

The Montessori Notebook S02E05

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SPEAKERS

Ferne, Simone Davies, Barbara



Simone Davies 00:11

Hi, everyone, and welcome to the Montessori Notebook podcast. So I'm recording this intro on the Monday evening before this episode comes out, it's quite late and dark and quiet. And I'm starting to realize that it's actually a pretty good time to record a podcast. However, I do feel like I want to whisper so if I get very quiet, there might be that. But anyways, I have all the fields going on as tomorrow is officially the day that our book *The Montessori Baby lands*. So by the time you hear this, it will be out in bookstores. And it's been delayed by COVID. So I am so excited that it's finally going to be here. And I'll try to do an episode on babies sometime soon as there's so much you can already do in the first year. And even when the babies in utero, so that would be fun. I hope. Yeah. Do you think that'd be fun? I mean, and like everyone says, launching a book is no joke, and hence why it's dark here and I'm recording this late and it was meant to be with Luke who edits these for me last Friday. But well, thanks, Luke, for your patience with me. And here we go. So today you are going to be blown away by my guests. I have not one but two brilliant guests with us with a total of over 50 or maybe even 60 years of experience in Montessori between them. I got to speak with one of my dear mentors Ferne van Zyl who was the main reason I trained as a Montessori teacher. When I went to her Montessori playgroup in Australia we back in 2002 when Oliver was around 18 months old, and I also spoke with my dear friend Barbara Isaacs, who recently retired, but has never been busier, I would say with just some of her current roles being the president of Montessori Europe, blogging at

the Montessori Granny and is one half of Montessori Musings as well as part of our lovely Montessori everywhere team. And perhaps the most important is she loves being grandma to her two grandchildren. So among many other things, the main reason I wanted to speak to both of these inspiring women was to talk to them about what it's like to be a Montessori grandparent. It was a super fun conversation. And it reminds us of the Khalil Gibran poem on children. So I'm going to open up my book here and read it to you. You can find it in the Prophet by Kahlil Gibran.



Simone Davies 04:34

And then what about when our child wants to climb a little bit higher. And when we want to say be careful, like then letting go is laying them trust their own body. So we have this Pikler triangle in my classroom, which I say is just as much for the adults to practice as it is for the children because we're practicing not to assist unnecessarily. Like the goal is not actually getting over the top of the triangle, but seeing where the child is at today and letting them learn the limits of their body.



Simone Davies 05:00

also like their enormous capability as well.



Simone Davies 05:04

Then there's the first day of preschool or the first day of school, the first day of high school and beyond, like, we're so excited for them. And yet they go, we must. And we're just trusting that that foundation that we laid will serve them as they venture out into the world. And then with letting go comes increasing independence, independence that scaffolded over time, like let's say, Take riding a bike. First, they might start on a balanced bike. And then like, they're learning to ride a two wheeler bike, maybe in a park, and then we start cycling side by side with them on the roads, and then we might move to be behind them. And then you know, by the time they're in high school, then they're cycling themselves off to school. So letting go means building up these skills in our children so that they're ready for the next stages of development.



Simone Davies 05:54

Letting go means seeing them for who they are right now on their journey with us, not controlling them. But there as they guide, just like the poem kind of says, we can't be them

or make them their thoughts. I love using Montessori observation to discover every day with fresh eyes who this child is, rather than having like an agenda for them, or thinking we know our child so well that we overlook who our child actually is today, or that we want them to actually think like us.



Simone Davies 06:22

And then letting go also means letting them make mistakes and learning from them. It could be as small as letting a ball fall from the table for a young child and allowing them to pick it up themselves. And then they'll maybe adjust how they keep the ball on the table for next time. Or perhaps they'll fall down. And then we can pause to see if they just bounce back up again. Often they do. Or a school aged child who forgets their lunch, like how often do you want to think about dropping it off for them. But instead letting them work something out at school, maybe they'll end up sharing a friend's lunch or finding another way to solve the problem or they might go hungry. So whilst it's really hard to see them struggling, if they are working out how to solve problems, they're learning from their mistakes. And they learn to take responsibility like if they hurt someone or something. So letting go means not trying to run in and fix everything for them. Definitely not abandoning them, but providing them just enough guidance and support in hard moments. They have to have their own experiences too. So is letting go then is about giving our child both those roots and wings. So with this strong foundation, like that's the roots, they know that we will be there to support them as much as necessary. And then we step in as little as possible to give them those wings. So I hope that's helpful to anyone who's going through some letting go of their own. And with that, let's get into my conversation with Barbara.



