CHAPTER SEVEN

Peace as a Premise for Learning: Maria Montessori's Educational Philosophy

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MARIA MONTESSORI'S philosophy of education is much more than a set of ideas about curriculum and instruction. Rather, what has come to be known as the Montessori Method is a comprehensive, highly elaborated, and fully integrated system of intellectual, social, and moral development. Although she is perhaps best known for her approach to early childhood education, Montessori education spans human development from infancy to adulthood.[1] And while peace is central to her educational vision at every stage of development, it is her design for elementary learning that most vividly brings that vision to action.

It was during the 1930s as Europe experienced economic depression and saw the rise of totalitarianism that Montessori spoke most passionately and eloquently about the relationship between education and peace. In her lectures, delivered from 1932 to 1939, then collected and first published in 1949 in *Education and Peace* (1972), she outlined her optimistic argument that an education truly responsive to the child's psychological and spiritual development would bring an end to war. Later, while in India during World War II, she elaborated that argument into a fully integrated program for the elementary age child, which was published in *To Educate the Human Potential* (1967b). In the present chapter, we focus on Montessori's idea of the elementary curriculum, known as "cosmic education," that emerged at that

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time. We begin with an overview of her life, highlighting those experiences that gave rise to her ideas about peace and education; in the second section we outline three core constructs fundamental to her vision for elementary education; the third section describes her philosophy in action by illustrating a contemporary elementary classroom; and, finally, we speculate about the import of her ideas for educators in the 21st century.

OVERVIEW OF MONTESSORI'S LIFE AND IDEAS

Maria Montessori (1870–1952) lived during a period marked by tremendous political, economic, and social upheaval.[2] She was born in the year of Italy's unification, and her youth and early adulthood were spent in a country seeking to establish itself as a modern nation-state on a par with its European neighbors.[3] Montessori, an only child, spent her early childhood in Chiaravalle, an agricultural town in the coastal province of Ancona on the Adriatic Sea. When she was 5, the family moved to Rome, where she attended school. While anecdotal accounts suggest that Montessori was not a particularly gifted elementary student, her desire to complete her secondary education, study engineering, and later enter a college of medicine was a radical departure from attendance at a conventional finishing school, which most middle-class young women experienced.

Montessori received training as a physician—itself a revolutionary act. Her subsequent academic study at the university provided her with an understanding of scientific thought as well as an acute capacity for empirical inquiry. During her formative university years, the ideas and ideals of socialism shaped the university's intellectual milieu. Her mother's influence and support along with Montessori's intellectual training led to Montessori's graduating in 1896 as a young woman with a radical, progressive commitment to improving the lives of those living in poverty or suffering neglect.

Montessori Steps into the World

In her early years as a physician (1895–1900), Montessori held an appointment at the university hospital while also operating a private practice. As she practiced medicine among the poor in Rome, she was drawn to the condition of those children and youth who were called "feebleminded" or "deficient" and sent to asylums where even basic needs went unmet. Her belief that these children were capable of far more led her to study anthropology, educational philosophy, and pedagogy. The work of the French physicians and psychologists Jean-Marc Gaspard Itard and Edouard Séguin was particularly influential. Both men devoted their careers to working with people

with disabilities and it was from this orientation that Montessori launched her own work with children. From Itard, Montessori adopted the practice of studying children's activity in their environment and then adjusting the environment based on those observations. Séguin, a student of Itard's, had begun developing instructional apparatus specifically for mentally impaired children. In addition to placing a focus on didactic materials, Montessori adopted Séguin's developmental orientation toward learning environments. That is, Séguin observed that the environment itself should be customized to the developmental needs of children at various stages. In Montessori's hands, the notion of a developmentally responsive environment, filled with carefully constructed didactic materials, became the "prepared environment," one of the cornerstones of the Montessori Method.

In 1906, at the age of 36, she became involved in an urban renewal effort in San Lorenzo, a poor quarter in Rome. There she opened the first school designed for "normal" children, and she named it the Casa dei Bambini, or "Children's House." The well-publicized success of her experiments in the Casa was a decisive turning point in her life. In 1907 she left the practice of medicine and devoted the remainder of her life to education.

