



"Follow the Child"



camt Talk



Canadian Association of Montessori Teachers

Canadian Association of Montessori Teachers

October 2015

Message from the President



As I write this, a week of the new school year has gone by. As you read CAMT's newsletter, a month will have already passed and before we know it we will be in the middle of the school year. The time goes so quickly, especially when our days are full and the lists of to dos progress beyond our accomplishments. Observing, planning and guiding the children to reach their full potential is a large responsibility. It's an honour to assist children in the growth and development of their whole being, not just academically. To teach Montessori is a choice we have made based upon experiences that have lead us towards this path. Yet, like the child's education the teacher's growth and education too must last a lifetime; it cannot stop once the qualifications and degrees have been received.

CAMT is working hard to assist with this professional development. We want to motivate you to be the best you can be as a person and a teacher. This is our goal, to assist the teacher in reaching their full potential. We do this by hosting the annual conference, offering an array of workshops presented by knowledgeable people who specialize and demonstrate passion in what they do. However, there are times we don't know what the members want and we'd like to hear from you. What is it that you are seeking, needing and wanting? What does your school need from you? What do you need from CAMT? Assistance with classroom management, planning, record keeping, innovative shelf work? The options are endless, yet we'd like your input so we can assist in your growth.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

- November 6 2015
CAMT Annual Conference

SAVE THE DATE!

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THANK YOU

A Special Thank you to the authors of our newsletter articles, who are awarded a complimentary event registration as a **THANK YOU!**

If you would like to contribute an article, please contact

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Does Montessori Answer the Phon? *By Diane Duff*

In the last week of September this year, with great joy (and relief), I submitted the results of my research about Montessori teacher training – as it relates to teaching children to read – to my M.A. supervisor. The research was conceived by my twin passions – teaching children to read and mentoring teachers who want to know more about reading development and disability.

During my second year as a teacher, one of my students was a 12-year-old girl who had dyslexia. Carving time into the classroom schedule to provide her with one-on-one instruction was a challenge, and yet that was the easy part. The difficult part was learning not only what dyslexia is, but, as a by-product, how reading develops and what sub-skills lie at the root. How did I do it? By observation, by trial, by error, by reflection. My own teacher training had not been designed to prepare me for the

challenge. As a Bachelor of Education candidate with a major in English and a minor in French, my English pedagogical course work focussed on teaching reading across the content areas; teaching a variety of genres; and teaching writing at the secondary level. But, as luck would have it, during my third year, I enrolled in a course that provided an overview of phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. For the final paper, I analyzed the emergent writing of a five-year-old girl (my eldest daughter) who, over the course of the six months after her fourth birthday, had learned to read—by writing. A decade later I learned that Montessori would have predicted my daughter's early reading by the interest she had shown in spelling the words she knew. Over the course of that same decade, I also learned how woefully unprepared I was for the narrow pedagogical focus that eventually defined my career—the teaching of early reading.

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At the same time, CAMT is also looking for volunteers to become members of our board. We have great goals and aspirations, yet the more manpower we have, the stronger we can be as an organization and accomplish more. Do you know a colleague who would like to be nominated and become a part of CAMT? Would you like to assist? Our Annual General Meeting (AGM) will take place the morning of November 6 and we encourage you to stay so you understand what CAMT is doing. I used to leave prior to the AGM, thinking there was nothing I needed to know, yet there was and there is; it's about Montessori and education. If you're a Montessori teacher then you need to know what is going on. This year CAMT has been busy, we have updated the By-Laws to maintain non-profit status, created a new website, launched our facebook presence, and connected with teachers and schools nationally as we want to become more than GTA centralized. This is all so exciting.

We look forward to seeing you at the conference on Friday, November 6 and we have a great program including two keynote speakers. Maren Schmidt and

Jennifer Morgan. Maren's website is kidstalknews.com and Jennifer's is the Deep Time Journey Network, both websites are worth looking into. Our exuberant workshop hosts will inspire you to take what you have learned and apply it first thing Monday morning! Catching up with former colleagues, meeting new friends, sharing, laughing or maybe crying will be part of your day. So join the excitement on November 6 at CAMT's annual conference and let's all learn together so we can reflect and progress in our common goal: The Development of the Child.

Wishing you a great school year ahead, full of excitement, compassion, inspiration, patience, empathy and awe.

Enjoy!
Claudia Langlois,
 CAMT President

Does Montessori Answer the Phon? (continued from page 2)

It was not by design, but again, by chance, that my professional work became situated in reading development. Several years after working with the girl with dyslexia, I had the opportunity to assess the reading skills of another 12-year-old girl, one who was not dyslexic, but who had just failed grade 7 in the public system. I discovered what her report cards had failed to illuminate, that she was, to all extents, illiterate. At the time we met, she could not read *The Story of Little Quack*, a section of which is excerpted here: “Every evening, when Jackie went to get the cows, Little Quack came, too. When Jackie went paddling in the pond, Little Quack swam beside him. Jackie wasn’t lonely anymore. “You are my very best friend,” said Jackie.”¹

