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Midwife to a Process: Montessori and Mediation

by Claire J. Salkowski

In 1932 Maria Montessori addressed the International Office of Education in Geneva and decried the lack of study given to the concept of peace as compared to the "science of war." She recognized the mystery of both war and peace and advocated for the systematic study of peace as a human phenomenon. Within the last half of this century the study and analysis of peace has been advanced by those in the interdisciplinary field known as Peace Studies. This systematic study of peace has only recently become an academic discipline and received the attention it deserves. Serious study and thorough research was begun after the horror and shock of World War I, and after the negative swell of opinion against the Vietnam War, it began to develop into a bonafide academic discipline. Peace Studies programs and courses can now be found in more than two hundred colleges and universities in the United States alone (Barash, 1991). Montessori would be pleased.

History of Conflict Resolution and Peace Education

During the 1960s and 1970s programs in conflict resolution came to the forefront and out of the social justice concerns of that time schools too began to develop their own programs in conflict resolution. Students were trained to help resolve disputes between their friends in what became known as peer mediation. Quakers, (The Society of Friends) who have always been considered one of the “peace churches,” have long supported the teaching of peacemaking and problem solving to young children. Much of their work began in the early 70s with CCRC (Children's Creative Response to Conflict). They now have branches and offers workshops and training to teachers and students all over the U.S. and around the world. This successful project grew out of the work of The Quaker Project on Community Conflict (QPCC) which was under the auspices of the New York Yearly Meeting of the Society of Friends and the Nonviolence and Children Program of the Friends Peace Committee in Philadelphia. It has now become an ongoing program in a growing number of schools and outlines activities and methods for giving children the necessary tools to become the peacemakers they are capable of becoming in a world wrought with increasing violence and destruction. These early pioneers in the field of peace education recognized the need to create a foundation for children to develop the ability to solve problems in peaceful ways by focusing on communication skills, identifying and understanding feelings and finding unique ways to resolve problems and prevent unnecessary conflicts. (Prutzman et al, 1988)

Interest in the field has mushroomed since that time and there are now conflict resolution programs for classrooms, peer mediation programs, and all-school mediation or conflict resolution programs all across the country. In 1984, educators, activists, and community mediators met at Amherst in Massachusetts and began the work of pulling together the diverse movements within the field of conflict resolution education. Out of their interest and commitment the National

Association for Mediation in Education (NAME) was formed as a support system and clearing house for conflict resolution programs in schools across the country. NAME has undergone several transitions since then and is now known as the Conflict Resolution Education Network (CREnet) under the auspices of the National Institute for Dispute Resolution (NIDR). The work of this group contributes widely to the understanding, evaluation and implementation of conflict resolution and peace education programs across the country. In 1997 NIDR estimated that there were over 8,500 school-based conflict resolution programs in the country's 86,000 public schools. On a more local level, in the state of Maryland for example, every public school system and many of the private schools have implemented a conflict resolution, peer helper, or peer mediation program. Training, curriculum, resources, evaluation, and support varies considerable, but never-the-less it all points to the critical mass that has amassed in the public mind in favor of learning to solve conflict in more peaceable ways and in equipping our children with the skills and attitudes to improve our communities across the land.

Montessorians too have returned to what many believe are the roots of Dr. Montessori's approach and her belief in the real purpose of education - to create peace in the world through the education of children. Since the beginning of the 90s every Montessori journal publication has regularly featured articles on peacemaking skills and activities, peace curriculums, and specific approaches for nurturing the spirit of the child and the teacher. In 1996, Aline's Wolf's book *Nurturing the Spirit*, illuminated many ideas for Montessorians and other teachers alike, to foster an atmosphere and attitude of peace in the classroom and whole school environment. Her emphasis on cultivating the inner spirit of the child reminds us of Montessori's deeply held belief in the spiritual nature of education and the care of the child beginning with the transformation and spiritual awakening of the teacher. With the creation of the Peace Academy in 1997 and the AMS position statement on holistic peace education, further recognition and emphasis has been given to realizing Montessori's dream for a better, more peaceful world.