The spread of the Montessori movement was swift and international in its scope. Starting in 1909, Maria Montessori began to travel the world giving lectures and demonstrations on her educational method. During this period she visited nearly every continent and established official residential status in Barcelona (1915–1936), England and Amsterdam (1936–1939), India (1939–1946), and again Amsterdam (1946–1952), thus giving rise to her claim that she was a "citizen of the world."[4] In 1909, confident that her method would have universal appeal and with the support of a wealthy patron, Montessori wrote, in one month, *Il Metodo della Pedagogia Scientifica applicato all'educazione infantile nelle Case dei Bambini*, whose English translation (Montessori, 1909/1912) is simplified to *The Montessori Method*. This seminal work is one of the few publications by Montessori that was composed by her in the form of a written text. Most of Montessori's published writings are actually transcriptions or recollections of her speeches by audience members.

Montessori typically approved such transcriptions for publication; however, it is important to highlight that Montessori was a woman of action, not a contemplative scholar. That her lectures and 3- to 4-month training courses were capable of transforming audience members into "believers" has led to the claim that Montessori's ideas spread because of a "cult of personality" (Cohen, 1969). It is important to discount neither the tendency among some Montessori teachers to revere her nor the control she and her son Mario exerted over the dissemination and implementation of her message. However, in our view the spread of the Montessori Method, which has unfolded over

multiple generations and across multiple cultural contexts, suggests that the power of the ideas, rather than Montessori's personal magnetism, explains the method's popularity.

The two world wars of the twentieth century, the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), and the rise of fascism in Italy all affected the spread of Montessori's ideas and her commitment in later life to the peace movement. She was thrice nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize: in 1949, 1950, and 1951. During World War I (1914–1918), with Barcelona as her official home, Montessori traveled to the United States, where she gave lectures and held training courses, which were covered extensively in the popular press. During these years her two major texts were translated into 11 languages. Inspired by the belief that education could heal the suffering that children experienced as a result of war, Montessori proposed the establishment of La Croce Bianca, the White Cross, in 1917. This would be an organization whose goal was "'to treat the children of war; to gather up the new human generation and to save it by a special method of education.' The plan was to train teacher-nurses to work with the depressed and frightened children of the war-ravaged countries" (Kramer, 1976, p. 253). Although the organization was never established, Montessori's concept did foreshadow England's plan for children during the blitz of World War II, and it contributed to the immediate opening of Montessori classrooms in France in 1917. More significant, the plan illustrates how Montessori framed, at least in part, the spread of the Montessori movement as a contribution to the restoration and maintenance of peace in Europe.

During the years between the two world wars, Montessori, now a grandmother, maintained an active travel schedule, offering international training courses every 2 years in England and in Europe and opening Montessori schools in Austria, England, Germany, Holland, Italy, and Spain. Both internal and external tensions shaped the movement's spread. Internally, Montessori's own desire and economic need to oversee the implementation of the Montessori Method led her to demand full control over all aspects of teacher training and production of didactic materials. Throughout her career, she cultivated a circle of loyal followers and was decidedly intolerant of experimentation with or modification of her method.

Externally, political tensions in Europe contributed to the closure of numerous Montessori schools. For instance, Montessori's schools in Barcelona were initiated and supported by Catalan leaders committed to social reform and to promoting the Catalan language and culture, a movement opposed by the leaders of Spain's "second republic." The turmoil of the Spanish Civil War led to the closure of these schools and, ultimately, to Montessori's departure from Spain altogether. Similarly, in Italy, the Fascist prime minister Benito Mussolini invited Montessori to open schools as part of his larger plan to promote the achievements of Italian culture. As she did in Spain, when pressed in Italy to align herself with the political party in power, Montessori refused, asserting that her cause was that of children. Ultimately, Montessori's refusal to cede authority to the Italian government led to Mussolini's closure of her schools, the suppression of the movement, and her permanent exile.

The Cause of Peace

It was during the 1920s and 1930s that Montessori elaborated her method for elementary and adolescent students. Her experiences in Spain and Italy, which were repeated in Austria and Germany, reinforced her belief that children's education was the means to social reform because they informed her argument that children were the greatest hope for peace. During the 1930s, as the forces of totalitarianism gathered strength throughout Europe, Montessori grew more active and vocal in the international peace movement, giving major addresses in Brussels, Geneva, and Copenhagen.[5] These lectures, first published in Italian in 1949 and later translated into English in the volume *Education and Peace* (1972), are her most direct statements of belief that a child, if given a proper environment, will develop to his or her fullest potential to be a citizen of humanity, transcending national and political boundaries.