That girl, whom I’ll call Rose, did eventually learn how to read, but she didn’t develop the fluency or comprehension of others her age and, sadly, she never did finish high school. I was later to realize that Rose’s story was typical of struggling readers everywhere. By the time we met, it was probably already too late. The fact that she didn’t read well at the end of grade one meant she had less than a 15% chance of reading well by the end of grade four.² And after grade four, the statistics become even more dire because every year, struggling readers carry their skills deficits forward. It’s what Stanovich famously called the *Matthew Effect*: The literate rich get richer by virtue of practice and the accumulation of word and world knowledge, and the literate poor become poorer –in relation both to their peers and to the demands being placed on their skills, in reading, and across the curriculum.³

It didn’t have to be that way for Rose. The research is indisputable: Children who are at-risk for reading ‘failure’ can be identified as early as kindergarten⁴ and early intervention can help them become competent readers.⁵ But what school has the experts it needs to conduct the diagnostic assessment of pre-reading and reading skills across their student population? And what school has a reading specialist on staff to work with all those who are at-risk of reading failure? None that I know of. And that means there’s a heavy load on the classroom teacher—because, of course, Rose isn’t the only student in the room. There’s also Jian whose family

came to Canada just two years ago; they still speak their cultural language at home. And there’s Rebecca whose parents don’t read much, and certainly not for pleasure; and Moe idling over in the corner with Ashanti, both of them so bright that no one ever questions how well they read. And there are 22 other students in the room, all at various stages of literacy development.

The research tells us that novice teachers are not well trained to deliver a sequential, explicit reading curriculum that will allow children to learn to read confidently and well⁶, and that the university professors who train them are not well prepared either.⁷ The good news is that teachers who learn about reading development and how to deliver a research-based program to incorporate explicit instruction into curriculum can become better reading teachers, especially if that training is followed up with mentoring during the school year.⁸

While we all agree that children need to learn to read—and we’re all shocked that the results of provincial testing show that 30% of them are not meeting minimum expectations at the end of grade 3⁹—there’s not much unanimity about strategies where teaching reading is concerned. In fact, the dispute about how best to teach reading is so old and so fierce that it is often referred to as “The Reading Wars.” In 2000, the National Reading Panel, which had been mandated to review existing research and put an end to “The Reading Wars,” delivered its verdict: The best curriculum for *early* reading development is a research-based one that includes, among other things, phonemic awareness and phonics.¹⁰

Reflecting on my own education as a teacher candidate, and reviewing the shocking disparity among universities that grant degrees to prospective elementary school teachers, made me wonder if things were different elsewhere. And that’s how I elected to research Montessori teacher training. I was lucky enough to find two teacher training institutions in Ontario willing to participate – one providing training for teachers at the casa level and one

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Does Montessori Answer the Phon? *(continued from Page 3)*

providing training for teachers at the elementary level. My study was very simply framed into the following questions: Did Doctor Montessori anticipate the findings of the National Research Panel and provide for phonemic awareness and phonics in the writing/reading component of the language curriculum? And if not, then, do contemporary Montessori teacher *trainers* remain current with reading research and incorporate phonemic awareness and phonics into the pre-service teacher curriculum they provide?

The results may surprise you. They surprised me.

Diane L. Duff, B. Ed., M. A., is the founder, director and trainer of The Reading School. She and her team teach reading to children throughout the GTA, whether one-on-one in their homes, or in whole class lessons in private schools. Diane also provides professional development and consulting about reading development, reading disability, and best strategies for teaching reading.

If you are interested in learning more about the services offered by The Reading School, or if you would like Diane to present the results of her study to your school or organization, call 416-537-7323 or email info@dianeduff.ca. In the meantime, visit www.thereadingschool.ca.

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A Journey That Became a Pilgrimage (Part 2) – by Nandita Agarwala

In January 2014, I took a trip back home. 'Back home' for me is India. As many of you must know, Dr. Montessori spent many years in India during the Second World War and during her stay, she set up training schools and Montessori schools. She also wrote some of her books while in India. The Cosmic Peace components as well as the Toddler curriculum were both conceived when she was there.

My trip to India had one goal- Was Dr. Montessori influenced in any way by the Hindu Scriptures and/or Indian leaders of that time.....During my visit to India, I met several interesting people. All of them were in some way connected to Montessori.

Below are some excerpts of my conversation with them.



Dr. Radha Nagaraj was a product of the infant Montessori school at Hymamshu. She took her pre-primary Montessori training from Mr. Joosten. She acted as his assistant for two years. She continued to work in Mahila Mandali since then as a Directress. She took up assistance at IMTC from 1997 under Mr. Swamy, and continued to work there till 2002. Radha has presented papers at the seminars organized by the Indian Montessori Center at Bangalore and at the celebration of 50 years of Montessori held at Chennai in 1989. She has been consulting with organizations like the Shreyas Foundation School at Ahmedabad and the Balasevika shibira of Vishva Hindu Parishad since 1990. She contributes articles to various Montessori publications in India.

She was convinced that Dr. Montessori was influenced by Hindu Scriptures. 'She must have read them', she said to me. "Great men think alike", said Radha, "so probably the Montessori philosophy was influenced by the scriptures". Radha talked about how the Montessori philosophy had attracted her because it was so close to the Hindu philosophy and the only thing that differed was the interpretation of the 'truth'.

She mentioned that Mr. Swamy, who had been trained by Dr. Montessori often, delivered lectures during her course and whenever he did so, he always made reference to Hindu philosophy and this was very appealing to her.