Simone Davies 07:47

Hi everyone, Simone Davies here and I am so delighted to be sitting with two of my favorite people here my favorite Montessori friends. Ferne, welcome all the way from Australia. Nice to have you here. It's so good to see you and be with you and to do this. And Barbara, thank you so much for joining us from the UK. Thank you so much for having me. It is such an opportunity to share Montessori journey even though it is virtually Yeah, absolutely. And I invited both Ferne and Barbara not only because they're some of my favorite Montessori people, but because they're also Montessori grandparents, and I think that it will be beautiful to share their perspective on their Montessori parenting and grandparenting journeys with us. Just a quick introduction ferne is responsible for me becoming a Montessori teacher. I've mentioned it before. But I turned up at her playgroup with my son who was 18 months old and a belly full of baby. And oh, actually, well, maybe

not. I'm not sure where Emma was, she maybe was just born. And I became so fascinated by Montessori and it's where I worked first in my Montessori classroom. And Barbara, I've gotten to know a lot in the last year or so. And I she's shared so much with the monster community. She's now the president of Montessori Europe, and her retirement has never been busier. So we're so excited that you're going to get to learn from them today. So I just wanted fun if you would like to start by perhaps sharing a little bit how Montessori has, you know, impacted maybe your parenting and grand parenting journeys. Would you like to start with that? Yes, I think when when we arrived in Australia, I had heard about Montessori before, but my perspective on it was like it was a weird thing before I arrived in Australia, and then when I arrived here, my my sister in law's little one was at down under three, where I what the school that I later purchased and I went to observe there and, you know, you talk about those specific points in your life where life changes, right? You know, those like sliding doors of opportunity, and I was



10:00

I think I was just fell in love with Montessori. The day I went, went there and observed the little children, you know, doing things for themselves. And at the time, I was quite disillusioned with traditional education for my older children. Unfortunately, none of them got to do well, one of them did get to do a little bit of Montessori later, but and yeah, I've always loved babies. So seeing that perspective of children doing things for themselves, it was like, what I believed was possible. existence. And, and I had the opportunity to, to work with tanika while I was training, and I was sold, the minute I saw toddlers in a Montessori environment.



Simone Davies 10:47

And even though you didn't get your children to go through Montessori schools, the way that you've parented your children and now your grandchildren, it's really just all Montessori.



10:56

Well, the impact on my own family is I left them with my husband to go study in a different city, which meant that for the first time, they were doing things really for themselves. I mean, they literally, you know, left instructions on the washing machine. And I tell people often that when I came back from training, I didn't take back the washing, or the cooking. wholeheartedly, actually, we began rosters right from them, you know, and everybody started doing their own washing from that time on. So it made a huge impact

in my own parenting of changing the way I view children really. And yeah, unfortunately, they couldn't go to schools, but you know, the home environments, the biggest impact, right?



Simone Davies 11:53

Absolutely. And now, Barbara, you've also had an interesting Montessori journey. And maybe you can touch on any part of your work or your parenting or grandparenting, whichever you prefer.



Barbara 12:03

So for me, I was first introduced to Montessori when I came to England in 1968. I at that time, anybody who came from the Czech Republic could not come and work we had to, you had, you could only be an au pair. So I live to visit a South African family whose youngest daughter went to a Montessori School in London. So that's how I was introduced to the Montessori idea. And I was hugely impressed by what this three year old and four year old could do, particularly the fact that she was beginning to learn to read, because in the Czech Republic, we had to read aloud as a group. That's how that was the method of learning to read. And the teacher would then say, and say, You read and you read, and to this day, I am not capable of writing, of reading from a script. Because all that feeling of tension of now I'm called to perform comes up.



