



THE ESSENCE OF MONTESSORI

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 these 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 elders or coresearchers) 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.

Question 1: What is the essence of Montessori?

Dialogue participants knew that the subject of the research was to look closely at Montessori teachers and did not know the specific questions ahead of time. Question 1 was asked to reveal the philosophical foundation in the dialogue group upon which the query into teachers would follow. The prompt given for Question 1 was similar in each dialogue.

An example of the opening to Question 1 follows:

The first question is very broad and it can be considered a reflective thought provoking question that might warrant having told you before you came. And I feel confident that it's a question that each of you will be able to respond to just now hearing it. So for the first question, what I would ask is that you just talk about what you think the essence of Montessori is. And the goal of this is to get as many perspectives, so there are no wrong answers. Nor would our dialogue be the same if we were to do this tomorrow, and so we're collecting what comes out today. So following the dialogue guidelines we've reviewed, please think about what is the essence of Montessori.

Some elders integrated into the discussion what they referenced as essential Montessori *methods*. Montessori theory and methods are inextricably connected. Not surprisingly, similarities intertwined with one another and were apparent in the review of results. The dialogue characteristically flowed and comments appeared to evolve off one another, moving from focus on one aspect that prompted an integral relationship with another.

A depiction of what elders described as the essence of Montessori is shown in Figure 5.1. The figure illustrates values elders attributed to the Montessori educational concept that reflect how Montessori essentially becomes a way of life.



Figure 5.1. During Question 1, coresearchers in the study on Montessori perspectives cumulatively described that the essence of Montessori becomes a way of knowing, being, and doing—a way of life in the classroom and outside the classroom cultivated over years—that is full of respect and values the child, community, the Montessori prepared environment, interrelatedness, peacefulness, and love.

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.

Way of Life

This discussion about the essence of Montessori begins with how coresearchers determined that Montessori essentially becomes a way of life. Way of life refers to a way of thinking, being, and doing that incorporates Montessori principles inside and outside the classroom. One elder said, “[Montessori’s] just a natural way of doing and seeing things and receiving things.” Coresearchers described a way of life that demonstrates respect for all living creatures, honors children and their role in the evolution of humans, maintains the importance of community and of the need for psychologically and physically prepared learning environments, sees the interrelatedness of life, exemplifies peacefulness, and shows love by supporting others.

Contributors indicated that Montessori becomes a way of life when the respect demonstrated in the classroom becomes the standard of respect in interactions outside of school. The same pattern could be said for the other descriptors. When a high regard for the development of children and a sense of community and a caring mindfulness is given to learning environments, when the interconnectedness of everything in the world and holding peace and love for others become manifest outside the classroom, the Montessori concept becomes a way of living. The viewpoint and values that elders described reveal how Montessori becomes a way of life for teachers and how, as elders expressed, Montessori principles might guide learning and living for students who experience Montessori education in their formative years.

One coresearcher said in her first response to Question 1, “I see it as a way of life, a way to look at the needs of not only individuals but communities. A way to behave in your own

life.” Another explained, “To be the best Montessorian it comes from within. It’s not just because you study it, it’s not just because you read it, you live it.” One elder added,

But living this philosophy, this educational philosophy, does ask you to take responsibility for yourself and asks you to allow everyone around you to take responsibility for himself or herself, and to honor that. And to be present if they ask for your support but to not . . . in other words, codependence completely disappears in a Montessori environment.

Coresearchers often coupled their thoughts about Montessori being a way of life with the term transformation. Transformation appeared to imply a transition that in essence signals a raising of one’s level of consciousness or mindfulness and manifests when Montessori principles begin to guide one’s way of living. More is said about the teacher transformation when Question 2 responses are addressed. For purposes of reviewing transformation as a factor in Montessori becoming a way of life, the following extracts are included and reveal that transformation refers to possibilities and insights in thinking that emerge when a change in perspective on life occurs. The passages describing transformation come from several different dialogues:

You become aware of possibilities that you never thought of before. And I think that’s a big essence of Montessori too because you know it is, you know the transformation of the adult.