However, as Montessorians we have much to learn from our compatriots in the wider fields of education, peace studies, conflict resolution, alternative dispute resolution, and mediation. We also have much to contribute.

Montessori is well known to us as a peace educator and was a recipient of the nomination for the Nobel Peace prize twice in her life. Her most important contribution in advancing the cause of peace however, may well be her emphasis of the spiritual nature of the child and the need to recognize, validate, and actively cultivate this side of the human being in a rapidly advancing technological world that places its stock in scientific empiricism, quantitative analysis and strictly observable measurement. As Montessori teachers and parents who understand the need to develop peace at a deep spiritual level, we have the opportunity to illuminate this perspective to our colleagues and educators in parallel fields, so that individuals might actively contribute to creating an outer peace in the world.

Montessori and the Role of the Teacher

Within the many diverse approaches to the central goal of creating a better world there is a core place of intersection. We are united in our understanding of the quality and essence of our role, which emanates from a common philosophy, and our belief in and respect for the powers of the fully functional human being. We collectively recognize the inexplicable connection and interdependence

of all things in the universe and we honor this truth in our work. Each individual is accorded an inestimable worth and valued for the contribution that he or she will make to the whole. Each individual has a function to achieve which serves the whole of the universe. Our goal is to assist the individual in actualizing their own goals and in discovering their special purpose in life so that they may also contribute their gifts to the whole while recognizing and honoring the gifts of others.

Montessori wrote extensively on the role of the teacher. In the early 1900's her vision was radical. She saw the teacher not as the all knowing benevolent authority who gave knowledge to the child, but rather as the guide and facilitator of the child's own process of discovery and learning. It was a position of deep respect, walking as it were beside the child, and sometimes behind, but rarely, if ever, in front. Recognizing that the child's becoming or development of self belongs not to the teacher, parent or anyone else, but unequivocally to the child, she taught us to view our role from a place of great humility.

In honoring and assisting the child however, knowing when to step in and when to get out of the way required great skill in observation, a wealth of knowledge about the development and developmental needs of the child, and much practice. Judgment is called for in assessing the needs of the child at any given moment and being able to respond with the appropriate match of activity, experience or interaction. All of this grows out of a deep abiding respect and belief in the awakening powers of the individual life we were attempting to serve. No easy task to be sure. We must know and examine our own biases, prejudices, and individual orientations. We must constantly search and examining the places where we have imposed our own will to the detriment of the child. There are times, she told us, when it is appropriate to "use our authority", but always with the goal of encouraging the child to master the lesson, and discover the inner truth for herself. Our aim is for the child to depend on us less and less. Our task is to become dispensable.

We must recognize that the child is always aiming toward independence and this we must support with all our actions and deeds if we are to truly love the child by nurturing his inner spirit and individual growth. Because we adopt an optimistic philosophy about the nature of the child and believe deeply in the inherent goodness and ultimate potential of the individual, it is natural for us to assume such a role. Most often we share that positive belief and undying hope for a better future with other peace educators and activists. When we examine the very nature of the role of teacher, parent, mediator, counselor, group facilitator or any other helping profession we can see that they are, in essence, the same.

Midwife to a Process

In his book, The Tao of Leadership, John Heider (1985) teaches the group leader to become aware and to respect the process and particular needs of the group, rather than impose his authority as leader. He invokes the image of the midwife as a metaphor for understanding one's role in facilitating groups. He write that we should: " Imagine that you are a midwife; you are assisting at someone else's birth. Do good without show or fuss. Facilitate what is happening rather than what you think ought to be happening. If you must take the lead, lead so that the mother is helped, yet still free and in charge. When the baby is born, the mother will rightly say: 'We did it ourselves!'"
(p.33)

What a beautiful analogy for understanding the special nature of our position, and the particular demands of our role when we seek to care for another in a

specialized way. Imagine if we were to approach the others in our lives as if we were the midwife to whatever their particular process happens to be at the moment. What a loving effect we would have upon them. How they would blossom under the light of our approach.