Mr. Gupta took his Montessori pre-primary training with Mr. Joosten in India in 1953 on the recommendation of the headmaster of the school in which he was working at Muzzafarnagar. After working for several years at his old school and at the AMI school of Gwalior, he moved to Delhi. When Mr. Joosten conducted his 6th – 8th

course in Delhi, Mr. Gupta acted as his assistant. His wife, Urmila Gupta also took her training at this period and joined him in his work for nearly a decade. When the Birth Centenary celebrations of Montessori was organised in New Delhi, he was in charge. A postage stamp was released on the occasion. V. V. Giri, President of India, presided over the function. Two years later, he left for US. Mr. Gupta stayed in touch with Mr. Joosten till his death in 1980, even visiting him during the latter's visit to Minnesota. Prof. Gupta took his elementary training with Margaret Stevenson in the USA in 1978. He has written manuals for Montessori teachers in the areas of botany, zoology, and language, and published classroom materials on science, language, botany, zoology, and history. He has also published books written by Mr. Albert Joosten and other Montessorians. Currently he is the Director of the Indian Institute for Montessori Studies which is conducting Pre-primary Elementary course in Bangalore, India.

Mr. Rajendra Gupta felt that Dr. Montessori may have been influenced by the Theosophists, because she was a staunch Catholic. "What I believe", said Mr. Gupta, "is as our sages also say, that this knowledge (truth) is in the bramhand (universe). We have to reach up to a certain level in order to draw from it. Then it just comes to us". Mr. Gupta made mention of the higher stages of being, 'samadhi' or that state of enlightenment that Buddha had attained. Being of similar background, I understood him perfectly but was not sure that I could make other people believe in it.....

Mr. Gupta truly believed that Dr. Montessori was at that level of enlightenment where she could tune in and receive all (the truth) from the cosmos.

He also felt that Dr. Montessori and Mahatma Gandhi "must have" met. And also that Rabindra Nath Tagore would have met her. About Tagore, Prof. Gupta said, "There is a possibility (of Tagore meeting Dr. Montessori). Tagore was a very spiritual

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A Journey That Became a Pilgrimage *(continued from Page 5)*

person so it all comes down to the same thing. When you see things all connected together in this cosmos, it is all the same and they begin to take concrete shape so that they can produce an environment where the soul can really bloom and unfold”.



Meenakshi Sivaramakrishnan is an Indian educator, who has promoted the Montessori Method of education in India for the past four decades. An acclaimed authority on the Montessori Method, she does not

believe in diluting the Montessori philosophy in any manner. Her commitment to the Montessori ideology is total. She has trained hundreds of Montessori adults, many of whom have established Montessori Houses across India and abroad.

Meenakshi graduated with a BA from Banaras Hindu University. She obtained the AMI Diploma (primary) and the AMI Trainers Certificate from the Association Montessori Internationale, Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

When asked if she believed that Dr. Montessori had been influenced by the Hindu Scriptures, Smt. Meenakshi Sivaramakrishnan had this to say, “Yes, yes, yes, of course, I do believe, as I have found out several parallels in her thinking (Dr. Montessori’s) and the concept of Cosmic Education came only here (India).

She went on to say that “Her (Dr. Montessori’s) inspiration came from India because in India from time immemorial, they have been talking about cosmic education. Rishis (sages) and at that time the Upanishads and the Vedas (Indian scriptures), they have been talking about cosmic education.

Smt Sivaramakrishnan said that she believes that even today, very few people really understand Dr. Montessori’s idea of cosmic education. She said that people these days all talk about how to give Montessori presentations, how to make the child do an activity, what to say to children etc and the whole philosophy of Montessori is lost. She concluded by saying, “My favourite subject is the spiritual preparation of the teacher”.

I am still searching for an answer to my question.....

I want to believe that India was a place of inspiration to Dr. Montessori

I want to find the truth.....

Cosmic Education for Infants and Toddlers (by P. Donahue Shortridge)

Maria Montessori wrote at length about the cosmic task of the child. She said in sum that the child's cosmic task is to come to understand his place in the universe and also to serve as a change agent for the adults in his midst. In *Education for a New World* she wrote, "Let us give the child a vision of the entire universe." Indeed the Montessori elementary program inspires the 6-12 year old's interest in grappling with the world at large and his place in it by introducing all subject areas through the 5 great lessons. Thus both tasks are fulfilled: the child's quest to understand the wider world is met and the adult takes on the responsibility of service to this age child by preparing an environment appropriate for him, both a Montessori school and guiding him out into the wider world. The child will question, evaluate and judge the state of the world and will advocate for change as he moves into the third plane.

But what about the young child? What does it mean for the infant and toddler to come to understand his place in the universe, how does he do that when he is not yet three years old? And how is he an agent for change for us?

Reading Montessori would suggest that because even the youngest child's mathematical mind seeks order, harmony and beauty in the world, it is incumbent upon us to give him the picture of the universe appropriate at his developmental level. For the infant and toddler that means sensorial, concrete experiences with his environment, both in nature and in his culture. Offering this child his world at his pace coincides with Montessori's insight that the young child as a spiritual embryo must adapt to his time and place in order to survive. Fortunately, the young child is in a very intense sensitive period for absorption and adaptation to his surroundings. Thus it is so simple to fulfil his cosmic task. But simple is not always the same as easy ...or successful.