I think you change as a person but it’s always your, kind of, your responsibility then to help the child develop in that same way of all those intangible things that aren’t part of our educational system, that we really want to help that child develop in his own life. And in doing that, I think you do that yourself in your own life.

The whole essence of it is in the child, in the elementary child and in the adolescent that it's not within the adult, and yet the adult has to be transformed in order for the transformation to occur in the child. So there's this denial in a sense of self that is extremely powerful and transformative. When you get that at a certain point it's just like, whoa, it's a different way of looking at life. And there you come to your original definition. It is a different way of living.

Another area is Montessori penetrates every part of your life. It's not about school, although that's where we probably introduce it and teach it, but most people who've been in Montessori long have learned how to take those principles and put it in every part of their life and see everything from a whole different paradigm or a perspective. And that, to me, is part of that transformation and that shift happens.

As I watched and listened to the elders talk about a transformation that can occur and how Montessori becomes a way of life, everyone in the dialogue group seemed to be nodding their heads in agreement more than when other aspects were spoken as an essence of Montessori. Their responses indicated to me a deeply felt belief of why Montessori education is important and why, as many said, they wished that every child could have Montessori. The attributes or values that coresearchers suggested represent Montessori as a way of life are elaborated below and include respect, focus on the child, community, prepared learning environment, interrelatedness, peacefulness, and love.

Respect

Respect as an essence of Montessori philosophy was described as reciprocal in that it is given and received between children and their peers and between adults and children. This phrase reflects the coresearchers' larger view of respect: "An essential thing for Montessori is profound respect for life in all its forms including nonliving . . . and that profound respect is in a way the motivation for the rest that comes." At the crux, respect seemed to be directed toward the child as a human being, or as one said, "Within the child is already the man he will become." That elder continued,

I would see a 3-year-old in absolute hysteria, a tantrum, and I would think within this little boy is already a ninety-year-old man. How would I approach a ninety-year-old man having a screaming tantrum? . . . And if I look, now, at this, you know, six foot fifteen-year-old, within him is already the ninety-year-old man. And so I think the essence of Montessori is respect. Respect for the individual, respect for his autonomy, spiritual nature, his wisdom, his soul.

In another dialogue, a coresearcher pondered,

The word essence means the heart or core of something . . . At the heart of her philosophy is the idea of respect. To respect one another, one has to appreciate the uniqueness of the humanity of that person, to accept they are not you, have not lived your life story, yet are made from the same star-stuff—thank you Carl Sagan—as yourself.

As a dialogue continued, the idea of respect often resurfaced with these clarifying thoughts: "What does that mean? What does that look like? Does respect mean [children] do whatever they want? A lot of misinterpretation comes in of respect,

which I do think is the essence of Montessori.” To answer those questions, the discussion turned to meeting the needs of the children as a whole class or one child, depending on what was appropriate in a given situation:

Sometimes those needs are elemental: If [the children] can't function independently then be very directive. If they can't choose, don't give them choice. If they behave as if they can't finish their work, tighten the structure until they experience completion, then raise expectations slowly. Et cetera.

The ways respect manifests in school encompasses how children and adults treat each other, treat the materials in a classroom, and everyone's work space. One coresearcher offered, “Children know to carefully walk around the rugs where someone is working.” Having respect, some pondered, seems to foster self-awareness within the child and often brings greater self-awareness for the teacher by watching the child. It also was noted that a respectful environment creates peacefulness for children as well as for the teacher:

Every child and adult feels respected that they have a peacefulness about them. They feel like they are seen, heard, people care, they count . . . I think in a Montessori environment, we're very cognitive of treating each child not as an adult but as an equal person.

As an essential in the Montessori concept, respect includes respect for self, others, and one's work and encompasses a larger view that honors every living being as part of the entire living family. The omnipresent role respect plays in the overriding philosophy was affirmed frequently and essentially was cited as a basic tenet within all the dialogues.