13:05

So



Barbara 13:07

I was impressed that this child just loved reading and was able to do it so naturally. And I lived with the family for three or four years, and then I left but I stayed in touch. And several years later, when the father died, he left me money. And you know, it was a hugely generous gift. Because I effectively I was a refugee of the 1968 uprising, and I really had no resources apart from my own work. And I thought, how should I spend this money, and he loved children. And I thought, actually, I would love to go and learn to be a Montessori teacher. By that time, I was working in an art gallery, and it was a very fancy job and everybody said, Oh, how can you want to leave this job? To be a nursery school teacher? Come on, but it absolutely changed my life. The opportunity of studying full time for one year. I absolutely relished. I loved learning this, women and young girls from different

parts of the world. I loved the idea of the freedom that Montessori offered to the children. And for me, it was the biggest gift that bloke has given me in terms of doing Montessori before we had children.



Simone Davies 14:36

Yeah, that must have been amazing to have that knowledge and then have your own children.



Barbara 14:40

Absolutely. I've thought that I understood a little bit more. It has made parenting hugely more difficult, because you know what you should do as a teacher, but doing living to the same expectation as a parent is so much more difficult. She believes you have got two small children closely together. And so I'm, I have always been anxious about doing the right thing or not doing the right thing. And but now the diamond Granny, I can really appreciate



15:17

all the



Barbara 15:19

effort my daughter puts into her parenting I so respect the way how she speaks to her children, something I could have never achieved. And I hope that there's a tiny bit of that early Montessori beginning in her as a parent of today. Not that she would ever acknowledge it, but it doesn't matter. I just hope there's a little bit of me in her as a parent.



Simone Davies 15:50

Absolutely, I think it's fascinating. I mean, for him, would you like to speak to that the difference between being the parents and the grandparents?



15:58

Well, I suppose I had the, I suppose the, the awesome privilege of having my daughter, she was a single mum. And she had a little one and she was living with us. So and I had the

school then. So I actually started baby classes when she was six months old. And so you know, she went through the toddler program, and then Aaron put her through the three to six program as well. So she fell in love with Montessori, as well. And that is a huge blessing, right. And I speak to a lot of parents who, you know, who really wish their grandparents knew anything about Montessori so. So that was, you know, that was my introduction and having a grandchild in the home, where we could literally do the home environment in a Montessori way. And, you know, in an extended family, there was just there was my husband loved it as well. So there was always somebody watching for the next step of development to give them Montessori activities. So that's where I really I suppose honed in my knowledge on baby Montessori like independence from birth. And she was like, we call her our Montessori experiment, right? Because we literally experimented with all the materials. And because there were three of us. And I didn't have to do any of the hard work like feeding thing. We, you know, that has become a role with each one of my grandchildren just, you know, having that time to be that support person, and do Montessori on the side when parents you know, parents are so busy, they, they, you know, they so we intense as parents, as Barbara said, getting it right, you know, whereas the grandparents, you have that relaxed, you have that relaxed disposition, that you're just there to be observe and be a support, and pick up the slack as you would say, in South Africa, you know, and it's just, you know, I think my husband and I probably have had much more fun, you know, grandparenting then then we did with that age, you know, when we were parenting, because we had three close together, you know, and, you know, the whole discipline, the way of parenting back then was more of the, you know, spare the rod spoil the child kind of approach to parenting. So, yeah,



Simone Davies 18:46

and now Ferne, you have how many grandchildren and the ages.



18:50

So seven...about to turn 17



18:55

about to turn 10 and then a 4, two and a half, and eight months are my son's three who are and they've all been, they all went to Montessori, you know, Montessori 0 to 3 and planning three to six as well for his family. So



Simone Davies 19:15

yeah, I think it is a calling right Montessori and it if you just modeling Montessori principles in the home, they are going to brush off on others right. Absolutely. Actually, I wrote down some words that Barbara had written about becoming a Montessori grandparents. And you wrote Barbara, for me becoming a grandmother has opened a door to exploring childhood afresh. And you get to learn again about the nature of young children observe now with an unhurried eyes and tempered by a deeply felt love and sense of belonging. It's not merely the start of an education. It's more like watching humanity itself unfolding week by week, right in front of me. Like how beautiful is that? That is so beautiful. Yeah. It's like an awesome privilege.



20:00

It really is.