As "midwife" we would watch for and respect their individuality and autonomy. We would applaud their particular efforts, recognizing that they must always achieve the goal themselves. We would not impose, but rather empower by listening, observing, then generously encouraging and gently confronting when necessary. We would facilitate, aid, and enable the other to advance, to journey, to learn, and ultimately to grow. Our care and concern would be demonstrated with loving respect. We would, in essence, love. We would teach the way of peace.

As a parent, teacher, counselor, mediator, and group leader I have learned to recognize and value the special requirements and responsibilities of those particular roles. Although the content of these relationships is quite different, the real nature and quintessential essence of each role is identical. In each role, I am privileged to witness the growth of another. I stand in awe of their extraordinary efforts, supreme achievements and personal betterment. I recognize that I have received a gift.

As parent we are midwife to the child's developmental process, as teacher we witness and assist in the learning process. Mediators facilitate a problem solving process for the resolution of conflict and a good group leader is a catalyst for the group process. Counselors and therapists coach their clients through the process of inner healing and becoming whole. There is overlap in all of these and yet, always the task is to promote the achievements, the progress and learning of the other. Such is the work of love and the way of peace.

We must approach this task with no small measure of humility, for our own ego must be quieted in order to hear the call of the one we seek to assist. For the moment, as we seek to aid another, our own needs become secondary to the needs of the assisted. We are in their service, to do as they need to have done.

To serve another does not mean to sacrifice myself or to become a martyr. Serving others does not require the denial of self. On the contrary, it is essential that helpers also learn to help and nurture themselves, for only when my own cup is filled will I have something to give to others. Yet there is also a wonderful reciprocality that happens when we reach out beyond ourselves and seek to assist in the growth of another. In my giving I actually gain. In my seeking to understand, I become more understanding. Often I am awed and inspired by what I have glimpsed in the becoming and awakening of another. More often than not, I learn more than the learner. I become renewed. There is something truly miraculous in it all. This is the central lesson that we as Montessorians might share with others who also endeavor to create a more peaceful world. If we can extrapolate this lesson, employ this role, and generalize it to our interactions with all people, children and adults alike, we might well build the foundation of peace in all of our homes, communities, institutions, and nations.

History and Use of Mediation

As Montessorians we might enrich our work and expand our repertoire by learning to employ the process of mediation and to assume the specialized role of mediator within the wider spectrum of our work as peace educators, parents, and administrators. The word Mediation comes from the Latin root "mediare" which means to halve. In Chinese it means stepping between

two parties and solving their problem. For Western practitioners in the field of alternative dispute resolution, it is a process which allows the parties in conflict to find their own solutions to the problem with the help of a neutral third party. It is no doubt one of the oldest forms of conflict resolution and probably predates recorded history. There is definite evidence of its use in ancient times. During the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) community administrators actively encouraged the village elders (li-lao) to assist in solving petty disputes within the community (Cohen, in Wall, 1993).

Mediation is just one of a number of processes used to resolve conflict in what has become known as alternative dispute resolution (ADR). The ADR movement, which is related to the field of conflict resolution and peace studies, was founded for the purpose of finding new ways to avoid litigation. Since the late 60s, mediation has enjoyed great use in the ADR field and has received considerable attention among researchers and practitioners. Mediation has moved beyond its origin in labor management where it had been employed for quite some time and is now used to resolve disputes in such diverse areas as custody and divorce, family and community disputes, environmental concerns, health care, insurance, real estate, and governmental agencies, to name only a few. Based on a structured problem solving model , it is first cousin to negotiation, the process whereby individuals in conflict work collaboratively to find solutions that meet both their needs and wants. Mediation, like negotiation, is based on a philosophy that has been defined as the "win-win" approach. It embraces the principles of collaboration, cooperation and mutual respect. Mediation is used when the parties in conflict are unable to reach a solution by themselves and require the help of a neutral third party.