The child under three is having his first love affair. It is a love affair with the physical world: Reality. He is awakening to the whole universe before him, he beholds all. He revels in it with every breath he takes. He is literally grounding himself in where he is right now. And it is all experiential. He is grasping the interrelatedness of the world through sensory impressions.

For our part, the child's mind is moved to the cosmic view by giving it to him from birth. We are to offer him direct experience, but here is the key. Not merely as a watcher only or a listener only from the stroller, car seat, crib or playpen, or in an inappropriately prepared Montessori environment, but with the full body experience – total immersion. The child is not a bystander in his life. From birth, he needs to discover with his hands and legs as well as his eyes and ears. He needs to do it with the totality of his being. As we know from children of this age, intelligence grows through movement- so set them free in the natural world!

Let him get wet, get muddy, get hot, get cold, learn how to navigate the undulations of the hillocks. Let him explore at his own pace. Take him outside on a cold night to see the stars, reveling in the full moon together; savoring the rainy days out of doors, jumping in puddles and capturing the droplets on his tongue.

He imprints all these direct experiences at the cellular level. His sensate impressions of the natural world will inform how he later, at the reasoning level, comes to know them, to understand their interrelatedness and ultimately to revere them as the world to which he belongs.

Our task then is to serve as a link to the natural and cultural world for this child. Let him partake in the cultural life of his family, honoring him as a full member by using his name with respect and offering him the dignity deserving of a member of the family and community. Let him observe you greeting and interacting with people in his community and invite him to do so as well. In this way, adults give him the keys to understand the reality of the universe at his level; that the world exists and it is accessible, knowable.

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Cosmic Education *(continued from Page 7)*

Keep thinking of ways to offer him age-appropriate encounters with concrete reality without judgment. e.g. Just because you don't like to get wet, doesn't mean you shouldn't go out in the rain. Just because you don't like crawly things, doesn't mean you get to share your aversion with a toddler who has just picked one up. Just because you have gone on the same neighborhood walk every day for a year with children doesn't mean you get to not go because you are bored with it. Everything is new everyday to the infant and toddler.

It is more essential than ever that our youngest children adapt to their cultural and natural world. The sensorial foundations laid at this stage, while they do prepare him for the next intellectual plane, more critically, must now also withstand an ever-increasing onslaught of the din of the popular culture. Our culture assaults us with messages that the natural world is dirty, scary and messy, such that as the child grows in the next planes of development, the consequences mount for the individual who did not absorb the world through his body as an infant and toddler: obesity, poor muscle tone, poor judgment in decision making, lack of persistence in adversity and insensitivity to the beauty and wonder all around.

And although there are many nature and cultural activities that you can incorporate into your prepared environment, e.g. a putting on and taking off of clothes activity, sand and water, having objects from nature brought inside, having natural materials for them to handle and having animals in the prepared environment, nevertheless, the children in our culture, generally speaking, suffer from deprivation of nature, the real thing, authentic nature, wild places. So give it to them. Take them out in the natural world every day if possible.

And here's a tip. Invite the parents along. I accompanied and observed a toddler going on a walk in nature with his mother. I observed the boy open up his heart to the natural world the deeper he ventured into it; he began to sing to himself, and became emboldened the longer he partook of its offerings. He moved from at first, just throwing rocks into the water, to then touching the water with a stick and finally to wading into the water himself. Early on in his adventure, he was hesitant to tackle a downward incline of a hill, later he trundled up and down it with triumphant glee. Such joy of discovery this child experienced: Reality on his level.

And his mother was able also to relax into it as well. She came to trust that he is competent, such that finally, the toddler successfully climbed a steep embankment and although his mother was within inches of her son, she resisted the urge "to help" resulting in the boy succeeding on his own!

We can model that this is normal. We not only serve as a link to the natural world for the child, we can do it for the parent as well, such that it becomes an every day part of life that children interact with nature, they fall down, they get wet, they get muddy, they pick things up and get dirty. But they gain the world in return. This, then is how we honor the infant and toddler's cosmic task.

P Donohue Shortridge is the creator of Aidan's Muddy Adventure, a DVD encouraging parents to take their child out into the natural world. pds@pdonohueshortridge.com

The Miracle of the Light Touch (by Wendy Agnew)

The late, great, Audrey Sillick, illustrious Montessori-an and naturalist, was a champion of our “four billion year-old mentor, the earth”. She embraced Montessori’s concept of cosmic education with a passionate attention to the practicalities of environmental education and inspired a generation of acolytes to follow ‘the call of the wild’. In a world that is becoming increasingly imprinted with humanity’s industrializing footprint, I recall her wise words.

“Rooted in and sustained by the Earth’s numberless communities, primal societies’ culture and ways of life celebrated and honored the natural world through song, dance, music-making, and the visual arts. With these acknowledgments woven into their daily lives, our forebears maintained a continuous sacred dialogue with the cosmos and formed deep affective attachments that nourished a sense of being “at home in the world.”¹

We humans have always considered ourselves linguistically sophisticated but do we habitually impose lexical limitations on this considerable aptitude. I observe with wonder intimate communications students experience in the “church of the blue sky” ... call it prayer, physical poetry, daydreaming, active semiotic engagement with nature or what you will – people transform when unpunctuated by echoing hallways and buzzing fluorescence.