Barbara 20:00

exactly it is such a privilege to be able to do that. Because it is unhurried. And it is for the first time ever, that I can be in the moment. I know that the two days when I am this are grand daughters, they are their time, and nothing else needs to be done, because everything else can wait. And so you notice these little nuances, you notice the little steps towards independence, you rejoice in their capacity to be able to tell you what they need. And for us, my husband, too, is absolutely loving the time and the girls for our business. But you know, my most favorite time is the Saturday night sleep over. Our almost four year old has been coming for Saturday night's sleep over for the last six months. And she just checks it I made the bed ready for us to share. And she says to her mum, granny is my favorite person outside the immediate family because she's warm. And I'm sure that his to do this the time when we wake up together and we curl up together and have a lovely time. So yes. And it reminds me we have all this what my daughter was a very poor sleeper. So I have put her to bed and often fell asleep with her all the way up to the age of six or seven. So for me having that closeness with this fee on again, is just such a beautiful thing. And I'm now thinking how will I manage when the two of them are here? Where will I fit in the bed between them?



21:57

We had we've had all five of us



22:01

have a sleepover on the same night. We're not sure we'll do that. You know, it's exhausting. I know.



22:10

But, um, you know, when my little grandson his four comes over, He really hates sleeping, you know, and he asked for, you know, so I generally have two of them at once and you know, so the 4am they climb in bed with us we've used Luckily, we still got the king bed, you know, so they can all come in. But I wanna make a tent with my legs, you know, their favorite thing is to go into the tent. So um,



Simone Davies 22:38

yeah grandparenting sounds like so much fun.



22:43

Definitely fun and then when you get exhausted you just hand them back Simone.



Simone Davies 22:48

So um Barbara I love the stories that you tell now with these fresh unhurried eyes you know the things that you're observing and seeing this things like climbing trees or the baby that's just started crawling and exploring the world. Would you like to share some of those moments with us?



Barbara 23:06

It's really ironic because um, the home environment is really prepared for the children this very much the Montessori emphasis of low bad and children having covered this their own utensils and everything. And all the toys are being displayed on lit in little cubby holes so they can choose what they want to play with, which is something I have so enjoyed watching to see what what they will choose. Every so often I introduce a little Montessori activity, you know, just think of my birthday. You know, it's so ironic. My granddaughter often refuses to have anything to do with her mother, as if she knew that I'm anxious for her to use it. So she she would say Granny, I don't like it. But she now goes to a Montessori

classroom and she tells me the Montessori teacher you know, the teacher shows me how to do it because she's Montessori. She is so you put heavy emphasis is you were a special person, because you were Montessori is just so very, very funny. But I think that, for example, both of the girls are incredibly physical and their mom got them one of those frames that they can climb up and down. And that has been something that has been part of their life from the very beginning. So the second baby who is now 14 months, actually can climb over the little frame and come down and be very, very happy and she will apply I'm on a stool and say, jump, jump, and she expects me to help her to jump. So it's what I have really learned watching the two of them is how fundamental movement is to human existence. And I think it is for this reason that I was very keen that neither one of them goes to a provision for babies, because in England, we don't have proper infant communities. And I just wouldn't want their needs to move to be curtailed by the limitations of not having enough hands to support, it's not that we need to do anything, but you still need to be vigilant. Because there are moments just for them to know that you are there if anything's needed in order to build that courage and have a go. And that is to me to have been able to support that, for both of the girls has been incredible. And as a result, the second one is just so feisty in her movements. She's there alongside the four year old F in every single moment. And so much more capable, because of observing, I also what I have learned and children observe so intently. What did the adults does, we always underestimate our influence, because every little little thing they see, and they will copy or mimic, you know, that need to imitate in the beginning is so so powerful, and the capacity to observe. Or the granddaughter will notice in a book when a child is said in a drawing in an illustration, he or she will ask why is it like this a tiny, tiny little detail, which I have totally passed over? You know, yes, I know, there is the chart, but she notices every little detail. So I think the capacity to absorb that Montessori talks about so well, is there from the moment when they are born, and so have the time to give them the time. To be able to absorb to be able to move is the biggest gift we can give to the children when they are so little.



