy to use that would “improve your student/students’ learning.” During one week, the teacher recorded what s/he observed and what surprised her/him. The second week, the teacher was directed to continue the same strategy and record what was observed, then compare the observations made in week one and week two. After week two, the teacher sat down with this administrator to share the report. The elder explained,

[The teacher] can choose anything that they want to look at while working—focus is on a single idea . . . a very short time period, made it a very short time period on purpose because it’s really hard to do anything longer than two weeks. So the first week they came up with their own idea, their own thing they want to think about, and this [exercise] has been very moving for me just to listen to them. And you know there’s no assessment or anything. I’m not doing any assessing of it. It’s just the requirement is you think about your practice . . . It’s really all about practice in the classroom, not about personal goals or you know I need to go to the gym three times a week. It’s really what do you want to do in your classroom . . . it’s classroom oriented. And not any of them over the last three years has not been inspiring. I mean they’re excited because they get to choose it . . . it has been powerful for individuals.

Another contributor echoed the importance and need for administrators to foster teachers’ passion about Montessori:

How difficult it is to be able to say to the teachers all of those other pressure things, try to just do them without realizing that’s not who you are or what you wanna do. And encourage

them, let's say once they go in that door it's another universe we [administrators] don't have. I'm so sorry that all of these papers and these tests and this obsession has happened because if [teachers] can keep the spirit alive of what they're trying to do . . . it is difficult, and thank goodness there are those who can do it, who can continue with the spirit. So I think knowing that and just supporting [the teachers] inspirationally is very, very helpful.

Examples of how administrators could be supportive and inspirational were addressed and included ways of approaching problem-solving with teachers. As elders noted, "Sometimes if you can fix it on a daily basis it doesn't get to be a big thing." Another coresearcher shared,

I think teachers have the inspiration when there's something that's not working, they feel that they have the energy to try to fix it. And in a prepared environment sometimes the fix is the environment . . . And if [the teachers] get to be able to reach out to colleagues or the administration to have someone outside if you are stuck to kind of help you take the next step, whichever direction that may be . . . They have to make the final decision, but if they don't have enough material or observations or perspective, the multiple perspectives is what I think helps them go oh yeah I forgot.

One elder continued by offering insight and coaching strategies that have proved useful in supporting teachers who have problem situations in the classroom that need to be addressed:

There's [use of] the open-ended questions . . . Do you have any ideas? What do you see? How do you deal with this? Those kind of collaborative dialogues where when they're asking for help that's not can you just give me a solution . . . it really isn't

helpful if you just give them a solution. . . . It is easy [to just want to give them a solution] . . . But then it falls back on you if it doesn't work. So you know . . . one of the many things I learned was [asking] what would you think about trying this? . . . What do you think would happen? So always giving it back to them . . . maybe giving them some pathways to choose so it's their decision and then having them come back to give you feedback about the outcome so that it is very open-ended, and the result is truly just in their observation of how successful it was in resolving whatever the issue is, whether it's with a child or a parent or just the environment. Like you said, just turning a shelf or adding new plants or whatever it may be that turns wherever the trajectory of the situation is that's causing the difficulty. It just, it changes it. And you don't know if it's going to be the best one until it gets an action, and then you can change directions again if needed.

Supporting teachers seemed to mean that administrators should follow a variety of strategies that would signal support for their teachers and staff. The strategies coresearchers offered involved being sensitive to individual teacher needs, building a school culture where teachers feel empowered and respected to grow as learners and implementers themselves.

Preparing Self as an Administrator

Elders discussed the demands of an administrator's job and the need for administrators to take care of themselves just as teachers need to do the same. Administrators have responsibilities that include the welfare of the children, the well-being and effectiveness of each teacher, smooth facility operations, financial integrity, and maintaining trust, rapport, and positive relationships with the parents.