Focus on the Child

The phrase *focus on the child* intends to represent the depth of view held among coresearchers about the value of each child or adolescent with regard to the whole of humanity. A coresearcher used this phrase in her initial response to Question 1: “My first thought in response was the child, the focus of it is on the child.” Another coresearcher referenced the love for each child because of “what that child represents as a possibility in our humanity.”

These elders understood Maria Montessori, who wrote about the child in a global context with great attention. The essence I heard elders invoke appeared to include and go beyond the concept of constructivism and a learner-centered approach, as Maria Montessori also did.

Comments about fostering independence in children factored into how the child is at the fore in the Montessori perspective. The environment of school should be a place where children, as one coresearcher explained, can “figure out who they are, understand having choices, be joyful, self-directed, and stay motivated to learn.” Beginning with the youngest children in a Montessori environment, the intent is to show respect for the child in as many ways as possible.

Thoughts about the child being at the center of the philosophy circled back to the paramount role of the teacher who creates the environment for the child and ensures the learning process assists the child, while remaining, in essence, on the periphery. Another contributor expressed,

Once the adult facilitator pays attention to the essence of that power of the child, that respect, then it's clear that their task has

to be to set up an environment for this child to function in and then to facilitate and respect the child in that process.

All contributors in the dialogues in some way seemed to acknowledge that in Montessori education, the directive is clear; it is the child who is at the center, and a teacher/guide exists to serve each child and establish a classroom environment where each student can thrive. I noticed that the tone of voice used when elders were discussing the child seemed filled with a deep reverence, signifying what appears as a core spiritual belief within the Montessori concept.

The essences of Montessori begin to reveal an interconnectedness. Focus on the child in the Montessori concept brings in the importance of respect and the importance of the prepared environment. Attending to the development of the individual child/adolescent seemed to hold a direct relationship with the importance given community.

Community

Community refers to the sense of belonging felt among students, students and teachers, faculty and staff, and relationships among those groups and their families. The importance of a sense of community beyond the school setting (local, state, country, world), elders noted, is raised with students as they grow older and become more able to recognize and embrace expanded views of the world.

Coresearchers representing all levels of instruction talked about the importance of having a time at the beginning of the school day when children/adolescents come together. One contributor noted,

I think in the elementary class [the essence] looks like having a class meeting at the beginning of the day, you know, so that they know what to expect, everybody gets to contribute, there's acknowledgments, news. Kind of the start of the day. We're a team, we're gonna all work together.

Another recalled how on parent day, even very small children appeared comfortable, confident, and prideful as they showed parents around the school campus. It was offered that when children feel loved, accepted, and successful, they exhibit feeling and being "a part of a community which is also part of the essence."

With regard to the importance of community, one elder made sure to explain,

We want independent people that move independently, that choose independently, that think independently. But then I thought you know the reason why we want the children to develop this independence, this individual independence, is so that they can learn that they live interdependently with

everybody else. So there's that, you know, but in order to be able to appreciate your role in that interdependent web, first you have to understand yourself and what you are capable of doing. The essence . . . is yes, we want the child to be independent, not so that he doesn't need anybody but precisely so that she can understand how much she's needed and how much she needs everybody else.

Another coresearcher continued,

And Montessori . . . talks about the movement from independence, but it's being developed all the time of course in a social setting. It's not in isolation. But then the movement towards the consciousness of interdependence. And then the further stage is what she calls solidarity, this concept that you know we're not only dependent on one another but we are, I think Gaia or something like that, we are one solid base of humanity working in collaboration with everything else.

The importance of understanding one was part of a community appeared to be a vital aspect of Montessori that is cultivated daily within the classroom, celebrated on occasion within the entire school, and extended to the community outside the school as a child grows older.