The use of mediation has flourished and has found its way into interpersonal, business, community and international spheres. It gained immense popularity about twenty-five years ago and has evolved into a full fledge movement with two fairly distinct branches that are rooted in two different philosophic perspectives. The approaches and models used in mediation may vary considerably depending on the whether it's use can be traced to the peace and social justice movement or the legal justice system.

Outcome based or settlement driven mediation, sometimes known as evaluative mediation or problem-solving mediation tends to focus heavily on producing a final agreement which satisfies the needs of both parties but is less concerned about strengthening the relationship between them, whereas transformative mediation is dedicated to enhancing the relationship between the parties and promoting their personal transformation through empowerment and recognition whether or not a final settlement or agreement is reached. Although the settlement driven form of mediation has become the dominant form of mediation in the movement today, there is a growing interest in promoting and practicing the use of mediation as a way to advance the higher values of human society and to provide opportunities for individual moral growth, achieving greater personal strength and acquiring the ability to become more compassionate. In transformative mediation the mediator's purpose is to help the parties move from a state of weakness and self absorption to strength and responsiveness. The mediator's task is to help remove the obstacles so that the parties can truly communicate and resolve the conflict. The parties are empowered when they experience a strengthened awareness of their own self worth and feel confident in their own ability to make decisions for themselves. They experience recognition when, having

achieved a degree of empowerment, they are able to honestly see the other person's perspective and respond to their needs in kind. That soulful connection is made when they achieve true understanding of the views of another and feel genuine empathy for their situation. This is the moment of transformation and the spirit of mediation.

The community model, which is sometimes paired closely with the transformative model, emphasizes the importance of finding the common interests and building consensus within the community. An important goal is to achieve equality and access for all community members in order to empower individuals to make their own decisions and reduce dependency on agencies and institutions, thus creating more social justice for all. In comparing the two styles of mediation, the former tends to be more directive while the later emphasizes a non directive approach (Bush and Folger, 1994).

School Mediation

School mediation grew out of the community mediation movement and the social justice concerns of the 60s and 70s. It embraces the values described in transformative mediation and seeks to present all parties with the opportunity to peacefully express conflict, to hear each other out, and to find mutually acceptable solutions to identified issues and concerns. The school's emphasis on the personal growth and development of its students makes the transformative and community model completely compatible and complimentary to our goals as educators.

At present, mediation is generally employed only by the students who are specially trained to assist their peers with resolving conflicts within the school community through peer mediation programs. Although in some instances, teachers too have used mediation as a way to remove barriers to communication and to assist their students in resolving conflicts that erupt in the classroom or school. In many schools teachers receive special training in conflict resolution and mediation in particular. This method and philosophy may then be infused into the curriculum where specific lessons are taught in a particular unit or in a more global way by incorporating it into all areas of the curriculum. However, the potential use of mediation in the school setting has certainly not been exhausted. In fact, I propose that we have barely begun to touch the surface of the potential that mediation has for enriching our whole school environment including teachers, school staff, administrators, students and their parents. If we are to embrace the call to peace we must recognize the power of this approach.

Research has shown the effectiveness of mediation and conflict resolution programs to create a safer and more peaceful atmosphere in the school environment, to reduce the number of disciplinary actions, to improve student academic performance and to enhance their social and emotional skill development. It encourages respect and cooperation and empowers students to solve their own problems in constructive and creative ways (Crawford and Bodine, 1997). There is however, a deeper dimension and sphere of influence that has only recently been recognized by those in the field of conflict resolution and peace education.

A number of people in the field have become inspired by the potential of conflict resolution and peace education for engendering spiritual growth and creating personal awakenings. Discussion about the spiritual side of the discipline has recently been noted by several authors in the field and in major professional publications. Baruch Bush and Joe Folger have advanced the transformative possibilities of mediation in their 1994 publication, *The Promise of*

Mediation, and the 1996 August/September volume of the Fourth R was dedicated exclusively to the spiritual aspects of teaching conflict resolution.