Consider this 6 year-old sitting in still and extended attention watching a monarch butterfly fan her wings. But she is *more* than watching; she is becom-

ing ... absorbing ‘the miracle of the light touch’. Balanced on a fulcrum of self-awareness, how thrilling to slip through the kaleidoscope of extended self and realize the visceral, sensorial, inspirational resonance of kinship. This is the genesis of a language that incorporates respect, awe, tenderness, and an holistic awareness that we are conjoined with place in radical reciprocity.

Nurturing a child’s eco-psychological self not only promotes an extended sense of compassion and comfort with the world², but also fosters imaginative and synthesizing skills necessary for mental health and creativity.³ It is proven that children do better academically if allowed direct interaction with the natural environment, and teachers in contact with nature suffer less chance of exhaustion and burn-out.⁴

The ancient Irish poet Amergin, some say, the father of metaphor, captures the profundity of identification with untamed nature as a conduit to the spirit of being. He uses iterations of phrases beginning with ‘I am’ to radically bond self to earth. Earth identification was systematically suppressed as early as the fourth century as a pantheistic heresy.⁵ With the advent of scientific rationalism, nature was further deconsecrated and subverted to the status of raw material, expendable, disposable and seemingly unlimited. From a teetering pinnacle of ‘human superiority’ we listen, with 21st Century ears to voices of nature redolent with warning. Vanishing species, climate change, nature deficit disorder,⁶ environmentally related diseases and disasters nudge insistently at our understanding of politics, commerce, and education.

Has language, the once familiar whisper of the elegant and enigmatic relationship between humans and place, fallen victim to the inexorable climb of our species? Is one of the most important tasks of educators in this time of environmental decimation, to allow children to reestablish contact with the tender relics of wilderness without prejudice or prescription? Montessori said, “follow the child.” Are we allowing a fluent metaphoric abundance in which the child may follow her nature into the nature of the world?

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The Mindset Mindset—What We Miss by Focusing on Kids’ Attitudes (by Alfie Kohn)

The emphasis on effort in Dweck’s “growth mindset” is most notable for the larger questions it discourages us from asking.

One of the most popular ideas in education these days can be summarized in a single sentence — a fact that may help to account for its popularity. Here’s the sentence: Kids tend to fare better when they regard intelligence and other abilities not as fixed traits that they either have or lack, but as attributes that can be improved through effort.

In a series of monographs over many years and in a book published in 2000, psychologist Carol Dweck used the label “incremental theory” to describe the self-fulfilling belief that one can become smarter. Rebranding it more catchily as “growth mindset” allowed her to recycle the idea a few years later in a best-selling book for general readers and an on-line “step by step” instructional program called Brainology® that is said to “raise student achievement by helping them develop a growth mindset” (\$6,000 for the all-inclusive kit).

By now, in fact, the phrase “growth mindset” has approached the status of a cultural meme and is repeated with uncritical enthusiasm by educators and a growing number of parents, managers, and journalists — to the point that one half expects supporters to start referring to their smartphones as “effortphones.” But, like the buzz over the related concept known as “grit” (a form of self-discipline involving long-term persistence), there’s something disconcerting about how the idea has been used — and about the broader assumption that what students most need is a “mindset” adjustment.

Unlike grit, which, as I’ve argued elsewhere, is driven more by conservative ideology than by solid research, Dweck’s basic thesis is supported by decades’ worth of good data. It’s not just the habit of attributing your failure to being stupid that holds you back but also the habit of attributing your success to being smart. Regardless of their track record, kids tend to do better in the future if they believe that how well they did in the past was primarily a result of effort. But “how well they did” at what?

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The Miracle of Light (continued from Page 9)

When I asked the six year-old how she felt when she emerged from her ‘butterfly trance’ she smiled, raised her arms in a sunburst and said, “that’s why “butterfly” has a Y in it.” She stood there, the 25th letter of the alphabet in human form, arms uplifted to the sky, watching a member of this recently endangered species chart its way South.⁷

And I thought with a mixture of wistful melancholy and hope -

‘This is language’.

1 Audrey Sillick, “Children at Home in the World: A Sense of Connection,” *Early Childhood Connections: Journal of Music and Movement-Based Learning*, Vol. 5, No. 3, Summer 1999.

- 2 David Sobel, *Beyond Ecophobia: Reclaiming the Heart of Nature Education*, Great Barrington, MA: The Orion Society, 1996.
- 3 Randy White, “Young Children’s Relationship with Nature,” *Taproot*, Fall/Winter Vol. 16, No. 2; Coalition for Education in the Outdoors, Cortland, New York, 2006.
- 4 Richard Louv, “How Nature Can Transform Education: Beyond the landmark ‘no child left inside act,’” *Psychology Today*, Sept. 22 2008. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/people-in-nature/200809/how-nature-can-transform-education>
- 5 Leonard Shlain, *The Alphabet Versus the Goddess: The Conflict Between Word and Image*, Viking Press, 1998.
- 6 Richard Louv, *The Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder*, Algonquin Books, 2008.
- 7 <http://monarch-butterfly.info/Endangered.html>

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The problem with sweeping, generic claims about the power of attitudes or beliefs isn't just a risk of overstating the benefits but a tendency to divert attention from the nature of the tasks themselves: How valuable are they, and who gets to decide whether they must be done? Dweck is a research psychologist, not an educator, so her inattention to the particulars of classroom assignments is understandable. Unfortunately, even some people who are educators would rather convince students they need to adopt a more positive attitude than address the quality of the curriculum (what the students are being taught) or the pedagogy (how they're being taught).

