

THE MONTESSORI CLASSROOM: A FOUNDATION FOR GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP

by Gerard Leonard

Gerard Leonard maps the child's increasingly global environment and sense of citizenship from elementary to adolescence. For the elementary child, an orientation to the local history and geography of their surroundings provides a framework for understanding geography. In Leonard's words, "We have to know and understand a lot about many different places and people so we can adapt easily wherever we go." Montessori understood that by grounding children in the natural world they will have "a deep feeling for the interdependencies of nature" (Leonard). From this global sense of the cosmic interaction of all life on earth springs an understanding of human interdependencies that enhances one's own sense of belonging to place and to the procession of life. The elementary child needs two environments, both the school and the world beyond, "the world of nature and the society of his particular region and country" (Leonard). The adolescent studies his local place, the town, the county, and the bioregion finding security and community awareness by experiencing engaged living through real work in the local community. This grounding combined with the study of other languages, cultures, and religions is the key to understanding the global society.

I am happy to be back in Seattle again. My previous visits have been short ones but they have fed my curiosity about Seattle and its environs. This time I am able to give myself the treat of an extra

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day in Seattle and a few more to travel west to the Olympic Rainforest. Seattle, named for Chief Seattle of the Duwamish, is one of the great ports of North America and a city now known as a green technology hub. I want to know this place and its people. I want to know its history, its story of rapid growth over the last 165 years, and what is its deep history: its place in *big history*, as it is now being called by the historians (Christian).

And what is the geography of this land? What is the greater region within which Seattle nestles? I would love to have a sense of what the bioregion looks like: its rivers, flora, fauna, its human settlements, and how this region connects to the rest of North America and how it connects globally. Who are the people here at present; what is the cultural flavor; what ethnicities do we have here and where did they come from, and why here? Who are the people that have been here from the beginning?

How did the geology, the landscape, and the climate affect human settlement and development here? James Michener, author of *Centennial*, *The Source*, *Hawaii* and other books centered in one place, wrote,

When I begin work on a new area...I invariably start with the best geography I can find. This takes precedence over everything else, even history, because I need to ground myself in the fundamentals which have governed and in a sense limited human development... If I wanted to make myself indispensable to my society, I would devote eight to ten years to real mastery of one of the world's major regions. I would learn the languages, the religions, the customs, the value systems, the history, the nationalisms, and above all the geography. (de Blij 17)

Yes, geography is fundamental to grasping the reality and potential of any region of our world. For those of you like myself who are not from here, Seattle sits, I am told, straddling the Seattle Uplift, the Seattle fault-zone, and the Seattle Basin. I found out that there have been repeated glaciations for over the past 2.5 million years. The landscape has been extraordinarily sculpted by huge ice movements and meltings. The crust has also been repeatedly twisted and turned because of the Cascadia Subduction Zone. What a place this is, nestling in the Puget Sound, which is part of the Salish Sea

bi-national ecosystem, and laying between the Cascade Range and the Olympic Mountains. It sounds grand, even mythic! Fossils of Columbian mammoths, ancient bison, and giant ground sloths have been unearthed here. When these fellow travelers wandered this land, it was a cold and dry grassland with scattered pine trees, very different from now. Yes, this ancient biome is part of the deep history and geography of this place we are occupying right now.

The indigenous people of the land immediately around us were the Duwamish. For over 500 generations they have been nourished by this land and have maintained good counsel with this place. Now their numbers are small, I hear, but they endure and are offering the richness of their long experience to all who will listen.

In the late 1800s, Europeans came and among the earliest were the Germans, Irish, English, and Norwegians, and by 1900, Asians, Chinese, Filipinos, and Japanese. Later still in the twentieth century, South Americans and Africans began to arrive. This “far western city of seven hills” was to become, after World War II, a center for the global aircraft industry. In the 1980s, it became a great center for technologically innovative global corporations. More recently, I read that Seattle is becoming an international model for sustainable development. I want to know more about that! Seattle has a story to tell, a tale full of many various realities and fascinating interconnections extending back into world history and far and wide across oceans and continents. And we have only scratched the surface of the cosmic tale that is Seattle.