A thorough conflict resolution or peace education program encompasses such attitudes and values as nonviolence, respect for diversity, fairness, and self-determination. Students are encouraged to affirm themselves and others, to label and express their emotions and to identify them in others, to manage anger constructively, develop self-control and delay gratification, gain relaxation and meditation skills, acquire the ability to see another's perspective, listen and communicate effectively, critically problem solve, and employ the use of various conflict resolution strategies and techniques including negotiation and mediation (Salkowski, 1991). These skills and values are best supported within the context of true community which exemplifies an atmosphere of real peace and genuine harmony. In such a climate conflict is accepted as a fact of life and viewed as an opportunity for growth and a potential impetus for change. Within the community, a culture of peace is established as the norm and conflicts are resolved in creative and nonviolent ways (Salkowski, 1994).

The concept of peace must be understood in both an inner and outer dimension, recognizing the interdependence and connection between all living things. It is active rather than passive and implies social justice for all and a responsibility for stewardship of the environment. These become the core components from which a curriculum can then be built.

The Process and Promise of Mediation

In the larger picture of conflict resolution and peace education, mediation is one small, but very powerful piece. Those of us who employ the particular use of mediation in the school or community setting generally adhere to three essential precepts.

First, mediation is a voluntary process. Parties can not be coerced into participating and must genuinely desire to resolve their conflicts. Working through conflict often takes enormous energy and personal commitment. It can be time consuming and emotionally draining. Mediators and parties have to be willing to submit themselves to the rigors of the process if it is to work effectively. Even when disputants are ordered to mediation by the Court or the school official, any agreement that is reached must be completely voluntary. Should either participant find that mediation is not working for them, they are free to end the process.

Secondly, mediation is confidential. Peer mediators are trained to tell their peers that "What's said here, stays here." Often in the course of mediation deep underlying issues and old hurts are exposed. During the process parties will often express sentiments that they have never before spoken to the other party. Such willingness to be vulnerable can only happen in an atmosphere of safety and genuine respect. Confidentiality creates that safe place for each party. Participants are informed that all notes will be destroyed at the end of the session and that mediators can not be summoned before the Court. This puts both participants on an even footing and often contributes to a balancing of power. Neither of them then "uses" what the other has said against them.

Most importantly, mediators are neutral. Their function is not to assess blame, evaluate the effectiveness of either parties' claim, or makes judgments of any kind. The mediator is a facilitator and a guide who helps the participants reach a new personal awareness and assists them with finding a resolution that they believe is fair and satisfies the needs of all parties. They do not set the agenda or determine what should be

discussed or what the outcome should be. They rarely, if ever, make suggestions and they do not have the power to enforce agreements, propose a settlement or persuade the parties to accept an agreement. They do not function as judges, therapists, counselors, or attorneys.

The mediator does encourage, and model open, honest, and effective communication, ensures that all parties are heard, and seeks to promote or reestablish trust between them. They help the parties identify issues and problems, find common ground, and facilitate the process of creating solutions that will work for all. Mediators function as the bridge or conduit between the disputing parties, opening the way for them to really see each other's perspective, sometimes for the first time. The mediator's role in this form of mediation, is never to manipulate the process, not even for the purpose of effecting a reasonable solution.

Mediation is a collaborative process based on mutual respect where everyone's needs and views are honored. The power and responsibility to make decisions rest solely with the participants. Just as the problems belong to the parties, so do, and must, the solutions.

The actual model may vary slightly, and more often than not a co-mediation model is used with two mediators present, but generally there are four major stages in the mediation process. However, before the mediator(s) begin they must prepare the environment. Just as the Montessori teacher carefully considers the needs of the students in her preparation of the classroom, the mediator considers the special needs of the parties and the demands of their particular case in preparing the mediation room. The kind of dispute and the orientation of the parties is carefully considered and reviewed with the co-mediator. They discuss the division of their roles and decide how they will handle the work, any special situations that might arise, and how they will communicate with each other. The physical setting is carefully prepared to achieve a sense of balance and welcome. The size and shape of the table, placement of the chairs, preparation of forms, and assembly of any needed equipment is accomplished before the parties arrive. As always, the mediators want to ensure confidentiality for the participants and make them feel welcome and comfortable. The environment reflects neutrality by striving for absolute balance in all things. Mediators then greet the parties warmly and welcome them to the session.