The Prepared Environment

Deemed by some as the heart of the method, the prepared environment refers to the physical and psychological environment of the classroom. The physical aspects of the environment comprise the learning materials that one coresearcher described as “beautiful, durable, accurate, safe, and age appropriate” as illustrated in Figures 1.1 and 1.2 (see Chapter 1 in the research). The prepared environment also includes, as one interjected, “not just the materials but the [trained] adult.”

The use of multiage groupings in classrooms afford children an opportunity to start out in a classroom, one coresearcher described, as the “rookies that don’t know how things work, where things are, what are the rules, and then gradually becoming the leaders, is an experience that they take with them forever and draw strength from that.” Highlighting the importance of using developmental stages to determine the multiage groupings in the prepared environment, another contributor maintained,

The emphasis on the prepared environment is an essential . . . But understanding of the stages of development and key characteristics of each stage are THE [emphasis made by speaker] essential components . . . Very fine Montessori can be and is being practiced in various parts of the world under sparse or Spartan material conditions. By contrast, there are elaborately equipped classrooms and schools without much evidence in the activity of the children of much understanding of bedrock Montessori principles.

Continuing to address the use of developmental stages in grouping students, this declaration was made:

The essence of Montessori is in the application of her keen and enduring insights describing the stages of human development from birth to maturity, and the differentiated psychological characteristics of each stage. These insights lead to a first principle that not only sets the tone and direction of our work, but puts her in stark contrast to most educational practitioners . . . Almost all educators ask, ‘What should our children learn?’ This question drives the curriculum specialists, who in turn set the agenda for teachers [to] deliver this content on this timetable. Where is the regard for the learner, for the essentials that develop deep knowledge and mental agility—motivation, choice, experimentation, cooperation, and reflection? Dr. Montessori by contrast suggests that the first question is ‘What is the nature of the learner?’ When you start with this sensible question the paths of developmental education and standards-based learning diverge quite quickly and dramatically . . . Understanding these essential principles generates the creation of distinct prepared environments for the different stages.

One elder believed, “The heart of the method is really choice...It gives [the child] a sense of their power and their own ability and that’s what I think is the magic of the system.” Another continued, “[The prepared environment solidifies] the intrinsic motivation in the child because they do have the opportunity to have free choice . . . in the environment and their interactions with people in their environment.” In relation to having choice and longer, uninterrupted work periods, one contributor added,

I think because of the kind of endless time that these children feel in these environments and that they can rest when they need to, which you know we all need to do after a big piece of work, I think they dig deeper into things than some of the traditional ways of educating children where the time is really

broken up. And I think from my own experience I learn much more deeply when I really can have a lot of time to think about and investigate something . . . and I think it's you know very essential. You said what's the essence of Montessori, I think that time, that endless time is really essential. And children feel it.

The way a prepared environment might impact a child was noted with this example:

I'm thinking about this one example with a child who had been in three different schools and they said if he didn't make it in Montessori . . . he entered the fourth level [grade], he would have to go to juvenile. He found such power in taking care of the animals. It was amazing. And through by being able to do that he then was able to begin to work beautifully within the environment and with other students.

The physical and psychological classroom environment is maintained and orchestrated by the prepared/trained teacher, both aspects (e.g., instructional materials and learning atmosphere) kept responsive by the teacher/guide's ongoing sagacious observation that requires, as one stated, "standing back . . . clearing your own mind . . . honoring the spirit of that child . . . so you know you can give [the children] what [each needs]." Specific references during the dialogues were made about the importance for a teacher to be spiritually prepared in the sense of cultivating her/his own centeredness, being able to be present with the children, and becoming selfless when considering the child as foremost. One participant described the directive for a teacher this way:

Montessori says to observe a child you need to put everything aside and you need to be here and now with that child . . . So our mission statement for our training program is, develop what gifts reside inside the student-teachers for helping children in

their self-learning. Most important of these qualities that we intend to nourish is an intuitive quality of attention. In its presence we will experience openness to the child's spirit and heart and receive its trust in return.