I found that the more I just walked everywhere in my neighborhood and observed the old and the young and the interplay of the traditional culture and the newer global culture, the more I understood the minds and hearts of the people as time went by.

This is what we do in our Montessori classrooms. This is the kind of thinking, researching, and imaginative journeying the children learn to take. Out of this they develop respect, even reverence for any local place and its diverse people, and simultaneously understand that there is always a global context. Global consciousness emerges

out of acquaintance with the true story of a place and seeing that story within the great story of our existence from the beginning.

Last year I worked in Mexico City for most of the year. What an amazing place, a place where I was to find incredibly warm and friendly people. Sadly, before I went there I knew very little about our southern neighbor. I knew that Mexico City was a big city, I did not realize how big: 21 million people! One recent book about the city is titled *First Stop in the New World, Mexico City, the Capital of the 21st Century*. It is written by a New York City journalist David Lida who has lived there for some time and speaks of its enormous potential in the coming decades. That potential was palpable, the young people there are ready for the world. What did I learn that might be relevant to our topic today? I learned that I had to ask many, many questions, and if I wanted to adapt well, I had to be interested in everything and most especially in the people and in listening to their stories. In the book *Cultivating Humanity*, Martha Nussbaum writes of the importance of experiencing the “real cultures” of a place. That includes those of the rich and the poor, the cultures of the past and the present, the cultures of the literati and artists, and the folk cultures. In Mexico City all of these very real cultures percolate and interweave around every corner. It was my



"Ciudad.de.Mexico.City.Distrito.Federal.DF.Paseo.Reforma.Skyline" by Alejandro Islas Photograph AC - <http://www.flickr.com/photos/99299995@N02/9355469268/>.

good fortune to be welcomed and taught about Mexico by wonderful people who are so proud of their country. I found that the more I just walked everywhere in my neighborhood and observed the old and the young and the interplay of the traditional culture and the newer global culture, the more I understood the minds and hearts of the people as time went by.

But I found that this was not enough. I found that I needed to know the geography, so I studied maps of the city and of the country as a whole. I learned of the great varieties of geographical regions. The varieties of flora, fauna, climates, foods, cultures, arts, and music were staggering to me and not what I had expected going there. I also began to read the history, both ancient and modern. Seeing the antiquities of the Teotihuacan, Aztecs, Maya, and other civilizations, I was struck by the fact that they rival the antiquities of Greece, Rome, and Egypt. This was quite an awakening. The legacy of New Spain, of the revolution, of independence, and of a history interwoven in particular with that of America, were additionally revealing and their influence very much still in evidence.

Globalization is seen everywhere in Mexico City, with all of its benefits for some, costs for others, and many glaring socio-economic contradictions. Being there in one of the world's great metropolises convinced me that we just cannot be ignorant of our world and the history and geography of its diverse peoples. What does it mean now to be a global citizen? It means that we have to know and understand a lot about many different places and people so we can adapt easily wherever we go. Maria Montessori understood this, well over a half century ago. Having traveled widely and developed a global perspective, she believed that the essential quality needed in the emerging world was adaptability. Being adaptable to one's own society was in fact no longer enough; one had to be prepared through education to adapt to the whole world. Young people would find a world of rapid change. How correct and prescient she was (see *From Childhood to Adolescence*, especially the appendices).

It is true that we have always had global trade and migrations of peoples and ideas from country to country and even across continents and oceans. Well known are the ancient names of The Silk Road, stretching from Xi'an through Turfan and Samarkand to

Baghdad, and The Spice Road from the Moluccas through South India to Alexandria and Baghdad, and from these great cities onwards to Genoa and Venice and the far West. In the Americas, we had the Inca Road, some 3,700 miles long from Santiago to Quito, with a linked network of roads for over 20,000 miles connecting about 100 different nations, and more recently from the 1500s into the 1800s, the Acapulco Road extending from Spain across the Atlantic to Veracruz and across Mexico to Acapulco and on in great galleons to Manila, all incredible networks and interconnections of cultures.