In the INTRODUCTION stage, the mediators introduce themselves and begin to build to a feeling of trust. The goals of mediation are explained and participants are often asked about their expectations for the process. It is important to explain the philosophic frame work of mediation as a "win-win" approach where each party is respected and heard with the goal of resolving the issues and concerns while meeting everyone's needs. The three essential elements of mediation and the various stages of the process are explained. The voluntary nature of mediation, the insistence on confidentiality and the neutral role of the mediator must be made clear to the parties who are generally unfamiliar with the dynamics and philosophy of this approach. The stages of mediation are often mapped for the parties, explaining that each person will have a chance to tell their perspective and that the mediator(s) will assist them with clarifying and identifying the issues that need to be discussed in order to resolve the conflict. Once the issues are identified and are listed in a public way, the parties will be invited to brainstorm solutions. Options will then be
reviewed and negotiated between them until a mutually satisfactory agreement is reached. Finally the agreement will be put into writing and the participants sign their agreement once

they are sure that all issues have been resolved and that the solutions outlined are satisfactory and meet everyone's needs. Agreement on the guidelines or ground rules for the mediations are also established in this first stage and miscellaneous paperwork and housekeeping details are generally worked out at this point in the process.

In the second stage, sometimes called the STORY TELLING stage or FACT FINDING stage, each party is given uninterrupted time to explain their perspective and to tell why they have come to mediation and what they hope to gain from the process. The mediators listen and observe with painstaking care as each participant tells their story. They use reflective listening skills to briefly summarize and reflect back what they have understood from each party as to the underlying issues and problems that they would like to have resolved. In this important stage the mediators listen carefully and help the parties identify their feelings, issues, and values so that they can begin to find common ground in their search for solutions. The mediators use open-ended questions to illicit as much information as needed in order to assist each participant in feeling empowered to resolve their own problems and to remove whatever barriers may exist. Through the course of reframing the issues in positive, neutral, and mutual ways, the parties are able to begin the process of recognition as they come to truly understand and respect each other's perspective. Issues and true interests are lifted up, identified, and sorted out from positions so that real problem solving can begin.

In the third stage, or PROBLEM SOLVING stage, the parties are invited to brainstorm any and all solutions that may address the problem. At this point in the process it shifts to become future focused. In the previous stage the parties have often recounted the past and spoken earnestly about their feelings in the present. However, at this time it become important for them to be able to let go of what was, in order to envision the way they would like it to be. The mediators facilitate this process and ensure that all ideas are entertained, no matter how outrageous they may first seem. If people get stuck and they find themselves at an impasse, the mediators assist with various techniques for creating movement and helping the parties see possibilities "outside the box." Each option is then evaluate by the parties for realistic implementation and their own ability to commit and to follow through. The particular details are discussed and negotiated between the parties until all issues have been addressed and a specific solution is found for each part of the problem. The mediators help identify the places where both parties can find common ground and may be willing to agree. They assist with creating objective criteria for making any decisions, exploring the consequences of each option, reality checking and summarize what each person is willing to accept as the final agreement, or where the parties may agree to disagree. Final solutions must be acceptable to all parties and should meet their needs and particular goals. Mediators assure that the agreements are balanced and non-judgmental.

In the fourth and final stage, AGREEMENT WRITING or DECISION MAKING is reached when the parties have found and agreed to the solutions that will work for them and when they have come to a greater understanding of the other party's perspective. The details and specifics of the agreement are thoroughly summarized and recorded by the mediators. The agreement is carefully constructed to reflect the three essential elements of mediation. Neutrality is ensured by reframing any inflammatory or loaded language and names are often alternated as the agreement reflects who will do what, in order to create balance. Confidentiality is honored by never assessing blame or recording admissions of guilt for

one party over another. The voluntary nature of the agreement is confirmed by making sure that all parties are satisfied with what they have agreed to in the document. Mediators often restate the specifics of who is agreeing to what, where, when and how, so that everyone is clear about their part and what they have agreed to do. The final document is received and read by the parties who then sign the final document with the understanding that they have the responsibility to live by its terms and to share it with any other appropriate personnel. Sometimes a review process is established for dealing with future problems or for evaluating the success of the agreement. Mediators congratulate them on their work and destroy any notes.