Simone Davies 27:33

Yeah, I think you're inspiring all of us to keep observing and keep watching. And to slow down. Even if we're parents, we will take those things away. And Ferne, would you like to share some of your things that you've seen running baby classes I



27:46

used to tell parents you know about when children are crawling, that is when they drawn to stairs, right. And if they can get confident on stairs, when they crawling, they'll tend to

be very confident walkers on stairs. But our societies are keeping them away for longer and longer periods. One of my pet hates is Montessori tower. And because it doesn't really give that much freedom, right. And it's used for an extended period past when children really need something that that's protect that, that protective. Whereas if you watch six month olds that are given opportunities to climb stairs, we've had big staircases in all of our environments when we've had small grandchildren and they've caused anxiety in the parents. So I took on the role of introducing all my grandchildren to stairs when they were six months so that by eight months, the parents could actually relax in the lounge because now they had crawlers that were confident, confident on stairs, right. And I was just watching my little and that little one yesterday who hasn't been introduced to them very much yet, but when you know that they as soon as they start and are interested, you can give them the first lesson as she sat looking at the stairs standing up bouncing on the first one, but she wasn't interested in going up them. But later her dad was down eight of the stairs. So I gave her first lesson climbing down the stairs to where her daddy was, you know. And I love that about Montessori that the principal is the best time for a child to learn as when they're interested. You know, and so, yeah, and toileting is the other thing where I think grandparents who have the knowledge can be such so instrumental in supporting something that can often be challenging and taking a lot of time and definitely a way to when your daughter in law's heart



Simone Davies 29:54

if you take over some of the toileting



29:57

Yeah, I'll change the nappy. Oh,



30:02

You know? So yeah, it has been a way of really cementing relationships, not only with my grandchildren, but also with the in law children.



Simone Davies 30:13

Thank you. I'm actually going back to movement as well in the importance of movement. Barbara, I remember you saying that your daughter and some of that communication that you really respect, you know, she's been teaching the grandchildren to say, like asking

them, does your body feel safe right now? And now the grandchildren will actually say, No, it's not safe, I need help. And they actually know when they feel safe and when they don't. So I think that's a hugely important part for us to take away is the movement and them trusting their bodies and those kind of things.

B

Barbara 30:43

Yes, that has been one of the key features of her language that whatever she says she always directs to the children. So equally, they have been introduced to baby led weaning from the very beginning. So they have been feeding themselves and managing their lunch, and all their food. And at the end of the meal, she always says, Does your body tell you that you have had enough. So again, learning to understand that you need to listen to yourself and be guided by what it is. But I had such funny experience on Monday afternoon. The baby toddler really is very different kinds of eater to her sister. And she doesn't need very much during the day, but she needs to have a big meal at about 430 in the afternoon. And she was so hungry, after we have been outside and playing that she said herself is her fork. But she passed me the spoon to feed her between between her forks, because I have never seen that she was I get it, she passed it once and I gave it back to her. And then she passed it again, she wanted me to feed her alongside the pork, which was just incredible. That she she already knows what her body needs, because she's never made to. I think that baby led weaning can be quite messy. And it can be quite wasteful, in that you know your offer and if the children don't eat it, and they don't eat it, or you can eat it instead. But that's another issue that I have, but not my daughter, she can leave it. But she they know what they need an eye. To me, there's two aspects is to Is it safe? Does your body feel safe? And does your body have enough, actually, to me that shows such enormous respect for the child and the trust in the child's capacity. And those are the two things I absolutely loved about Montessori when I first started to read the secret of childhood, because I was brought up in a community more in a society which expected you to obey irrespective of what you may have been thinking about.



33:19

I remember we had a waterfowl, you know, one of those self water stations for Kayla, and my oldest granddaughter at home from when she was just starting to stand up. So she learnt you know, she had learned to drink from a glass at about five months. And so by the time she was walking, she could really fill the glass already, you know, with you know,



33:41

and



33:44

I just remember, we never had to ask her whether she was thirsty because she had the capacity to go and get the drink. And later you would find her time, you know, I'm thirsty. You know, and she's always been an avid water drinker, which is another gift that you can give them when you know you have given them that opportunity to have the autonomy around, as you said that self regulation around food so that they they're not looking to the adult to solve waiting on the adult to feed them and waiting on the adult to give them drinks so that that that personal responsibility has been taken away son later. They often don't drink enough because they wait. It's still waiting for adults to be offering them things you know, instead of actually meeting those needs themselves. It's such a gift.



