

Term 2 2024

A warm welcome to our new whanau and we hope you enjoy all the amazing gifts that come with the choice of a Montessori education. For classroom and other updates, please keep an eye on our FB pages;

<https://www.facebook.com/montessoriatarataki> and <https://www.facebook.com/montessoriabellevue>

TMET Trustees are a collection of passionate parents who give freely of their time and expertise to ensure that Montessori education continues to thrive in the Bay of Plenty. We welcome Lizzie Earles, a Montessori@Arataki parent, onto the Trust joining Kent Hazlehurst, Karin Copestake, Amanda Lowry, Donna Eckstein, Julie Fisher-Somervell and Michael Roe as Trustees. TMET is grateful to both host schools, Arataki and Bellevue School, School Leadership Teams and Boards for the ongoing support of operating Montessori environments within a state school. A shout out also to our amazing dedicated and passionate teachers who are continuing their studies with MOTU Montessori and give so much to our tamariki and wider community.

TMET is grateful to receive donations in a timely manner and to those whanau who have payment plans in place. This allows the Trust to future plan for your children. A reminder that all donations paid to TMET are tax deductible. Please see the below link <https://www.ird.govt.nz/income-tax/income-tax-for-individuals/individual-tax-credits/tax-credits-for-donations>

There is diversity within the Montessori community in Aotearoa and worldwide, with each school being unique reflecting its interpretation and practice of Montessori philosophy, the staff and parent-family community, the facilities and resources available and the vision of the centre or school. TMET's vision is to provide Montessori education to meet the needs of its community. Choosing an education for your child is one of the most important decisions you make as a parent. Being informed about your choices helps you to make good decisions for your family, your child, and their future. To complete the full 3-year Montessori preschool programme, a child starts around 3 and finishes around age 6. We believe a child gets the full benefit of Montessori pre school by staying until age 6. However, in response to the changing needs of our community we are now open to families enrolling their child earlier. Please email trustadmin@tmet.org.nz if you are interested in enrolling your child before age 6.

The Journey of Discovery event at Montessori@Bellevue in March was a huge success. One of the best ways you can support your child is to come along and get involved in the events we run. These events are designed to be fun, informative and open to the whole community. Come, learn and grow with your community. Please keep an eye on FB, Hero and your inbox for information on up and coming events.



Everyone who attended the Journey of Discovery loved the experience and found it enriching in so many ways, they thought they were coming to learn about what their child does all day, and instead they learnt so much about themselves! Thank you to Whaea Vicki - Tumuaiki Arataki School for coming along to join the learning.

Normalisation: By Donna Eckstein, Montessori@Bellevue

Whaea Donna has been doing some study on the Montessori phrase "Normalisation". Thank you Donna for sharing your mahi with us below:

What is normalisation? Normalisation in the Montessori Environment refers to the focus, concentration, and independence of the children, by their own choice. It means they have acquired the internal freedom to initiate work, be independent, and adhere (by choice) to the rules of the environment

Normalisation was the most significant outcome of Maria Montessori's work and research. It is the alignment of the difficulty of the task and the skill set available. In essence it is exactly the right amount of challenge.

Vygotsky would call this "The zone of proximal development."

Maria Montessori said, "The child does not work in order to move on or in order to become intelligent. He works to adapt to his environment. It is essential that he has many experiences in the environment if he is to do this. " "It is not that man must develop in order to work, but that man must work in order to develop.

Dr Montessori's main discovery was the reality of the child's true nature; the normalised child being in complete harmony with their entire environment. She discovered that this new normalised child would consistently emerge as a result of applying her method with children. Montessori later described this process of fundamental change in the child as normalisation- the central psychological event that defines the essential meaning, value, and purpose of the Montessori method.

Maria Montessori had a firm belief, based on her strong scientific practice of observation. She believed that she could take 50 children and train them without the interference of anyone else. In fact when she was approached with this proposition she knew this was her dream come true. This was a chance to prove that all students can be normalised. Maria was given one empty, cheerless room inside a tenement house with no other support. She would take 50 extremely poor, timid, and neglected ragamuffins, place them in the best environment she could create, and see what they could do.