In her address to the European Congress for Peace in 1936, Maria Montessori declared:

> Man now flies higher and more confidently through the heavens than the eagle; he has mastered the invisible secrets of the energy of the universe; he can look up into the skies and the infinite; his voice can cross the world's seas, and he can hear the echoes of all the world's music; he now possesses the secret powers of transforming matter. In a word, contemporary man has citizenship in the great nation of humanity. (1972, p. 29)

She goes on to underscore what she regards as the educational and political consequences of this sea change in the human condition:

> Our principal concern must be to educate humanity—the human beings of all nations—in order to guide it toward seeking common goals. We must turn back and make the child our principal concern. . . . The child is richly endowed with the powers, sensitivities, and constructive instincts that as yet have neither been recognized nor put to use. In order to develop, he needs much broader opportunities than he has been offered thus far. . . . Society must fully recognize the social rights of the child and prepare for him and the adolescent a world capable of ensuring their spiritual development. (1972, p. 31)

Here Montessori argues forcefully, even rhapsodically, for the necessity to awaken the child's potential and to honor its natural development.

At an address in Copenhagen in 1937, she was even more outspoken about the power of children to influence the world if adults took them seriously enough:

> In our experience with children, we observed that the human child is a spiritual embryo, endowed with mysterious sensitivities that guide him, with creative energies that tend to construct a sort of marvelous instrument in men's souls. . . . The child is also capable of developing and giving us tangible proof of the possibility of a better humanity. He has shown us the true process of construction of the normal human being. We have seen children totally change as they acquire a love for things and as their sense of order, discipline, and self-control develops within them as a manifestation of their total freedom. We have seen them labor steadily, drawing on their own energies and developing them as they work. The child is both a hope and a promise for mankind. If we therefore mind this embryo as our most precious treasure, we will be working for the greatness of humanity. (1972, pp. 35–36)

Thus, as Europe faced the inevitability of a second world war, in these and similar remarks woven throughout her various lectures, Montessori distilled her life's work into an argument for the fusion of education and peace.

Montessori spent the years of World War II in India and returned to Amsterdam in 1946 after the war. Although in her late 70s, she maintained a schedule similar to that of her youth: She supervised the publication of her many lectures, transcribed during various training courses; managed with Mario the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI); and gave numerous invited addresses, including those at three International Montessori Congresses (1949–1951) and at UNESCO's General Plenary Sessions (1947, 1950). Active to the end, she remained dedicated to her lifelong mission of service to social reform and to the rights of those with less power in society. She was a woman who both profoundly shaped and was shaped by the social, economic, and political context of the era in which she lived; more important, the legacy of her work lives on several generations after her death.

THE CORE CONSTRUCTS: PLANES OF DEVELOPMENT, PREPARED ENVIRONMENT, COSMIC EDUCATION

Planes of Development

The Montessori Method is a developmental approach to education founded on the close observation of the maturing child. In a sequence that foreshadows Piaget's four "stages" (sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational), Montessori outlined four "planes" of development. Like Piaget's stages, the planes map a progression from reflexive motor activity to concrete and abstract thinking. But unlike Piaget's framework, Montessori's planes offer holistic renderings of the child at successive developmental passages. The child at 3, for instance, is said to be in the period of "absorbent mind." From 3 to 6 the child takes in the world sensorially. His or her drive to explore and experiment is fueled as much by spiritual as cognitive impulses. "The absorbent mind is indeed a marvelous gift to humanity," Montessori declared near the end of her life. "By merely 'living' and without conscious effort the individual absorbs from the environment even a complex cultural achievement like language. If this essential mental form existed in the adult, how much easier would our studies be!" (1949/1994, p. 64). Along with recognizing the cognitive power associated with the spongelike mind of the 3-year-old, Montessori identified a spiritual impulse in young children that, if properly nurtured, would mature into a powerful "inner guide" leading the child to peaceful, orderly, compassionate action. She called this impulse the "spiritual embryo" (1972, p. 35). Comparing the developing child's spiritual/moral "potentialities" with that of the physical embryo, Montessori asserted that human capacity for purposeful living, creative energy, and compassion is present even in infants. If allowed to occur naturally, she claimed that the very process of development serves as a fulfillment of these capacities.