Overall, coresearchers indicated the prepared environment is organic in the sense it is dynamic yet critically structured for a consistent sense of beauty, order, and routine based on the developmental needs of the children in the classroom. One elder referenced Maria Montessori's sentiment saying, "A child is like the acorn which has the possibility of this beautiful, large oak tree. And for that oak tree to grow it must have the right environment." The essential prepared learning environment that coresearchers described seems rooted in grouping students according to developmental stages and is multifaceted, while appearing as a single key aspect.

Interrelatedness

The ideas elders pondered with regard to interrelatedness referenced the design of the Montessori concept, what children experience, and how the philosophical foundation recognizes that everything in the world is interconnected. Interrelatedness was invoked when discussing the holistic approach of the Montessori educational design that considers the social, emotional, cognitive, physical, and spiritual aspects of the child/adolescent in each phase of development, the transdisciplinary continuum of the Montessori curriculum from birth through 18 years, and the importance in education of having teachers, administrators, students, and parents work in concert with each other. One coresearcher recalled realizing Montessori held a larger view of the world that recognizes everything is interrelated:

[Maria Montessori wrote], 'We shall walk this path of life for all things are a part of the universe and are connected to form one whole unity.' That's page nine in To Educate the Human Potential and to me the interrelatedness of everything was what drew me to Montessori . . . the expression educating children to be citizens of the world just made sense to me . . . So I think the interrelatedness [reflects the essence].

While the reference to interconnectedness usually pertained to how this essence manifests in a teacher's ability to grasp the integral aspects within the Montessori philosophy and curriculum, some mentioned the interrelatedness children experience in the classroom, alluding to the philosophical continuum found throughout the levels of classes:

They're able to be in an environment where there's interrelatedness. They see they're a community you know in toddler eyes and then when they go to the primary class they get

to experience that again. I mean how wonderful is that? What a gift that is.

It appeared the interrelatedness about which elders spoke referenced tangible and intangible aspects about the Montessori educational approach, indicating the concept is complex and difficult to express or convey.

Peacefulness

Peacefulness is an essential of Montessori. The coresearchers provided several perspectives. One spoke, “What comes to my mind first is the peaceful approach, the whole aspect of human development from the beginning . . . really encompasses all of that.” Another noted, “For me the essential part is to the education for peace.” The elder continued to explain that the dimensions realized within the concept of education for peace include the student “feeling powerful and good about yourself that you’re able to do things . . . and then having a sense of their place in the universe.”

Peace as essence appeared to refer to one’s inner sense of peace and occurs with routines, feeling trusted, trusting others, and practicing silence.

One contributor remarked that when children are “learning what they want and learning how to accept not always getting what they desire, they are learning peacefulness.” *Children*, one explained, *need to be prepared*

not only educationally and academically but being at peace themselves [which comes] if they have that same trust in their environment at school and the patterns and the routine and always knowing what is supposed to happen at school . . . the routines that put them at peace so they can come in and really be ready to do all the things that you do in the classroom.

Elders acknowledged that practicing silence in Montessori education begins with the very young children to help them feel a sense of their inner peace. Often the teacher of younger children will play what is known as the silent game with the students. During the game, children are challenged to remain silent for a short period of time, and space is given for each

child to note and feel the effects of silence throughout the entire classroom. One contributor illustrated the essential of allowing time for silence during an event she experienced with adolescents:

To get a little bit of an understanding of what Montessori was, [these adolescents] were brought to the training center and I wasn't used to these kind of big clunky people . . . and they came in and they went through the food we had for them within five minutes and then we did a silence activity. And at the end of it I asked them how it made them feel and they said so wonderful, can we do this again? They said my life is so scheduled; I'm always having to do something. So when they came back we did it again. So that ability to just be and be silent I think is really profound in Montessori's work.

The elders who acknowledged the role of peace as fundamental in the Montessori concept brought in varying perspectives. They discussed the importance of peace as connected to students feeling successful in their work as well as the practice of providing time to honor silence and help students gain access to their inner selves.