Being prepared included taking care of self by finding joy in their work and establishing clear boundaries as a professional. Coresearchers implied that being a role model for teachers, tantamount to being the kind of role model administrators want teachers to be for the students, is one reason why administrators should actively strive to prepare themselves. One elder who teaches administrators shared some thoughts:

If I could give one gift to these administrators what would it be? And I thought just find at least one or two things every week to enjoy. And just enjoy it and let everybody see you enjoying it. Because, you know, that's the outcome [you want to show your teachers and staff].

In another dialogue, contributors spoke to the demands on an administrator and how administrators might be counseled (the separation of comments reveals different speakers):

We haven't mentioned mindfulness but that's truly what we're talking about here is being present, putting down the cell phone you know and thinking about this and just being. And maybe it's just being and watching, maybe that's all you need to do, but that's the observation. You know that's where the

seeds grow and go to the next place or to celebrate what's happening. Because if we're always busy then we don't get that joy, and I think our whole life right now is so sped up and so many expectations that it's a real art to learn how to be present, and I think that's a part of what we need to help teachers learn how to do.

Being in a frenzy is a choice. I mean we don't have to be crazy busy unless we choose to be crazy busy, and I think people think they have to be overwhelmed or have to do that. I mean this whole thing about you know people are addicted to checking their cell phones. Not necessarily even reading them but the constant need to check them. Well who's telling you you have to check every five minutes? Yourself.

You used to go away and go home and check your messages maybe.

And the administrators, we were talking about that and some of them made some really clear distinctions, but the fact that there was like three ahas the other day because oh I don't need to check my phone at night, you know, because I kept saying if you answer it you'll get another one at night. If you don't answer and doing it in the morning then you'll get one in the morning but you won't get another one at night. You know, so you can choose to answer, you can answer and not send it too. But you know if you feed that then you know then you're gonna get another one back.

Coresearchers suggested it is imperative that Montessori school administrators either have a Montessori credential and experience as a Montessori teacher or take a Montessori administrator course to familiarize themselves with the Montessori concept. A significant obstacle for newly credentialed teachers and even seasoned teachers could

reside within the school culture and expectations. It is crucial for administrators to understand and support the Montessori concept if the school is to have a successful Montessori program. Elders believed that being a strong advocate for and protector of the Montessori concept defines much of what being prepared as an administrator entails.

Demonstrating the resolve to support the Montessori concept might inspire not only the administrator, but the teachers, staff, and parents. One elder provided an example that involved initial discussions with prospective parents:

I say to the parents, if you're uncomfortable with the fact that we're really looking at the child as a spiritual being maybe this isn't where you belong . . . this is who we are, this is Montessori. If you're not comfortable with that you need to make that decision now before you get involved in this.

One coresearcher shared an incident that arose for the administrator and teachers in a public Montessori school:

One time the superintendent said you have to do this and this and this, and we called him in and we said you're making us schizophrenic. We can't do that. We're not a charter, an alternative, so we still had to follow the guidelines. And we said you have to either let us do it, it was a particular math program, or we'll have to take that sign down. We had to be able to stay true to what that sign said, we're a Montessori school.

Another contributor raised the challenge some administrators face in maintaining classes grouped developmentally. Several schools, it was noted, felt pressure to include sixth graders in the adolescent program, for instance, or place 5-year-olds in a separate class. Understanding the planes of development and how those

planes impact the learning environment is crucial. One elder elaborated,

And I think having the multiage groupings really helps with all of that. I mean I can't imagine even being able to have a learning community without having the different ages. You know, for children, adults, teachers, any of us. So that's what, you know once the traditions and the community is set, that's what keeps it going. And when you were talking about the Bead frame, I remember a little boy watching another little boy doing the Bead frame, and he said I can see myself doing that in another year or two . . . [the children] look forward to it . . . So taking those sixth graders out does them a great, great disservice . . . Or taking the kindergarteners out. You just lost your leaders . . . and their opportunity to help and learn how to be helpful. They teach it, teach it, give back . . . and Covey says the only way to know if you know something is being able to teach it.