The key to fulfilling those developmental capacities, she further posited, is what she described as "freedom within limits." Elaborated in *The Discovery of the Child* (1962/1967a), Montessori distinguished freedom from liberty. The developing child must be free to carry out the process of "forming his personality," which is best achieved in an environment specially designed to meet that child's developmental needs. Within that environment, the child engages in purposeful activity, or the "work" (Cossentino, 2006) of developing him- or herself. Within this scheme, the adult's role is to "follow the child." Montessori observed that children engrossed in work were peaceful and contented, which she interpreted as evidence of the fulfillment of intellectual and social, as well as spiritual, potential. The notion of the "spiritual embryo," then, establishes both the purpose and the foundation for Montessori's framework of development.

Montessori's planes run in 6-year cycles in the age of a person (birth–6, 6–12, 12–18, 18–24), with each cycle subdivided into two distinct 3-year cycles. Moreover, within each developmental plane, but especially in the first plane, Montessori claimed that children pass through "sensitive periods" for particular intellectual, social, and moral awakenings. There are sensitive periods for language, movement, music, order, and so on. The central role of the adult, again, is to recognize these sensitive periods and direct the child to work designed to foster those awakenings.

By the time the child reaches the second plane of development (6–12) absorbency is replaced by deliberateness. The child becomes more task-oriented, more satisfied by completion, better able to map relationships between the parts and whole. What was the "spiritual embryo" has now matured into a being at the dawn of both abstract and moral reasoning. Identity begins to solidify during this plane and the child remains deeply invested in the work of formation. Montessori compared the mind of the child in the second plane to a "fertile field" where the "seed of everything can be sown," using this metaphor to illustrate the elementary child's unbounded curiosity to understand culture and the world/universe (1967b, p. 4). In addition, the child in this plane is more oriented toward learning and working in a community and toward moral reasoning, particularly the discernment of good and evil, an aspect of development that underscores her holistic point of view and a key difference with Piaget.

The Prepared Environment

An even more important distinction from Piaget's theory is Montessori's deliberate association of each plane with an environment specially prepared to match the developmental needs of the child at each developmental epoch. Achieving the goal of "freedom within limits" rests on a subtle partnership between the child's spontaneous activity and an environment organized to frame that activity. "The first aim of the prepared environment," Montessori said, "is, as far as it is possible, to render the growing child independent of the adult" (1936/1966, p. 267).[6]

Environments are prepared differently for each plane, but they share similarities across the developmental spectrum. The prepared environment is, first of all, an orderly one. "Work" is arranged carefully in a developmentally progressive manner on open shelves so that children may have easy access to materials. In the elementary classroom materials are organized into disciplinary domains (e.g., mathematics, botany, geography, language) and children find a wide range of resources and materials, rather than textbooks, to draw from, thus reinforcing the critical role of choice and their responsibility to select materials.

Second, the environment is aesthetically pleasing, thereby instilling a sense of respect for the environment on the part of the children. Montessori was clear on this point:

> The environment should be "artistically beautiful" . . . not beauty produced by superfluity or luxury, but by grace and harmony or line and color . . . absolute simplicity. . . . No ornament can distract a child really absorbed in his task; on the contrary, beauty both promotes concentration of thought and offers refreshment to the tired spirit. (1917, pp. 144–146)

The teacher's attention both to the arrangement of materials and to the room's aesthetic qualities contributes to a sense of order that facilitates purposeful movement within the surroundings. In addition, Montessori envisioned that children would have immediate access to the outdoors and, when possible, a garden.

Finally, the environment should be a community shared and cared for by all its members. Sweeping floors, washing tables, watering plants, and feeding animals are all natural elements of the "practical life" aspect of the Montessori curriculum. Moreover, because environments are set up to accommodate multiage groupings (usually 3-year cycles), children establish bonds with one another, their teachers, and the physical space that serves as their "schoolhome" (Martin, 1992). For example, children do not have assigned desks; rather, they move fluidly from one area of the room to another, depending on the resources needed as well as their own sense of whether they require solitude or colleagues to accomplish a task. Thus, the features of the prepared environment—order, broad access to materials, aesthetic beauty, permeable boundaries, community responsibility, and flexible movement—all give the child the freedom to follow his or her curiosities, to marshal his or her intellectual energies to pursue questions, and therefore to construct integrated understandings.