An awful lot of schooling still consists of making kids cram forgettable facts into short-term memory. And the kids themselves are seldom consulted about what they're doing, even though genuine excitement about (and proficiency at) learning rises when they're brought into the process, invited to search for answers to their own questions and engage in extended projects. Outstanding classrooms and schools — with a rich documentary record of their successes — show that the quality of education itself can be improved. But books, articles, TED talks, and teacher-training sessions devoted to the wonders of adopting a growth mindset rarely bother to ask whether the curriculum is meaningful, whether the pedagogy is thoughtful, or whether the assessment of students' learning is authentic (as opposed to defining success merely as higher scores on dreadful standardized tests).

Small wonder that this idea goes down so easily. All we have to do is get kids to adopt the right attitude, to think optimistically about their ability to handle whatever they've been given to do. Even if, quite frankly, it's not worth doing.

The most common bit of concrete advice offered by Dweck and others enamored of the growth mindset is to praise kids for their effort ("You tried really hard") rather than for their ability ("You're really smart") in order to get them to persevere. (Google the words "praise" and "effort" together: more than 70 million hits.) But the first problem with this seductively simple script change is that praising children for their effort carries problems of its own, as several studies have confirmed: It can communicate

that they're really not very capable and therefore unlikely to succeed at future tasks. ("If you're complimenting me just for trying hard, I must really be a loser.")

The more serious concern, however, is that what's really problematic is praise, *per se*. It's a verbal reward, an extrinsic inducement, and, like other rewards, is often construed by the recipient as manipulation. A substantial research literature has shown that the kids typically end up less interested in whatever they were rewarded or praised for doing, because now their goal is just to get the reward or praise. As I've explained in books and articles, the most salient feature of a positive judgment is not that it's positive but that it's a judgment; it's more about controlling than encouraging. Moreover, praise communicates that our acceptance of a child comes with strings attached: Our approval is conditional on the child's continuing to impress us or do what we say. What kids actually need from us, along with non-judgmental feedback and guidance, is unconditional support — the antithesis of a patronizing pat on the head for having jumped through our hoops.

The solution, therefore, goes well beyond a focus on what's being praised — that is, merely switching from commending ability to commending effort. Praise for the latter is likely to be experienced as every bit as controlling and conditional as praise for the former. Tellingly, the series of Dweck's studies on which she still relies to support the idea of praising effort, which she conducted with Claudia Mueller in the 1990s, included no condition in which students received nonevaluative feedback. Other researchers have found that just such a response — information about how they've done without a judgment attached — is preferable to any sort of praise.

Thus, the challenge for a teacher, parent, or manager is to consider a moratorium on verbal doggie biscuits, period. We need to attend to deeper differences: between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, and between "doing to" and "working with" strategies. Unfortunately, we're discouraged from thinking about these more meaningful distinctions — and

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from questioning the whole carrot-and-stick model (of which praise is an example) — when we're assured that it's sufficient just to offer a different kind of carrot.

Here's another part of the bigger picture that's eclipsed when we get too caught up in the "growth vs. fixed" (or "incremental vs. entity") dichotomy: If students are preoccupied with how well they're doing in school, then their interest in what they're doing may suffer. A 2010 study found that when students whose self-worth hinges on their performance face the prospect of failure, it doesn't help for them to adopt a growth mindset. In fact, those who did so were even more likely to give themselves an excuse for screwing up, a strategy known as "self-handicapping," as compared to those with the dreaded fixed mindset.

Even when a growth mindset doesn't make things worse, it can help only so much if students have been led — by things like grades, tests, and, worst of all, competition — to become more focused on achievement than on the learning itself. Training them to think about effort more than ability does nothing to address the fact, confirmed by several educational psychologists, that too much emphasis on performance undermines intellectual engagement. Just as with praise, betting everything on a shift from ability to effort may miss what matters most.

And this brings us to the biggest blind spot of all — the whole idea of focusing on the mindsets of individuals. Dweck's work nestles comfortably in a long self-help tradition, the American can-do, just-adopt-a-positive-attitude spirit ("I think I can, I think I can..."). The message of that tradition has always been to adjust yourself to conditions as you find them because those conditions are immutable; all you can do is decide on the spirit in which to approach them. Ironically, the more we occupy ourselves with getting kids to attribute outcomes to their own effort, the more we communicate that the conditions they face are, well, fixed.

Social psychologists use the term "fundamental attribution error" to mean paying so much attention to personality and attitudes that we overlook how profoundly the social environment affects what we do and who we are. Their point is that it's simply inaccurate to make too much of a fuss about things like mindsets, but there are also political implications to doing so.

Why, for example, do relatively few young women choose to study or work in the fields of math and science? Is it because of entrenched sexism and "the way the science career structure works"? Well, to someone sold on Dweck's formula, the answer is no: it's "all a matter of mindset." We need only "shift widespread perceptions over to the 'growth mindset'" — that is, to the perceptions of girls and women who are just trapped by their own faulty thinking. This is similar to the perspective that encourages us to blame a "culture of poverty" in the inner city rather than examine economic and political barriers — a very appealing explanation to those who benefit from those barriers and would rather fault their victims for failing to pull themselves up by their mindset.