What does it look like in a school setting?

She focussed firmly on ensuring the environment for these children was set up in order for them to gain independence. The furniture was set up for the 'command of movement', everything was placed at a child's height. The furniture was light enough for them to move around by themselves. She insisted that at her school if a chair fell over noisily, a child would learn to pick it up quietly. The children would, she said, acquire grace and agility in moving their tables and be free to place them wherever they wished. This would develop in the students' independence.

Maria Montessori believed that a teacher should not teach the children, but should direct them. In her schools she used the title of 'Directress'. The directress showed the children how to use the materials, then let them work on their own. She must sit and watch, Maria said, "like the astronomer who sits immovable before the telescope while the worlds whirl through space." Maria wanted to hear a teacher say, "The children are now working as though I did not exist."

What are the three stages of normalisation?

1. They have freedom of choice.
2. Independence to choose what they are interested in.
3. Concentration, we as the guides must become guardians of this concentration.



M@A Parent Information Evening

Montessori@Arataki hosted our termly Parent Information Evening in week 2. These evenings are designed for whanau considering Montessori education for the primary years. The evenings are informative and allow parents the opportunity to look around our environment, talk to the teachers and hear directly from the experts - the children themselves. We had a full house and the children were articulate and spoke with confidence to a room full of adults - some who asked tricky questions! Our next Parent Information Evening will be held in August at Montessori@Bellevue.

Physics in the M@B Classroom

Lucas and Jeremy saw some cardboard and wanted to build a sleigh to go down the hill in.

Of course we needed a friction lesson first in order to consider the structure and factors of their sleigh ...



"It is a fact that anyone who lives with children, anyone who knows how to approach them with love, will always learn new things." - Dr. Maria Montessori



Why do larger classroom communities work so well with Montessori education?

Large classroom numbers with strong Montessori guides lead to greater outcomes for Montessori children.

Would you choose a small classroom of 20 students or a larger one of 30 students for your child?

If you are like most parents, the answer seems obvious: smaller class sizes are always better, right? At least that's the common perception: we've all read about teachers' unions and parents protesting increasing class sizes during budget cuts, and deploring the decline in learning that happens when one teacher has to manage 35, or more, students in a mainstream school class.

Class size and traditional education: smaller is likely (somewhat) better.

One of the key appeals of private schools, and one selling point of high-quality preschool programmes, is smaller class sizes and, for traditional programmes, the research seems to suggest that smaller class sizes positively correlates with better learning outcomes.

When you consider how a traditional school programme works, this makes intuitive sense. In a traditional classroom, a teacher directs the learning of all students in a single-age environment. Much of the time, the entire class is working on similar learning goals: they all work on addition in maths, or study how to write a paragraph in English/Literacy and the adult's role is to transmit knowledge: a teacher in the traditional sense of the term. They're also in charge of checking and correcting student's work, and spending a significant amount of time on managing their classroom, providing motivation and validation to students, calling students to attention, mediating conflicts, and so on.

With one teacher often transmitting uniform knowledge to a large class, all at the same time, fewer children mean the teacher has more time to spend one on one with each child. It also means that in a group of students, individual students will be less likely to be "left behind". Also, with fewer children, there's a lower likelihood of some children distracting the teacher away from teaching as they need to manage these children while teaching the entire class. This is what the research seems to indicate: a significant reduction in class size (say, from 40 to 27 or from 22 to 17 in some of the studies) does improve achievement (in the range of three months of learning progress over a four-year period), assuming the quality of the teachers stays the same.

Class size in Montessori: bigger (within reason) is better

Montessori functions very differently from traditional education - with the initially surprising result that larger classroom communities at the pre-school (ages 3-6) and primary level are generally recognized by Montessorians to function better than smaller class sizes. (Note that the same does not apply for infant and toddler classrooms, where student-teacher ratios are purposefully in the 1:3 and 1:6 range respectively.)

Here's what Dr. Maria Montessori said about class size:

"We consider that in its best condition, the class should have between 28-35 children, but there may be even more in number."



What is it about a Montessori setting that can make bigger classes work better than smaller classes? Here are a few points to consider:

The role of materials and the Montessori adult act as a guide, not a traditional teacher. In traditional education, the teacher teaches.