The length of a session or the number of sessions required depends on the depth and complexity of the issues and the level of emotional intensity that the parties may bring to the process. In court settings or in other time restricted environments, the time allowed for each session and the number of sessions allowed is dictated by their specific restraints. In general, most sessions do not last longer than two to three hours and with students they can be completed in less than twenty minutes, depending on the issue and the age of the child.

The Spiritual Dimension of Mediation

In its simplest form, mediation can look like nothing more than mechanistic problem solving, but the essence of mediation, especially transformative mediation, ensures that a more spiritual and deeply personal experience is part of the mediation process. The parties in conflict who come to mediation are often blocked in their ability to see beyond their own perspective, hurts and fears. They are often complacently self-centered and ingrained in habits of bias, jealousy, anger, vengeance and pride. Their behavior has often spiraled down into more and more destructive patterns of action and non action which are hurtful to themselves and to the other party or parties. Conflict then, has becomes a destructive force which inhibits growth and personal transformation.

The mediator, as guide, and facilitator embraces the opportunity to act with quiet respect and thus helps remove the obstacles so that the parties are released from patterns of negativity and can reach new levels of positive functioning and inner growth. The experience and skill level of the mediator, coupled with the foundational respect for the individual party, is brought into full use at this point. Although mediation is clearly not therapy, it often has a therapeutic effect. New insights are experienced by the parties and inner growth takes place.

This transforming, spiritual response to conflict comes from viewing conflict as an opportunity to grow and be changed. Conflict is often a powerful challenge to our clouded perceptions and serves as a wake up call to change. Often it can motivate us to move in different, more positive directions in our relationships and inspire us to create more functional patterns of behavior. The spiritual nature of conflict manifests itself when we are transformed and begin to act in harmony and cooperation with others, when we are awakened to our own potential for growth, and when we recognize the potential, dignity and rightful respect of others. The spiritual dimension of conflict resolution moves us into a new place of personal transformation and regeneration. Often we are healed, there is new balance, and equilibrium is established. We honor the connection and interdependence between us all.

When the mediators recognizes the very special nature of their relationship with the parties and act as catalyst for change, they enable the participants to move from fear and despair to hope and optimism; from anger,

jealousy, and greed, to acceptance, empathy and generosity. The mediator as spiritual guide creates the environment and constructs the experience in which the parties are able to develop new perspectives on the meaning of life and come to understand their interconnected role in it. Creativity is unleashed and the parties come to understand their true needs and are willing to respond to the needs of the other. New ways of thinking and feeling are opened up and communication is enhanced. The relationship is improved and the parties strive toward cooperation and collaboration in resolving the issues between them. They are empowered to make their own decisions and creative solutions inevitable arise from such insight (Sidy, 1996).

As a mediator and a teacher, I have witnessed the vast transforming and growth enhancing power of this approach. In both the classroom and the mediation room, individuals have been deeply touched by the significant change that has come into their lives from being respected, empowered and recognized for the unique individuals that they are and the gifts that they bring to the world. They have discovered for themselves, the power that resides within and have moved in ever widening circles of understanding while achieving deep personal growth. When parties truly connect with one another their spirits are lifted and they become enriched.