Having spent a few decades watching one idea after another light up the night sky and then flame out — in the field of education and in the culture at large — I realize this pattern often has less to do with the original (promising) idea than with the way it has been oversimplified and poorly implemented. Thus, I initially thought it was unfair to blame Dweck for wince-worthy attempts to sell her growth mindset as a panacea and to give it a conservative spin. Perhaps her message had been distorted by the sort of people who love to complain about grade inflation, trophies for showing up, and the inflated self-esteem of "these kids today." In the late 1990s, for example, right-wing media personality John Stossel snapped up a paper of Dweck's about praise, portraying it as an overdue endorsement of the value of old-fashioned toil — just what was needed in an era of "protecting kids from failure." Their scores stink but they feel good about themselves anyway — and here's a study that proves "excellence comes from effort"!

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This sort of attack on spoiled kids and permissive (or excessive) parenting is nothing new — and most of its claims dissolve on close inspection. Alas, Dweck not only has failed to speak out against, or distance herself from, this tendentious use of her ideas but has put a similar spin on them herself. She has allied herself with gritmeister Angela Duckworth and made Stossel-like pronouncements about the underappreciated value of hard work and the perils of making things too easy for kids, pronouncements that wouldn't be out of place at the Republican national convention or in a small-town Sunday sermon. Indeed, Dweck has endorsed a larger conservative narrative, claiming that “the self-esteem movement led parents to think they could hand their children self-esteem on a silver platter by telling them how smart and talented they are.” (Of course, most purveyors of that narrative would be just as contemptuous of praising kids for how hard they'd tried, which is what Dweck recommends.)

Moreover, as far as I can tell, she has never criticized a fix-the-kid, ignore-the-structure mentality or raised concerns about the “bunch o' facts” traditionalism in schools. Along with many other education critics, I'd argue that the appropriate student response to much of what's assigned isn't “By golly, with enough effort, I can do this!” but “Why the hell should anyone have to do this?” Dweck, like Duckworth, is conspicuously absent from the ranks of those critics.

It isn't entirely coincidental that someone who is basically telling us that attitudes matter more than structures, or that persistence is a good in itself, has also bought into a conservative social critique. But why have so many educators who don't share that sensibility endorsed a focus on mindset (or grit) whose premises and implications they'd likely find troubling on reflection?

I'm not suggesting we go back to promoting an innate, fixed, “entity” theory of intelligence and talent, which, as Dweck points out, can leave people feeling helpless and inclined to give up. But the real alternative to that isn't a different attitude about oneself; it's a willingness to go beyond individual attitudes, to realize that no mindset is a magic elixir that can dissolve the toxicity of structural arrangements. Until those arrangements have been changed, mindset will get you only so far. And too much focus on mindset discourages us from making such changes.

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Turtles and Caterpillars by *Claudia Langlois*

The week before school starts is always a time of reparation, organizing, creating new lessons, ensuring the classroom is just so in anticipation of a new year beginning; yet there is sadness that summer is over. I too was getting the classroom and school prepared for a new year, except a few things got in the way, turtles and caterpillars.

Where to start? They are both meshed into the same two weeks, beginning August 31. I will start with turtles, specifically snapping turtles. I live on Rice Lake, a prime location for turtles. Yearly, my friend and I assist in the preservation of the turtles' nests. We look for signs of disturbances, find the nests and then put dog hair and chicken wire on top of them to deter the predators from digging them up. These turtles are a species at risk. Only about 10% of the hatchlings survive. Some of the eggs do not hatch, some succumb to predators eating their eggs and others are run over by vehicles. As they get older they are hunted and poached. Snapping turtles mature slowly and the female starts to lay eggs at the age of 17 to 19 years. Many turtles do not reach maturity. A lucky turtle can live 70 years or more, swimming around, sunning on logs, eating decaying animals and plant life.

The area my friend and I observe has over 50 nests of snapping, northern map and painted turtle nests, on a private causeway that leads to an island. This year road resurfacing was to take place and it was happening after Labour Day weekend; the time when the turtles begin to hatch. Depending on the weather the hatching of nests can take a week, or it can be slow and last into early October. Regardless, the resurfacing of the road would disturb the nests and likely kill them. What to do? I said we could be really crazy and dig the nests up and move them, the reply was, "Are you kidding!" "Yes," I said.

As we Montessorians know how to be proactive and work towards completing a goal and mission, the bull had to be taken by the horns and phone calls needed to be made. How can this road work be halted until after all the turtles have hatched? It was only 3 weeks to wait, but the islanders wanted a road without potholes. The asphalt needed heat to meld and the work was going to be completed as soon as possible, delaying the work would be a

waste of money. We had to stop this. Calls to the Ministry of Natural Resources, Ontario Naturalists, the local conservation areas, waterway commissions, emails, phone messages and contacts were made. Responses were given, "Sorry there is nothing we can do, if there was more notice, perhaps this area could have been protected." Then I decided to reply to an email from the Toronto Zoo and called them up. It was discovered that a special permit could be granted by the MNR to legally dig up the turtle nests. Biologists would be needed in order to get the permit and a name of an Environmental Professor was given. I contacted the professor, he said he would send a group of grad students studying reptiles and amphibians when needed. We found somebody who wanted to create a habitat for snapping turtles. Volunteers who were interested in assisting were recruited and on September 3, a day was spent digging up turtle nests. If things went array, the Turtle Trauma Centre was available to assist if needed. The universe had provided.