In Montessori, the teacher introduces the child to a concept through a presentation (e.g., long division in Primary), or offers thought provoking information (e.g., the Great Lessons in Primary). This lesson is just the beginning! Once a child has received a lesson, they learn the skill or content through independent work with the materials. For example, a primary child may challenge themselves with more mathematical operations. Primary students may study the Fundamental Needs of Man materials, and do research on how people obtained shelter, food, clothing and transportation with books in the classroom library (or books gathered at an excursion to a local public library).

The materials usually have a built-in control of error. This control of error enables the child to correct their own mistakes and move on, without needing the help of a teacher to check their work and tell them how to fix it. Thus, in Montessori, the adult acts as a guide who establishes the contact between the child and a material/topic that will offer the child an experience through which they will learn.

The role of peers in the mixed-age Montessori community.

In traditional education, where children are in classes with same-age peers, the opportunity for peer-to-peer learning and mentorship is limited. When all the children in a class are the same age, the traditional system requires teachers to “teach down” as abilities naturally vary between children. This pushes children too fast in some areas while leaving them bored in others.

In Montessori, we purposefully create mixed-age classroom communities: from pre-school children ages 3-6 are in one class; during Primary, 6-9 year olds are joined with 9-12 year olds. This allows children to learn from each other, which benefits both the younger and the older children.

Younger children can get help or even receive lessons from older peers. This helps with motivation, as the 4 year-old intuitively understands that they can and will soon read as well as their 5 year-old peer. It can also improve teaching: an 8-year-old who recently learned to master abstract addition into the thousands is often surprisingly capable at untangling problems in a 7 year-old’s thinking about maths as they just overcame the same challenges a few months ago themselves!

Older children who give lessons, or edit the work of younger children, experience the benefit of built-in reviews of what they have already learned. For instance, whereas in traditional schooling children will most likely only cover adding fractions with different denominators once at age nine, in Montessori they’re likely to be called upon at age 10 or 11 to help a younger peer to master this concept. By explaining what they know to their younger peers, older students are actively reviewing their knowledge. They discover any gaps in their own understanding (in a non-threatening, non-pressure charge way - much better than failing a retest!), and they can then get the help they need from their teacher. Teaching their younger peers also improves the older children’s confidence: they experience just how capable and knowledgeable they have become with all the hard work they put in during the preceding years.

In the Montessori primary class, children learn that when they need help, they should ask themselves first, then a peer, then an older or more skilled mentor. Only when all that fails does the teacher get called upon. This reliance on oneself and one’s own initiative to ask a peer produces great learning outcomes—and, as a side benefit, it also strengthens children’s leadership skills!

The presence of concentration and child-initiated, intrinsically motivated work in Montessori.

In a traditional school setting, motivation often happens through extrinsic rewards and punishments—everything from gold star charts and classroom pizza parties, to bad results and different resits. One of the teacher’s roles is to dole out the rewards and monitor behaviour to impose extrinsic discipline (e.g., getting children to not talk to peers and instead sit still and pay attention)—in a word, to get children to obey.

In Montessori, our goal is to connect each child with work that challenges him or her at just the right level - work that the child eagerly completes without outside incentives or direct supervision provided by the adults in the room. When you observe in a well-established Montessori classroom, you'll see children deeply focused on chosen activities. You'll also see them move about the room purposefully, working together in small groups, discussing their work in low voices. They'll sit at little tables, or curl up with a book on a beanbag, or sit at a rug on the floor with some big work. Because the work is meaningful, because the children gain joy from doing it, because their natural needs are met (they can talk, they can move!), the teacher supports the development of internal discipline and has more time to present lessons. In addition, while a Montessori 'guide' instructs one group of children, the others don't just sit idly, daydreaming or doing worksheets. Instead, they continue to learn and progress independently!

It may sound counter-intuitive, but to reap the full benefits of peer learning and independent exploration, it is often advantageous to have bigger class sizes. Too many adults in the room leads children to look towards their teachers too much for guidance when they could help themselves or learn from their peers. Also, teachers with too small a group of children may be tempted to teach too much - and become more like a traditional teacher, rather than the Montessori guide we want them to be.