Love

Love can hold many different connotations, and one elder noted what several others said when referencing love: “Love is not a fluffy feeling around the hearts . . . it is willing the good of another . . . that’s why you cannot like a child and still love a child.” Another contributor speaking about love explained,

For me the essence of Montessori was love. When I think back as to where did it begin for me and it was with my own child. So it was trying to find the perfect place that I knew my child would be accepted and supported and loved, and just wrapped in a space or environment of positive growth and encouragement. I mean that’s really where Montessori became for me not education, but Montessori.

One coresearcher repeated what Maria Montessori said about the love a teacher must cultivate: “The Montessori teacher has to be in love with the universe because the child is in love with first his world, and then as they get older grow to encompass the whole.” In another dialogue, an elder echoed that the essence of Montessori “comes from within the heart to embrace and nurture the human potential.” One contributor described love as “that love and passion that [teachers] have for life.” Another elder elucidated,

What comes to me in this question is love. That it’s about truly being able to work from a place, as a teacher or an administrator, coming from a place of as much love as one can come forward and it shows up as respect, but it’s coming from a love place . . . And to me that’s the very, very key, is to have an environment that is safe, that is filled with love, and the respect . . . that is the deepest key in how I see Montessori.

Several talked about how important it is for children to feel love when they enter the classroom, equating a feeling of being loved to having a sense of emotional safety that can foster feelings of trust. An incident that was shared in a 3- to 6-year-old classroom captures the expressed belief that when children feel safe—indicated as feeling loved and respected—their ability to trust and sense of empowerment becomes augmented:

Yesterday I said you can ask so and so for help and she went over and said will you help me open the drawer? It was a recycling door to put the paper in. And the little girl [who was asked to help] just said no and sashayed away. And she came back and . . . [said] she said no. And I said ah hah, sometimes people say no and sometimes they say yes. And we looked at who else might help us. But you know that could have closed her down in a moment and instead we just kept going through and she found someone and it became something that she took control over . . . that didn't work, what will work next? . . . becoming a strong enough person to be able to say let me move forward. Montessori gives you the depth of trusting yourself to keep going . . . for me that's really the essence.

One contributor referenced the peace curriculum she and others in the group had created. In their presentation, peace is illustrated by the lotus blossom and the petals represent four areas of awareness—self, others, culture, and environment. At the center of the flower is spirit, which is viewed as love. She continued during the dialogue,

So I think that spirit in the middle it's what guides all the pieces. Your attitude and your openness and your love of everything . . . and the love of learning that it's all a discovery, not something to memorize or to you know check off the list or whatever.

Coresearchers seemed to convey the importance of cultivating love within oneself and that the love for each child manifests in the dedication to foster a child's development in positive, accepting, and supportive ways, with a loving heart, even if you find a child's personality is difficult for you. Circling back to the fundamental of respect that all elders seemed to view as the best single way to describe the essence of Montessori, contributors voiced a belief that respect is grounded in this kind of love they had described.

Dialogue Question 1 Takeaways

Throughout the dialogues, it was noted that Montessori is complex, and that it takes time to absorb the essence. Question 1 appeared to resonate meaningfully with the participants, most of whom acknowledged the essence remains elusive and is a question they often contemplated. One contributor noted,

I think it's an essential question, and it's a question that I have been thinking about for many, many years. And I'm not sure that I have quite come up with those bullet points . . . I'm thinking of you know we visited [an] outreach center last year, and we went to this homeless shelter with a woman, a passionate woman who started Montessori with the help of the [named city] course. And these kids sometimes come for a couple of hours once a week, twice a week, three times a week, and the testimony of the woman and the changes it made in the children with such a small amount of time with such an incomplete environment really made, I think all of us who were there think about this [what is the essence of Montessori] in another way . . . And it makes me think is there something so fundamental that speaks to what you said . . . so fundamental that we haven't really defined yet.