However, globalization moves all of this interchange to a new level. International commerce is being stimulated as never before, many dormant economies are being revived, and long-standing barriers to international trade are being lifted. Just as importantly, social, cultural, and other international exchanges are also being stimulated and are proliferating (see de Blij; Christian). While I was in Mexico, Irish President Michael D. Higgins visited with a large trade delegation, but he was also setting the stage for much greater cultural exchanges, including the opening up of opportunities in each other's countries for university students.

How do we prepare the child and the adolescent for this reality, for it is an inescapable reality of life today and in the future? In our Montessori classrooms we have a unique approach. We first do this by grounding our children in the natural world, in reality, so that there is a comprehensive understanding and a deep feeling for the interdependencies of nature. Robert Kennedy Jr. recently began a talk titled "Our Environmental Destiny" in my home city of Danbury, Connecticut with these words, "Nature is the infrastructure of our communities, the ultimate source of our values and virtues as a people." Nature is the deep ground.

Maria Montessori wanted to impart this core scientific truth to the young that our relationship with nature is primary, that our whole built environment, what she called *supranature*, depends on this foundation. This truth is that living creatures interacting with the environment create a universal balance, a harmony in nature. In her own words, "Life sustains life" (*Education and Peace* 112). The interdependencies of nature extend to the entire earth seen as one organism, and from this fundamental scientific truth it is possible

then to examine the reality of human interdependencies and see humanity as a single nation or as one integrated organism that is intimately bound to the natural world. Maria Montessori takes us to the very ground on which we stand and to our place in nature in order to begin to develop global consciousness.

She wrote in *The Meaning of Adaptation*:

...before going to education where material, social and spiritual environment have their influence; where the individual psycho-somatic structure of the individual educator and pupil have still greater influence, let us pause. Let us absorb what nature seems to convey...Nature has this beautiful arrangement in which everybody, while striving for his own life and happiness, does something for the improvement and conservation of the environment. (2-3)

Our children discover through listening to stories of the cosmic tasks of various living beings and through their own interest-driven research and discoveries that there is a “mutual exchange” in nature between living creatures and their environment. They discover that “adaptation means fulfillment of conditions necessary for life and happiness” and for harmonious living (*The Meaning of Adaptation* 1). Maria Montessori found that these facts relating to mutual exchange are easy for children as young as seven or eight years old to observe and to understand. With this understanding comes a solid grounding and a concept of adaptation that can then be applied to human society.

Montessori prepared environments are designed to give the child the experience of being at home in the natural world, a sense of place appropriate to his developmental stage, and a sense of belonging to a community within the greater community of life. The message the toddler embodies from day one when seeing an environment scaled for him and activities he can independently choose and do is “This world is a place for me, I belong, and I can live well and harmoniously with others here. I can do my work, I can take care of problems and I can adapt.” The prepared environment and hence the world is a secure, loving, interesting, and inviting place.

The *Casa dei Bambini* for three- to six-year-olds is a place not only to experience independence and real freedom to choose for oneself,

it is also a place to experience what it is like to live and work in a socially cohesive group. It is the time in life to first come to true self-discipline and self-regulation through concentrated work. The prepared environment is designed specifically to foster this concentration and the patience and control of movement necessary to develop these life skills. The keys to the world are presented systematically at this time with materials for the refinement of the senses. This is why the prepared environment, *which is an integrated indoor and outdoor environment*, is full of natural and cultural richness to explore.

Between the ages of six and twelve, the child now needs what we call a dual environment, a prepared environment within the school and the world beyond the school. The world of nature and the society of his particular region and country. The place of interest to the child now becomes very large. His intellect and imagination need a universe for their fulfillment. As Thomas Berry wrote in his beautiful poem, "It Takes a Universe":

It takes a universe to make a child both in outer form and
in its spirit.