The importance of space for materials.

A Montessori classroom needs a certain footprint to accommodate all the materials that must be in a quality Montessori environment - and all those materials take up space. In part, this is why Montessori schools generally don't like classrooms of fewer than 20 students, and aim for classes of 24 or more children. Rooms sized to make a class of 20 economically viable can feel cramped and can stifle children's free movement. It is also why large 30+ student rooms often have a more open, airy, inviting feel. There is still only one set of material of each type (with the exception of a few often-used materials, such as the maths Stamp Game and the Small Bead Frame). With a larger footprint, rooms feel more spacious, even if the space per child remains the same. Larger rooms may also have space for extra items, like a sofa for lounging, a music corner, or a free-standing kitchen work table that just might not fit into a 20 student room.

The training and preparation of the Montessori teacher

The research on class sizes in traditional schools often finds initiatives to reduce class size have limited impact on student achievement because new, less-experienced teachers are brought in. In fact, even in traditional settings, some researchers suggest that larger class sizes, with better qualified, more experienced and higher paid teachers can lead to better outcomes.

TMET fully supports all of our teachers to be well trained, with an MOTU/NAMC Montessori credential or equivalent. Many experienced teachers (whom we like to call "master teachers") are eager to teach in larger classrooms. They recognize that an established, balanced class, 30 or even 36 students can be better for children than a smaller class. That said, Montessori units within mainstream schools may need to adhere to MoE guidelines.

Whether your child is in a smaller, new classroom, or larger, established room at M@A or M@B, we hope understanding Montessori better helps you appreciate the great experience you are giving your child by investing in their education. Montessori materials, mixed ages and the three-year-cycle of learning are fundamentally different from traditional education, and our team ensures that children receive the benefit of the unique Montessori approach in every classroom.

Janine has been delving into the role “Cosmic Education” plays within the Montessori philosophy. Thank you Janine for sharing your insight below:

When first encountering the term “**Cosmic Education**” there is often an assumption that education is all connected to the study of stars and space. Within Montessori, Cosmic Education refers to how everything is connected, much like a giant spider's web!

Maria Montessori recognised that the children of the second plane (ages 6-12) sought a different kind of order from the control and order of the Absorbent Mind in the first plane (age 0-6). The ‘Reasoning Mind’ of the second plane desires a cataloguing system for the universe, where the relationships between elements could be identified and given meaning through their relationships to the universe as a whole. Cosmic Education is a framework that gives the children an understanding of the interconnectedness of the universe and also their part within it. This framework stems from the great stories that Maria Montessori created for the children of the second plane. The stories follow a progression and order; How the World Began, Life Comes to Earth, the Story of Humans, the Story of Math (including technology), and the Story of Language and Communication. Rather than looking at specific items in isolation she devised a system where the children were given the whole picture and invited to explore the details that were interesting to them.

Adults within Montessori are often referred to as guides, their primary role being to guide the children to a deeper understanding of the areas that they are drawn to. Often children in the second plane love to study animals. As guides we encourage and invite investigations that will broaden their understanding, for example, evolution of the species, habitat requirements for survival, historical human influences upon this species both past and possible future, understanding earth’s formations and different elements that are connected to their chosen animal.

Oral language plays a significant part in this. Humans have been storytellers from the beginning of time and it is how our vocabulary grows. We have myths and legends to explain how things came to be, as well as scientific understandings. We grow both our descriptive language as well as our scientific vocabulary within these conversations. We can discuss the cause and effect of actions and events, offering different perspectives or alternative responses. In each of these discussions it is important to listen and clarify each other's thoughts. In this way we can all be richer in our understanding, vocabulary, and the way we act and respond to each other. The ultimate aim of Maria Montessori’s Cosmic Education is to give the children the tools and understanding to create a peaceful and harmonious world, allowing everyone to reach their full potential. In the twenty-first century the skills of peaceful communication, global awareness, and conscientious cooperation are the key to our wellbeing now and in the future. As Doctor Montessori states: “The child is both a hope and a promise for mankind.”



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