Barbara 34:44

Our youngest toddler absolutely loves water. And she already knows I always thought Phil, I don't have a fountain so I have these little cups or little glasses that I leave around the house and she I just adore it. She stops and she takes too little hands and she sits it so beautifully. You know, it's such a mark of competence or personal competence to be able to do it well. And, you know, just think what it does for the sense of self and well being, you know, I can do it. And, and good at it. It's, I just rejoice in that. Absolutely rejoice in it.



Simone Davies 35:28

I think it's so different to what a lot of grandparents are probably saying, as the grandchildren come to visit, which is be careful and don't do that. And I'll get it for you. I actually I wanting to over parent them because they have the time instead of stepping back to take in those moments and joys. So I guess, do you ever get the question, you know, like, I want my grandparents to be like, you like your Montessori, granny? Like, how can I get a Montessori? Granny, do you have any tips for parents who maybe aren't finding it quite so easy to have Montessori at home and Montessori with their family? Um,



36:00

it is one of the questions. I mean, at my school, you know, of course, because I had my granddaughter there, the mothers, but it would on a daily basis, say, Oh, you know, your daughter is so, so lucky. That, you know, to have you and to be, you know, supporting it means that you like, even got a second set of parents, do you know what I mean? Giving

Montessori principles The advice I give to parents, because it's a bit similar to your discipline methods or whatever, you know, parents have different discipline methods. And then, you know, they, their parents look after them. And they say, why would they listen, they tell them, they are good girl all the time. And, you know, can they just stop calling them a good girl and, and I've said, you know, take a step back. And start, I think if we start using empathy, if they start using empathy with their parents, and actually sharing with their parents, what they



Barbara 36:59
did love



37:00

about what their parents did with them, you know, there would be more openness. But I mean, I have thought for a long time to run a workshop for grandparents. Because it is such a beautiful way to not have to change your whole life where you're, you know, you can set up a little corner so easily in your environment, you know, and I did do a consult with one grandmother, who is whose children weren't even allowing her to look after the children. Because they were so concerned about her ornaments. And so I just started to buy a few Montessori things. And it just revolutionized this whole time she was having with her children, with her grandchildren, you know, in terms of, she felt useless, because they didn't like the way she did things. You know what I mean? And, and so, yeah, empowering grandparents by just also having the confidence, the hard conversation, I think if parents could have the conversation, I really respect the way you did things. And this is the way we would like to do them. Can you support us in this? And when parents have taken that boldness, because it is hard to do that? It has made a huge difference, you know, to be able to setting up the grandparents house for toileting, you know all these things? Because I think it's not what you say it's how you how you approach the conversation that's going to, you know, whether it goes well or not



Simone Davies 38:36

so right, because I think a lot of the grandparents feel criticized, well, didn't you like the way that I was raised? And actually, every human just wants to be seen, heard and understood, and that kind of thing. So to actually come back to empathy and treat the parents in the same way, but also acknowledge, yeah, that they just want to do it differently. And I think it's really sad to actually hear when we shut off grandparents, because they're not doing it in a Montessori way, because there's so much richness that a

grandparent can add to the child's life, if that's a possibility. And we understand obviously, that not everyone has grandparents that are available. And Barbara, do you have anything that you tell other families? Well,