At the end of Question 1, elders were given a minute to ponder a takeaway and then share with the group (with exception of one dialogue due to time constraints). Because responses were generally short in length, their main thoughts can all be shared. It seems fitting to leave the reader to contemplate these takeaway reflections, mirroring that experience of dialogue.

I think I've answered the essence of Montessori question a lot, and I never can ever, and I don't think I ever will, and I'm not sure it should be that there's just one thing. It's so many things

that are, they lead to one another. So even though I talk about the essence of Montessori a lot it's still really hard [to describe].

My takeaway is the still always communication because that's what leads to being peaceful inside so that you can be intentional with your communication but also with your receiving information

... and I guess the first thing that I think of is that it really is a lifestyle that it becomes a true part of your whole being, not only just your own self but the connectivity with everyone involved in it in your network or circle or wherever.

I've spent my life experiencing it but it's hard to package it.

Really working and believing in the connectedness of all things. And the importance of understanding that . . . the beauty of the awe of a child, and . . . self-awareness, learning about yourself and thinking about everything that you do in a perspective of the big picture.

All what we have said in a different maybe perspective it's to see the more realism into what we experience in our life as Montessorians, because everything is a different reality . . . to listen to all these things and to feel them . . . it's a real significance, and . . . to feel this greatness with your children and other children it makes me come to my own experience . . . but in another perspective.

Montessori is not materials, it's a culture. And it's so clear to me as we sit here talking . . . there's such a commonality of understanding . . . that's very powerful really, to have the collective minds, whatever our, and I would say . . . I respect all trainings that have the children as their base. That's my criteria . . . you know when I look at all the many different groups that do training I would suspect that we could sit around with people

from many different structures and we would all feel that we shared a vision; a vision, but then also we shared something about the path to realize that vision.

My real takeaway from this is how bonding it is to be Montessorians . . . we speak a language and have an understanding that transcends really everything . . . And we have this essence, as we started off the question, essence of Montessori that bonds people together. And that bond is really strong. And I just had that feeling again as we were talking that I've had so many, many times . . . So I think that my takeaway is that Montessori has this real important power to bring the essence of love together.

I think just the ability for us to boil this down to that word respect and respect for the children, respect for our work and what we can do for the children.

If I had to land on one word or one concept it was respect, but then as I was listening I realized that it's a different, more powerful respect and it's grounded in love because it's broader and deeper. It's respect for the children . . . it's as if you belong to in a sense a cocoon of respect in this world that is bonded in love and is powerful . . . it's with the adults as well as the children.

I would say considering everything that we've talked about I think what has the most meaning for me is this unfolding. I see it as you know for the children that you work with, for the adult learners, for ourselves, and for any relationships that we have . . . Montessori is a way of life so to speak . . . personally with my husband I've been able to see that over the years, and it's very beautiful. And I feel very blessed.

I think my takeaway is awe and wonder that leads to the curiosity and the spirit . . . whatever you want to call it. Love that penetrates everything and connects everything together.

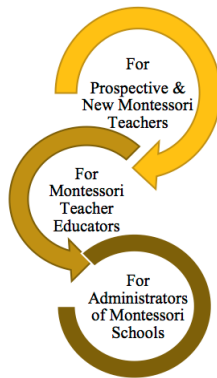
I think this love even in a greater sense is like a love of life, a love of everything. The world, the interconnectedness, and just that lifelong desire to learn more and build that unfolding . . . to want to be a part of it and to be aware of all of it.

Well that comes back to that I feel very connected in that place, at that center truly is finding that love and that joy within ourselves because then we can share it.

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.

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: for 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.

Below are summaries of what coresearchers offered For Prospective and New Teachers; For Teacher Educators; and For School Administrators.

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 enhanced self-awareness so they can take those abilities and create a caring and emotionally supportive psychological place to learn and 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.

Summary of Findings for School Administrators

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. 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.”

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.

A full excerpt of Question 2 findings For School Administrators also is available.

In closing the complete chapter presentation of the findings, one coresearcher's thoughts 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.