It takes a universe to educate a child. A universe to fulfill
a child. (*Every Being Has Rights* 3)

Nothing less than "a universal syllabus," as Maria Montessori calls it, will satisfy now (*The Child, Society, and the World* 111). And so the keys to the universe are given and he is now offered the great tale of our existence from the beginning of time, a story to end all stories, or within which to locate all other stories. These are the years when there is a powerful sensitivity for the acquisition of diverse human cultures, both past and present. And so we sow the seeds of culture and as many seeds of the sciences as we can. The mind of the child is a fertile field for world culture and for the sciences that reveal the workings of nature. The sense of belonging expands: I belong to a global civilization, to a particular genealogy, and to a particular nation and territory within this civilization. I am also part of an awe-inspiring history, that extends back billions of years and whose telling reveals that I am connected to all of Life (*To Educate the Human Potential* 15-17).

The adolescent's sense of place in a Montessori program is that of a return to the local ground, to the natural world around him,



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and to the local society in his town, county, and bioregion. From this security and stability during a time of major transition, the realities of economic, social, and cultural exchange can be explored in very real and meaningful ways. The child can experience complex challenges of the global society and the global environment understood in an embodied sense and beginning with the experience of work and effort within a local community.

The adolescent's adaptation to our global civilization is supported by the study of other languages, other cultures, other religions, and the study of one's own classical, intellectual, and ethical traditions (see Berry, *Evening Thoughts*). This takes place side by side with study of the sciences and their methods, together with their practical applications through daily occupations on the land and in various technical workshops and craft studios. The history of technology is core. These studies bring adolescents in direct touch with innovative technologies and ideas and sustainable development projects throughout their region and the world.

Weaving through all of the prepared environments of Montessori schools is the solid bedrock of practical life activities. This environment allows the child to always have the freedom and wherewithal to take care of one's own needs, learn to respect others and master the social graces of the culture, and to become competent and responsible for house and garden and later for the local community of work and production beyond one's own house and garden.

Mario Montessori said in this regard, "This helps the child to gain an intimate contact with the world. The child must explore the social conditions of man and the different aspects of society and of nature." Research now clearly tells us that activities involving deep engagement of mind, heart, and hands, such as those of practical life, truly build executive functions and self-regulation, which are the prerequisites to success in life (Diamond and Lee 959-964). This is acting locally, while thinking globally at its most fundamental. Thomas Berry once commented that people tend to equate thinking and acting locally with a small-minded provincialism but that, he said, is quite wrong. He was convinced that experiences like the Erdkinder were the very thing that young people needed in order to be responsible world citizens (Leonard).

In order for children and adolescents to develop as responsible people, responsible for themselves and as an asset to their society there must be real freedom in the classroom, freedom of choice, of movement, of association. With freedom, self-discipline can be developed. As Montessori said, she discovered that in order to have discipline it was necessary first to give freedom. And with freedom comes responsibility.

Children can discover in Montessori prepared environments what it means to live in a society where all are responsible for the common good. They can discover through lived experience that freedom is necessary in order to lead a responsible life. This fascinating interplay of individual and societal responsibility and an atmosphere of freedom apply to problems of global development as much as they do to the Montessori classroom and school. Young people who have lived and worked in this way are better prepared to begin to understand the complex global issues of development, sustainability, justice, and peace (Sen).

I began today telling a little of the story of Seattle because it is first of all essential to know where you are, the ground you stand on, your own traditions, and your own cultural heritage. If one's heritage and home place are not manipulated to become a closed-in nationalism, a warring tribalism, or a hate-filled fundamentalism, then knowledge of one's own place and heritage, and pride in this heritage, will not limit but rather, with "cultivation," will expand one's vision of humanity as a unified whole (Montessori writes about the "cultivation of humanity" in her 1949 speech "Human Solidarity in Time and Space). A global perspective can be the fruit of delving into one's own home place and history.

Kwame Anthony Appiah, Harvard professor of philosophy and African-American studies and a great promoter of world citizenship wrote, "...one may be intensely loyal to a particular nation or group without forgetting that one's primary loyalty is to "the human future"(Nussbaum 149-150).

Maria Montessori was always an Italian and indeed always a Roman Catholic, but she was also a universalist. She developed an increasingly cosmic vision as her experiences grew through observation of the worlds of children with her anthropologist's eye. Through her experience of humanity, she would come to see mankind as a single organism and as a cosmic agent in earth's evolution. Through her openness to new scientific discoveries and to the wisdom of other religions and through her first-hand experience of a world at war, she saw a united humanity.