Cosmic Education

The particular manner of preparing an elementary environment is, perhaps, the most concrete manifestation of what Montessori referred to as "cosmic education" in *To Educate the Human Potential* (1967b). This is a relatively "late stage" elaboration of the Montessori system, developed in collaboration with her son Mario in India during World War II. Its purpose, like that of the rest of the system, is to respond to the unique developmental needs of the child between the ages of 6 and 12—to harness the combined forces of intellectual curiosity, physical stamina, and moral awakening. However, beyond this developmental approach is a more sweeping social agenda that Montessori always had in mind: to remake a world ravaged by war and injustice into a more peaceful, harmonious place.

Cosmic education holds as a central aim the child's discovery of his or her "cosmic task" (Duffy & Duffy, 2002; Montessori, 1973b). "Cosmic task" refers to one's particular role in the larger "cosmic plan" as a member of society whose collective impact is felt by all. The "task" of remaking the world, in other words, is the "great work" of humanity. It is a universal cause that requires both individual discernment and collective commitment. While the entire system is oriented toward this goal, discernment beginsin earnest during the second plane of development, between the ages of 6 and 12.

Here, Montessori's own cultural heritage, first as a Roman Catholic and later as a devotee of the mystical philosophy of theosophy, is most evident. She drew upon the Catholic catechism and upon theosophical reconstructions of ancient Indian doctrines of the union of the human soul with divine consciousness and karma. Her vision of cosmic education links the universal to the particular in the structure of the curriculum as well as the organization of the environment. Moreover, it instantiates the notion of harmony and situates it in the activity of learning.

> If the idea of the universe is presented to the child in the right way, it will do more for him than just arouse his interest, for it will create in him admiration and wonder, a feeling loftier than any interest and more satisfying. The child's mind then will no longer wander, but becomes fixed and can work. The knowledge he then acquires is organized and systematic; his intelligence becomes whole and complete because of the vision of the whole that has been presented to him, and his interest spreads to all, for all are linked and have their place in the universe of which his mind is centered. (1967b, p. 9)

Where the child from birth to 6 requires the carefully prescribed limits of the classroom environment, within which he or she masters the basics of independent living, the child from 6 to 12 requires a more expansive rendering of the wonders of the universe. In practice, this means, quite literally, presenting a picture of the whole—the whole sweep of human history, the whole structure of the English language, the whole image of the frog or fern—before exploring the smaller, more manageable parts. Montessori's assertion that a coherent picture of the whole is needed if one is to make sense of the parts distinguishes her educational vision from that of nearly every other major educational reformer, and most dramatically from Progressive Era contemporaries, such as John Dewey (Egan, 2002).

THE PHILOSOPHY IN ACTION

Unlike traditional elementary curricula, the Montessori elementary program is driven by what in Montessori parlance are known as the "cultural subjects." These include history, geography, geometry, the arts, and the sciences. Study in these subjects is framed in an interdisciplinary mode that tends to revolve around the exploration of three fundamental questions: What am I? Where do I come from? What is my role in the universe?

These questions are, in Montessori's scheme, thoroughly appropriate for children who are at the dawn of moral and abstract thinking. Prior to the elementary years (birth to 6), the curriculum is driven by the development of fundamental sensory-motor competencies. Children are said to be given the

"keys" to the world. By contrast, children in the stage she identified as "childhood" (6–12) are ready to learn more about the world beyond their immediate touch. Children in this second plane of development are insatiably curious, have the physical stamina to explore a range of topics, have the concentration to stay with those topics over extended periods of time, and have the independence to manage their time and work within carefully constructed guidelines.

In most Montessori elementary programs, children begin their day with 3 hours of uninterrupted, largely self-directed "work."[7] In addition to math and language work, a good deal of a typical elementary student's morning may be taken up with researching and writing a report on amphibians, constructing a model of the Parthenon, or composing an original creation myth. Self-directed work entails variations on three primary activities: classification, sequencing, and exploration. Classification (in the form of charts produced for the study of zoology, botany, and geology) and sequencing (in the form of time lines for all the cultural subjects, but especially history) provide structure for the creative and imaginative work of exploration.