On September 3rd I arrived at 7:00 a.m., it was hot and humid. It had rained the evening before and the conditions were ideal. The turtles had already started hatching. I saw some hatchlings who had been run over by cars, seagulls and herons were lurking overhead and in the water. I watched turtles coming out of their nests, crawling up through a hole that was 3cm in diameter. I assisted these turtles, opening the

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hole wider, only to discover that there were 30 – 40 more turtles also digging and pushing their way through dirt, gravel, rocks, and egg shells. They had obstacles: their claws were only about 1 mm long, their heads pulled back as far as they could into their shell, they were vulnerable, about the size of a twoonie, and they were cute! They were placed into a bucket and released into the lake. I discovered another hatched nest and this one was a double nest, it had 18 northern map turtles, and about 36 snapping turtles, which had hatched side by side. It was unbelievable to witness!



As the day progressed, the volunteers and grad students arrived and they began to open up nests. The eggs were gently removed only to reveal turtles coming out of their eggs. Some had their egg shell on their carapace, and some still had the yolk sack on the plastron and these needed to be placed in incubation. Others were placed in a bucket, given time to recuperate and once they began moving, they were taken to the lake to swim to a greater existence. Some nests had turtles who were half hatched, these went into an incubator and they were set free four days



later. There were unhatched eggs and these were placed onto moist peat moss and later transported and relocated to their new habitat on a sandy shore. All relocated nests hatched. A total of 47 nests were found and redistributed. The turtles had been saved.

A few more nests hatched during the long weekend, the road was resurfaced and some nests hatched even after the work was done.

The people on the island drove past, likely thinking that we were crazy, perhaps we were, yet the support that accompanied this craziness was worth it. It re-



mind me of the crews that came to observe ET, not as drastic, yet there were a number of inexperienced naturalists on the causeway, digging with their hands, on their knees, protecting something that was valuable to them. Only one person from the island assisted and that was my friend, the others ignored or they complimented the work that was being done. In the end, peace was reached. There was no conflict amongst neighbours, no media was sent out, the universe had provided as the Cosmos knew this was important. The feeling of despair had turned to relief and happiness amongst everyone. As I turned to look away from the lake to the marsh, there was a snapping turtle hatchling being pursued by a sunfish. It was swimming for its life as it swam towards shore and the fish veered to the left. Another turtle had survived that moment. The moral of this story, don't give up on what you believe in, you never know what will hatch out of nothing. If it's meant to be it will happen, if it doesn't, you did everything you could to make it work and the universe must have

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had a greater plan. For these turtles, they had to have been in the universe's plan. Yet not without the help from all the organizations who had been patient with phone calls, emails and urgency, they understood and that was awesome. There was compassion. I returned to school, inspired by what happened and set up the classroom more quickly than I ever have. No turtle pace for me.

Caterpillars

August 29, the first two monarch caterpillars were found on one of the school's milkweed bushes, 5 cm long. Later that day another was found, 2 cm long. I went to get milkweed, happened to glance under the leaf and there was a monarch caterpillar 2 mm long! It must have recently hatched, were we ever excited!! Into the prepared enclosure they went, joined by the 5th caterpillar found the following day.



This is the story of the 2 mm caterpillar. This tiny guy could not be found in the enclosure, the others were spotted and in 9 days this little guy grew to be 5 cm long and 5 mm wide. The others had spun their chrysalis by the time Tiny made its J formation, a whole 9 days later. On September 8 at 10:12 a.m. some of the children watched Tiny spin the chrysalis, the first enclosure was completed in a vibrant green within 3 minutes, then the second thicker layer formed in about 4 minutes, and there he transformed, as did his roommates. The first 2 monarchs hatched 5 days after Tiny spun, and they were released. I felt like a magician opening the cage. One flew out and landed on a maple tree, the other needed assistance with my finger to get out of the enclosure, it circled the school yard and returned to the golden rod and asters waiting to feed him. The children's faces were lit! A week later the other 2 monarchs were released, they flew away instantly.

As I write this, Tiny has just hatched an hour ago, September 21 at 6:12 p.m. I watched him come out of the chrysalis. His wings are side by side, each is 3 cm by 3 cm, and 30 minutes later they are 5 cm by 3 cm, still side by side. He's hanging upside down now, hanging onto the transparent chrysalis. Tomorrow he will be released to begin the arduous journey south.



It has been a phenomenal experience for the children to witness. Daily they come to check on them, bringing in their parents, looking at them during work transition, proposing questions that resonate in awe, the monarchs have become a part of the school's history, they are part of each child's history and it has been beautiful.



Somebody wonders how the caramel gets placed into the Caramilk Bar? How does the larva transform into a butterfly or an egg into a turtle. This is life's great mystery. A mystery that perhaps one of the children will solve. Until then it is based in AWE, wonder and the question of who came first. The chicken or the egg?