One contributor shared a frustration faced as a teacher educator that pertains to a particular school, the school's administrator, and the administrator's superiors. This elder (a teacher educator and a longtime school administrator) was highlighting the role of administrators and need for resolve and commitment to children. The elder began:

I have such a frustration, as we all do I'm sure, that people just don't understand how children learn. And how do we make that clear? Whether it's Montessori or anything else you wanna name it, what is the process of really reaching the child?

The contributor continued by explaining an incident that occurred with one prospective teacher's practicum situation,

which ultimately involved administrators at high levels in this particular public school district:

An example is that we had [a] practicum site here in inner city where these kids have parents in jail, need to sit on somebody's lap, somebody to read with them, somebody to be with them, and they weren't doing well on the standardized tests in December. So in January they mix up in the middle of the year, the Montessori program and the non-Montessori program, and each child got a math teacher for half a day and a language teacher half a day. Perhaps not even the Montessori teacher they were with. And they drilled them, a half a day in language, a half a day in math. So I took away the practicum site of the teachers and the administrator, which of course then I got called in. And here I mean I got the top two people right underneath the superintendent, and I said to them. . . first of all it doesn't meet the practicum agreement at all. It's not multiage, it's not materials, there's nothing. But beyond that it's not good for any child whatever you call it. And in the end they agreed with me but it was their directive, and I finally said to them, you mean somebody in your position can't do what's best for children? And that's how I left them.

In response to the discussion about administrators understanding the Montessori concept and having the resolve to create a sound, integral program, one elder shared a testimonial from a former student who contacted this coresearcher years after he had graduated from the Montessori program. The former student, who had become a parent, wanted to enroll his children in a fully authentic Montessori program:

[This parent] said, 'Middle school is where I learned how to learn, learned how to work with people, and how I wanted to

live my life.' And [he] came back two weeks ago, he lives in [another city], has two children in a Montessori school in [that city]. And he was distressed that at the Montessori school they keep putting layer and layer on top of the Montessori, and calling it STEM [science, technology, engineering, mathematics] or calling it whatever the newest trend is. And he just wants pure Montessori for his children and [he asked], why are we having to do that?

I think what he saw and what he wanted for his own children, not all these buzz things that people are sometimes looking for to enhance Montessori [speaks to this issue we've been discussing].

Coresearchers believed “the faculty is [the administrator’s] classroom.” In describing what that means for administrators, elders discussed ways administrators might foster teacher effectiveness. Suggestions included taking time to get to know an applicant, looking for characteristics that signal a joy in learning, and articulating clear expectations to a candidate before hiring becomes finalized. In terms of support for teachers who already are part of the faculty, the importance of continually providing support and inspiration to new and experienced teachers was emphasized, viewed as imperative to establish a strong school program. Considering the demands and frustrations of an administrator’s position, elders expressed the value of an administrator’s continuous self-care to be prepared emotionally and in tune with the Montessori concept philosophically.

The entire chapter on findings ends with this passage:

In closing this chapter's presentation of the findings, I share one coresearcher's thoughts that seemed to offer sage insights to all three groups— prospective and new teachers, teacher educators, and school administrators:

Montessori described to us an educational philosophy and, in great detail, an educational practice. But describing Montessori as an educational approach only, which we almost always do, gives her short shrift. She described a path of human development from birth to maturity with the goal of living in an interdependent, peaceful world. This is the vision that excites our teachers, but also sets impossibly high standards for performance. Teachers I have worked with who achieved the highest realization of Montessori teaching combined great technical proficiency always undergirded by a strong understanding of the needs and tendencies and the psychological characteristics, all wrapped in a steely pragmatism toward the needs of the children before them. The finest teachers never fully implement Dr. Montessori's philosophy. This is not a pessimistic statement or disparaging in any way of the extraordinary efforts our teachers make every day. But we tend to cling to abstractions and miss the wonder of the grainy, messy delightful complexity always present right in front of us. The best teachers stay clear-eyed, in the moment, and deeply rooted in universal principles of human development.