The teacher, in this scheme, provides structure and guidance, but is not the source of knowledge. The preparation of an orderly, highly enriched environment constitutes one of three key activities distinguishing Montessori pedagogy from more traditional, transmission approaches to teaching.[8] In addition to preparing an environment specially designed to meet the intellectual, social, and spiritual needs of children at various stages of development, Montessori teachers base their instructional decisions on close observation of the child at work. Observation is the primary basis for assessing readiness; interest; and, ultimately, mastery. Invitation is a third core activity of Montessori practice. Teachers offer lessons, both individual and group, based on interest and readiness demonstrated by the child; and the offer is just that: an invitation to work imaginatively within the structure provided by the environment and the materials contained within that environment.

A key example of the balance of structure and imagination is the series of narratives that serve as touch points for the curriculum. Known as the Great Lessons, these five stories, told by the teacher to the students, collectively present a picture of the story of the universe. Beginning with the creation of the earth and progressing to the beginning of life, the emergence of humans, and the development of social life in the form of language and numbers, these lessons are designed to provide a compelling impression of the whole. Therein lies their "greatness." The picture of the whole of the universe then prompts students to wonder, to question, to seek to know more. Once the interest is sparked, work may begin. The stories themselves provide a scaffolding to support imaginative inquiry, which is then carried out in a varied series of extensions and experiments. Following the story of creation, for example, which tells of the formation of elements, the

transformation of matter, and the manner in which chemical interactions gradually produced the earth, students may examine the composition of our planet, the force of gravity, and plate tectonics. Or they may conduct experiments involving the transformation of solids, liquids, and gases.

While the subjects under study are wide ranging, the nexus of exploration remains consistent throughout the 6 years of the second plane: Who am I? Where do I come from? What is my role in the universe? Within these questions Montessori presents peace as not just a goal of education, but its very context. To "give [the children] a vision of the whole universe" is to prompt holistic and generative exploration of a phenomenon that is at once limitless and orderly. Within the universe all things are connected. To examine the origins and purposes of those connections is to engage in activity that is both fascinating and consequential. According to Montessori, it is precisely the combination of vastness and order that appeals to the elementary child.

In other words, the child as a cosmic being is a child in search of meaning. Aiming to meet the needs of the child in search of meaning gained through knowledge of oneself and society, the curriculum for cosmic education not only provides a limitless course of study, it mirrors the order of the universe itself. The preponderance of charts and time lines provides, perhaps, the most concrete manifestation of this order. Children use these charts as reference tools, exemplars, and symbols of their work. Incorporating research material, drawings, and tracing, the charts are reproduced by the children, usually in groups. Once completed, the charts may be displayed in the classroom, where they become one of many artifacts of the collective work of the elementary community.

Going Out

In addition to the structure of the curriculum itself, a key element of cosmic education involves learning beyond the classroom. While the prepared environment is rich in resources, venturing into the wider world is central to understanding one's role in that world. Elementary children go out individually, in small, self-directed groups, as well as on larger, more traditional field trips. Whether the trip is to purchase crickets to feed the classroom frog or an overnight camping excursion, the critical element of "going out" is the students' central role in planning and executing the event.

Ideally, going out is prompted by a genuine need that cannot be fulfilled within the classroom. For instance, in the course of a research project on turtles, a student may initiate a visit to a local university to interview a biologist who studies turtles. To carry out the trip, the student must contact the biologist to schedule the visit, arrange for transportation to and from the lab, and follow up the visit with appropriate correspondence. Students

who are planning an overnight trip will research lodging possibilities and contact visitors bureaus to obtain maps and other information relevant to the trip. Overnight trips are often funded by money raised by the students themselves. In these cases, the fund-raising activities become practical life exercises with consequences. In most cases, regardless of the source of funds, students are responsible for creating and working within a budget. In every case, the child's agency, both individually and as a member of a group, lies at the heart of the enterprise. A final way in which children go out in the world is through service learning; for example, children may identify a social issue of interest, research that issue, and identify a way in which they may engage in social action to respond concretely to the issue explored. In some Montessori schools, such a project is viewed as the culmination of the 9-to-12 cycle, an experience that is foreshadowed as the younger students watch and listen each year as their older classmates conduct and share their research and social action activities.