She wrote in her 1947 letter to all governments:

Through the study of children I have scrutinized human nature at its origin both in the East and the West and although it is forty years now since I began my work, childhood still seems to me an inexhaustible source of revelations and – let me say – hope. Childhood has shown me that all humanity is one. (*A Letter to All Governments*)

When asked in 1946 shortly after her return from India after the war what nationality she now had, she answered, "I live in Heaven, my country is a star which turns around the sun and is called the Earth" (Association Montessori Internationale 50).

A wise, global citizen loves his home, his land, and his own people and then takes the time to broaden his international knowledge and understanding. This begins with knowing the map of the world. To be geographically literate, wrote Harm de Blij in his book *Why Geography Matters More Than Ever*, it is necessary to primarily know the regions of the world. We should have a mental map of the world's major regions, and we should be aware of the features of the major regional powers: Brazil for South America and India for South Asia for example.

Since the introduction of social studies in the United States in the 1970s, there has been a steady decline in geographic literacy. Geography had given students a sense of the relationships between the environment and humans through the lenses of physical geography and the study of climate and weather. The loss of this general knowledge in our society is truly a great loss in the opinion of professor de Blij. In 2011, only 20-28% of students between fourth grade and high school were proficient in geography. For example, less than 50% of eighth graders knew that Islam originated in modern day Saudi Arabia (de Blij).

Fortunately, Montessori schools have not traveled down this road; we have retained geography as an essential discipline that is introduced in early childhood. In our Montessori classrooms, political, physical, economic, and cultural geographies are central and we find that children from a very young age are really interested in studying the map of their world and the people, landscapes, flags, animals, famous buildings, and so on from those far flung places.

Maria Montessori called the type of education we offer ***an education for vastness***. She also called it ***an expansive education***. Such a formation does not limit the child, rather it opens up broad vistas for exploration and contemplation. It expands the child's horizons.

At Georgetown University some years ago, a course called Map of the World was required as a freshman course. The course covered the geopolitical map of the contemporary world, resource distribution, and environmental and climatic conditions. At the end of four

years the students were asked to list the course that most pushed their knowledge forward and the majority stated that freshman course Map of the World (de Blij).

When I taught in Montessori upper elementary, there were many children who had been in Montessori since toddler and primary, and they had been working year after year with maps. The students were challenged to try to master knowing all the countries of the world before graduation at age twelve. Most students took this challenge on with a passion, with real interest and a sense of great accomplishment when achieved. It had the air of a rite of passage about it. Many chose to add to their geographical knowledge goal the learning of the capitals and major cities, the rivers, mountains and major bodies of water, the religions, the major languages, and so on. I don't remember anyone ever questioning the relevance of this work. The children knew that being geographically literate would be important to them. Over the years I heard many stories of shock when children went elsewhere only to find that others did not know the location of more than a few states in their own country.

Working in China, Kenya, Thailand, Russia was a possibility that young people, living at the cusp of the twenty-first century, could easily envisage. In fact, former Montessori students of mine are at present working in all these countries. We have to ask ourselves, as educators, if we know enough about the geography and the history of the rising powers in the major regions of our globe: Russia, China, India, Brazil, Mexico, Nigeria, Turkey, Indonesia, etc. In the Western world, we have been woefully ignorant of the geography and history of the Middle East, and again we are in the midst of staggering violence, hatred, and genocide in this region. "If our educational task is to enhance the intellectual and affective faculties of children, we must first enhance our own" (*Human Solidarity in Time and Space* 22). These were Maria Montessori's words when she lectured in San Remo at the 1949 post-war congress "Man's Formation in World Reconstruction."

Let us pause here and observe a little. Where else but in a Montessori classroom does one see, as I have, a four-year-old passionately working for weeks on end finding out everything she could about Kenya, its location, its shape, its landscape, its animals, its flag, and

so on with the absolute excitement of a self-chosen activity. I have observed seven- and eight-year-olds dive head first into the fundamental physical and spiritual needs of all kinds of people from the ancient Aztecs to modern-day Swiss, Japanese, or Mongolians.