Montessori and Mediation

In comparing the role of the mediator to Montessori's concept of the role of the teacher, one can immediately see that the same dynamics apply. Mediators, just as Montessori teachers, must prepare the environment, and observe carefully in order to assess the needs of the people they seek to serve. They must recognize and honor each person for where they are in their own development and personal growth. Their task is to make the match between the needs of the parties and the experience of mediation. Mediators facilitate and assist their parties through the process of mediation, but they never impose or try to do "it" for them. The mediation process belongs to the parties just as the learning process belongs to the student or the healing process belongs to the client in therapy. Parents can not make their children grow any more than teachers can make their students learn or mediators can force a resolution of conflict. The issues in mediation must be the disputants and can not be owned by the mediator, no more than the teacher can learn for the child or the therapist can be healed for her client. Mediators are midwives to the mediation process. Yet at a much deeper level, mediators, teachers, parents, and any who assume such a posture in their role to aid the individual have the potential to create the space for personal transformation and intense individual and spiritual growth. The quality of the relationship assumes a dimension far beyond what we generally assume. There is a depth of relationship and sacredness in our connection. We invest deeply in our inner most humanity. Thus is the work of the true peacemaker.

Mediation and its Many Uses in the Montessori School Setting

In the school setting we have much to learn about expanding our roles as facilitators for helping both children and adults do the work of learning for life. I have long advocated for the teacher to accept the mantle of mediator in the classroom, as role model, as bridge between students, and as trainer and mentor to the group (Salkowski, 1991 and 1994). It is yet one more way for the teacher to live out her role as the facilitator of children's growth. Acting as the mediator she can assist them in developing specific communication and problem solving skills

that will enhance their ability to cope with adversity, constructively manage conflict, and experience personal transformation while striving to attain additional spiritual insights. As in her role as teacher, the teacher - mediator seeks to honor each child and enhance their connectedness. She recognizes that her task is to let go of preconceived outcomes and allow the process to unfold for each child. She must listen carefully to their head and their heart, then play it back to them so that they can discover their own needs and insights as they work together toward resolving the problems between them. She must honor the process and believe in the children's ability to make it work for them. Ultimately she can train her students to mediate for each other as well.

There is tremendous power in peers mediating for peers. When students are able to act as mediators for each other, it is offers them important recognition and provides them with the skills to become peacemakers for themselves. It validates their inestimable worth and honors their capabilities as problem-solvers and guides for each other. Children can reach further and further levels of independence through the teacher's specific planning, careful preparation of the environment, modeling and purposeful instruction. Peer mediation programs must be carefully designed to address the needs and levels of each school or classroom community, but there is a wealth of literature and many trainings are available to assist schools with this function. Even three to six year olds can be trained in modified versions of mediation and minimally they can begin the work of effectively communicating their thoughts and feelings, needs and values.

The administrator who adopts such a view and becomes skilled in the practice may also act as a powerful catalyst for institutional change and new growth within the entire school community. No matter how loving and well organized a school community may be, disputes will inevitably arise between faculty and staff, parents and teachers, administrators and families as well as administrators and coworkers. Envision the day when every administrator and teacher is trained in the use of mediation as a creative and life affirming way to assist others in the resolution of their conflicts. Administrators would act as role models and spiritual leaders in helping their communities deal with conflict in positive and constructive ways. Through this kind of courageous leadership administrators would act as mentors offering a process of true healing to those in the painful grip of debilitating conflict. He would seek to aid each party in their ability to convert the negative forces of conflict into an opportunity for spiritual renewal and personal betterment. He would show the way toward restoring equilibrium and balance in the individual and social "ecosystems" of his school environment. He would achieve Montessori's ultimate aim- to educate for life and show the way of peace.

Visualize a future when parents will automatically respond to their children in kind. When parents achieve their own metamorphose and model for their children a way through conflict to peace, they create hope for the future. They would show their children a way to grow, to improve their own life and the lives of others, to build bridges and to construct a new world.

When the spiritual philosophy is paired with the pragmatic and practicality of mediation, it becomes yet one more tool for the peacemaker and one more gift that we are able to give. When our relationships are broadened to encompass a process which shows a life enhancing way through the thorny path of conflict, we ultimately strengthen our ability to become true peacemakers and spiritual guides in our roles as parents, teachers, administrators, and mediators. When we practice mediation rooted in spiritual awareness and add it to our

repertoire of skills, we offer another gift of peace as a true act of love.

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