"We Declare Peace"

The notion of development as active and effortful reflects Montessori's perspective that peace is not a passive endeavor. Peace is made in daily interactions large and small. Along with lessons in grace and courtesy, which are introduced in the first plane of development, Montessori's most overt demonstration of peace education occurs in what is sometimes known as the "peace rose ceremony." Many Montessori classrooms include an area specially designated for conflict resolution. Usually this is a quiet space that may contain a rug or a table set up with objects designed to calm the spirit. There may be a Zen garden or beads for handling or a beautiful print for gazing. Children are free to spend time at the peace table when they are feeling out of sorts or need a break from the morning routine.

Often the area will contain a vase with a single rose. This is the "peace rose." Children who are engaged in a disagreement are encouraged to go to the table together, to take turns listening as each explains how he or she is feeling and, ultimately (and often with the guidance of an adult), to come to an agreement that each "can live with." At the conclusion of the discussion, the students are encourage to "declare peace," and younger students will often repeat the phrase "We declare peace," sometimes holding the rose together. Older students are more likely to offer the rose as an opening to discussion. A child may approach another child with whom he or she has had a conflict, hand him or her the rose, and ask for a solution to the problem. Implicit in the concept of the peace table is the notion that conflict is a natural part of community life. The very presence of a space in the classroom devoted to peaceful conflict resolution acknowledges that peace is a goal that requires ongoing commitment.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS FOR EDUCATORS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

For the third time in its history, Montessori education is experiencing a dramatic rise in popularity. The first two iterations of this interest (in the early 1910s and again in the 1960s) were driven primarily by middle-class interest in alternatives to traditional public schooling. The current wave of interest is centered largely in public schools. According to the best available database, there are currently more than 4,000 Montessori schools in the United States.[9] Researchers, too, have started to notice Montessori and have begun to study its contributions. In the years 2000–2005 there have been 32 research studies of Montessori education in the United States.[10]

We close by highlighting three key themes that characterize Montessori's system for elementary children and illuminate the construct of peace as a premise for education: Montessori's vision was at once developmentalist, communitarian, and cosmological. Each of these themes resonates with current discourse in educational theory and practice. Within the intersection of these three themes, we argue, lies the essence of her vision of peace as a premise for education and the most important lessons for contemporary educators.

Cosmic education, like the whole of the Montessori system, begins and ends with a sharp focus on the child as a developing human being. "The child," she proclaimed in 1937, "is also capable of developing and giving us tangible proof of the possibility of a better humanity" (1972, p. 36). Montessori's infinite sensitivity to the processes of human development, honed at the start of her career by her thorough medical and scientific training and elaborated over a lifetime spent largely as a war refugee, inspires us to take seriously her vision of peace as flowing from the child's natural tendencies to learn.

Within the developmentalist frame, education is achieved through fostering those natural tendencies. Development, moreover, is situated within an intentionally created community. For the youngest children, the "prepared environment" fosters key skills necessary for harmonious living: freedom of movement, courtesy, peaceful conflict resolution, and care of the environment itself. And as the child matures, so does the community grow more complex and expansive and the child's responsibility to nurturing community more profound.

In linking world peace with healthy human development, Montessori elaborated a cosmological (Cossentino, 2005) vision of education in which all things are connected—from the order of the universe to organization of classroom space to the structure of the curriculum. Maria Montessori was the first educator of the 20th century to fully elaborate an integrated curriculum, the specifics of which link the moral and social aspects of development with the intellectual. Moreover, in situating peace at the center of her curriculum, Montessori also demonstrated how moral and social development might serve as both the means and end of education. That is, in the Montessori scheme, peace is not made manifest in tolerance, but in respect: respect for the environment as well as respectful relationships. And that respect is acted out in daily interactions both within and beyond the prepared environment. Peace is not achieved through justice, but through deep and active appreciation of the order of the universe and one's place in it. The order of the curriculum—all that emphasis on classification and sequencing—mirrors, even exemplifies, the order of a harmonious universe. Mapping that order allows children to know the logic that holds the universe together, to find it awe inspiring, and to be moved to protect its awesome and fragile beauty.

For 21st-century educators, Montessori's holistic system offers not just an alternative to traditional, transmission approaches to teaching; it provides both a redefined purpose for education, peace, and a redefined means of achieving that purpose. Peace, within the Montessori frame, is achieved through practice. It is a practice that begins within the carefully defined limits of the prepared environment and is embodied in tiny movements—waiting one's turn to use a piece of material, learning to pour from a pitcher with care, moving gracefully around the room so as not to disturb others. As the child matures, so does his or her practice, growing ever more complex and intentional.