I have observed ten- and eleven-year-olds researching everything from Alexander's conquests to the war in the Pacific in World War II, and these were children who were fascinated to learn about their world and trying to make sense of it all. Montessori classrooms have the essential keys, developmental materials, and frameworks for these early ventures into world citizenship. To paraphrase Maria Montessori's words, we the teachers must also feel passionate about our world and strive to learn more, enhance our knowledge and understanding of all the major regions of our globe.

Secretary of State Madeleine Albright stated the importance of geographic literacy in this way:

Geography played a leading role in nearly every policy decision I was involved in as Secretary of State. Young Americans with an understanding of people, places, and cultures have a clear advantage in today's rapidly changing global economy. (de Blij 17)

In Montessori classrooms we approach the various disciplines and their histories as an "aid to life" for the child. Every day, connections are both taught and discovered. For example, let's look at geometry, a core study in Montessori classes. Our little fifteen-month-olds in the young children's communities are introduced sensorially to the three key figures of Euclidean geometry: the circle, the square, and the equilateral triangle. They will see these displayed in art in the classroom, in two- and three-dimensional objects to be manipulated and explored, and in books. Our assistants to infancy teachers know that their work is part of a stream of cumulative sensorial experiences that will ultimately locate geometry within the great story of our human adventure in space and time.

As three- to six-year-olds, the children will explore the key varieties of these three geometric forms. They do this using visual, tactile, motor, kinesthetic, and stereognostic senses. They also begin to refine their experiences as they move from triangle to right-angled scalene triangle, and so on. Discoveries are made by using triangles



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to construct other polygons. Folders containing the art, architecture, and engineering of various worldwide cultures will surely contain these geometric forms in a myriad of creative uses.

Elementary children explore these geometric figures more deeply again using reasoning and an enhanced capacity for creative imagination. The worlds of geometric design and construction are now delved into using geometer's tools, the compass and straightedge. Proofs and theorems are easily tackled because of the sensorial foundation and the language of geometry already available to the children. Through stories and research, children learn where various discoveries came from—Egypt, China, Babylonia— and of the known heroes of human progress in this realm—Pythagoras, Euclid, and others. This approach is as true for grammar, music, history, and geography, as it is for geometry. The history of the disciplines and their global origins are always emphasized.

What else is needed for true global citizenship today?

Martha Nussbaum wrote in her book *Cultivating Humanity* (114):

A new and broader focus of knowledge is necessary to adequate citizenship in a world now characterized by compli-

cated interdependencies. We cannot afford to be ignorant of one half of the world if we are to grapple with the economic, political and human problems that beset us.

She stresses that young people must study non-Western cultures. In so doing, we have to be careful, she counsels, not to become ignorant of our own Western tradition, which we also need to study, from our roots in Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Maria Montessori likewise emphasizes the great importance of presenting the history of the Hellenic world to our children and even wrote that the study of the Latin language ought to be available as a choice for students because of its importance in the history of Western civilization (*De L'Enfant a L'Adolescent* 138-139).

Remarkable for her time, Maria Montessori also stressed the importance of Chinese civilization and its accomplishments and of Lao Tzu and Confucius. She was aware of the strategic place of India as a mediating link between civilizations, of the Buddha, of the Hindu philosophy of great thinkers such as Shankaracharya, and of the enriching of Indian culture with the arrival of Muslim civilization and Akbar the Great (*To Educate the Human Potential* 85-86). "I cannot insist enough," wrote Montessori, "on the importance of history, in any and all its details, if we are to educate the children to an awareness of universal solidarity" (*Human Solidarity in Time and Space* 22).

Professor Nussbaum (115) continues, "To be ignorant of Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism, of the traditions and religious practices of China and Japan, is not only to lack an essential prerequisite of international enterprise and political debate. It is also, frequently to lack the equipment to talk to our neighbors." Islam has 1.6 billion believers, Hinduism, 1.1 billion, and Buddhism almost 500 million. Collectively these three major religions account for 3.2 billion people.

Maria Montessori called the type of education we offer *an education for vastness*. She also called it *an expansive education*. Such a formation does not limit the child, rather it opens up broad vistas for exploration and contemplation. It expands the child's horizons. In *Education and Peace* she describes her goals as twofold. The first goal is protection of the child's personality, that is, creating the conditions and clearing the obstacles so that the "new child" can emerge. We have talked about this earlier: the need for a scientifi-

cally prepared environment and the need for respectful and loving teachers who support the child's freedom and who practice the art of observation in order to learn "the threshold of intervention" for each child. The second goal she says is the fostering of the reality of the single nation in the minds and hearts of the young and bringing the reality of our global interdependencies to consciousness.

Here are just some of the foundational experiences we give to foster this second goal... the reality of humanity as a single nation:

We give the little child the *orbis terrarum*, the globe of earth made so that it can fit in his small hands. This is your home we tell him. Maria Montessori talks of cultivating humanity from very early life, in fact she says from birth. "Man is a human being from the day he is born, even conceived" (*Education and Peace* 56).

We make sure that the keys to the world are available and we give the freedom to be active in exploring these keys: the keys to the worlds of color, size, sound, pitch, texture, smell, taste, temperature, and more. We always connect these experiences to nature and to culture.

Around age six or seven, a Montessori child will have heard the great stories of our origin and of our great inventions: language and mathematics. It is no small thing that we as a species, as a single nation, have a unifying story that is for all people everywhere and that connects all of our stories. Following this, we give the means to explore the universe, what we call Cosmic Education. Our presentations and additional stories unveil the laws of nature and the scientific truth of interdependencies. They also inspire wonder and uplift the spirit.

The children are given structures so they can independently research far and wide in history, geography, and the sciences. Our keys to the universe include timelines, maps, essential charts, and classification systems for different disciplines. Children delve into any area of interest in nature, any biome, region, culture, religion, civilization.

The music, the art and the literature of the world are also very important keys to understanding and appreciating the variety and vast beauty of our single nation, which is so different and yet

somehow the same. Music is one of the great unifying forces; it is a universal language. Songs from all over the world must be sung and the non-Western musical scales introduced once the Western scales have been presented.

When children are offered the opportunity to share their heritage using costume, food, and artifacts, the message of the single nation is there for all to see and enjoy. The great myths and legends of the world are treasures not to be missed during childhood. Drama, poetry, journals, diaries, and novels from unfamiliar present-day locales and from times past are a powerful way to experience what it might be like to walk in another's shoes. We may never actually occupy these shoes, but through our imaginations we can mentally occupy them with compassion, respect, and admiration.

Here, for example, is one journal I read to the children from the great haiku poet Basho's (47) journey through Japan written in the 1600s. It was written so long ago and so far away and yet we can feel our common humanity when we hear his beautiful words. In this passage he describes his experience of a great pine tree that he had longed to visit.

I simply could not believe my eyes when I saw the famous Takekuma Pine. Just as in olden times, the tree rose from the earth, divided into twin trunks....This one looked as if it had been growing a thousand years. What a splendid and beautiful tree it was! When I left Edo, Kyohaku composed for me the following verse as his parting gift:

Though in thy decline,
Late cherry, show my master
Takekuma's Pine!

So I wrote the following for him as a reply:

Since late cherries bloomed,
I've longed to see the Double Pine –
Even these three moons!

Readings of heroes' journeys, of human courage, of struggles for justice and peace, of human solidarity, of how deeply our shared

humanity connects us; these are classroom essentials when we educate for peace. One of the great obstacles to what Maria Montessori calls the “cultivation of humanity” is that we tend to consider ourselves selfish (*Human Solidarity in Time and Space* 20). She contends that when we study our interdependencies and reflect on the reality of our universal service to one another, we find that in general we are not selfish. Lecturing in 1949, she said, “In my experience, I have seen that children respond wholeheartedly to this call and are more than ready to accept with joy the idea of human solidarity” (19)

What is this call? The call is one we have to keep reminding ourselves to make: We are enriched by the work of all life and of all peoples, that the existence of these interdependencies is a phenomenon of great beauty, and something to be very grateful for, that we are already global citizens, already a single nation. “This is the great task of education,” said Montessori, “to make the child conscious of the reality and depth of human solidarity” (21).

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