B

Barbara 39:16

it's a bit too difficult, because I don't really want people to think that I know more than others. And I don't want them to feel kind of anxious about being around me. And I also felt that I have always said to my daughter, if you have children, I would really love to help you. looking after them because we didn't have that support. None of my family were around so we were very much a nuclear family and we had to rely on ourselves and I think that it gives children so much richness to have the extended family Have the grandparents. And I think that grandparents add another dimension. And the children understand absolutely fully that it is not what happens at home. This is a granny. So Ffion knows that in the kitchen, there is a cupboard where I may have a treat for her. She always wants to examine what the treat is, of course, I'm very careful that the treats are in line with what is x kind of acceptable within the family. But I think that all those little things just enrich the children's lives. So well, my husband makes tiny little things out of wood for, for her little play scenarios. And she, she told him on Sunday, I'm so happy you made me this animal enclosure, it is really good. And my husband hasn't stopped talking about it since since Sunday, he said, I'm so glad she really has come to appreciate that I have made it for her. So I think that we can grandparents are the dimension to the children. But I also try, it's almost inevitable that whatever I do, or my husband does, will be irritating to my daughter sometimes and her partner, if that's that's just life, and that's the nature of any relationship. But we really try hard to be respectful of the things that they wish to do for their children. Because I remember, when my daughter was three, and our son was quite small, I took them to visit my mother and I heard her say to somebody on the telephone, don't invite them, the children are very spoiled. And I was incredibly hurt. Because she totally missed the point of what I tried to give to my children, this sense of freedom and sense of being and of course, the children, you know, up to the age of six, you need to understand they are developing that you have to give lots of leeway with some parameters, but not too many. And the fact that she couldn't understand it, the fact that she couldn't understand that they were not brought up in the same way as I was brought up was I found really, really hurtful. So I have remembered that I must not be critical in or try not to be it's inevitable that sometimes one will say things, but I to be really respectful of what your children are trying to do with their children. Because being a parent is such a huge responsibility. Nobody prepares us for it, we might have had some positive experiences, but it still is a huge, huge challenge. And we need to support the parents as much as possible in what they are trying to do. Yeah,



43:00

I just spent you know, I think one of the big things I learned, I mean, you've got to transition into the fact that when your children are adults think they're going to have different ways. And they are in their partnership negotiate, you know, navigating to different households, and how are we going to bring up children. And, um, you know, as Barbara says, being a support, we need none of us like advice when we are asking, asking for it. Right? And, and our children don't want it either. And I found, you know, if you talk only 5% of the conversation with your adult children, they ask you more than if you spend more time talking. Right? Because, you know, it's that whole empathy thing, the more you listen, the more people feel loved and accepted and respected. And the more likely I wrote down here. If you talk lists, you've got a much better chance that they're going to ask for some advice. Because you know, when you don't give it then they're like, What's wrong with me? And we as when you give it, there's less likelihood, especially when they didn't ask for it, that they'll even listen, even if they think you're right. You know, it might take and it would take a lot longer. I mean, we negotiating transitions, right from birth on weight with our children. You know, every stage of development, we've got to change that relationship a bit. And I tell a lot of adults that, you know, I've spoken to a lot of people that have lost relationships with adult children, because they don't accept the partners. You know, they don't love their partners and the best thing you can do for your child is love their partner. You know, And when you do do that you gain your children, they're not going to move away from you if they don't have to choose between you and their partner. Because they'll choose the part that you know. And I've heard parents doing such weird things like going and opening pantries and checking out what their son's being fed. And it's not. So advice don't unless you ask for it.



Simone Davies 45:30

I think that's really wise. Because that must be so hard when you actually know so much from all of these years working in Montessori and seeing that there might be another way and yet saying less so that then they come to you to ask for the advice, I think is a really, you know, beautiful thing to see. And I think also that letting go of my children owning the fourth planet development. They're not having their own children yet, but I can imagine it's another letting go when they're actually parenting their own children. Do



Barbara 45:55

you find that Barbara? Absolutely. And I think what Ferne's said about loving their partners being such a good way to open the doors for a growing relationship. I think that is really so so important. Yeah, I love that. It's the same way as in the teenage years. You

may think lots of things, but you say very little, because it is not very helpful. Yes, I had. I had a friend who said, just try to sip your lips think it but don't say it. And I think that was the best advice I had to managing teenagers. And I think that idea of loving the partner. So did you accept that choice and also this idea of trying not to see the children your projection of you, but seeing them as an individual, you know, that idea, you see the baby, for as a person from the moment they are born, not as some a creature that has come from your body, I think that is so important in establishing those meaningful relationships. I think that's really, really important.



Simone Davies 47:12

So I think that this is really interesting as well, because, you know, you've seen children through different generations. And I'm kind of curious how things may have changed. You know, Dr. Montessori says that the needs of the child always the same. So Montessori should work, you know, whether it was 100 years ago or today, but Technology and Society and things like that have changed. So Ferne, have you noticed any differences in children, or how Montessori can still deal with the changes, you know, still meet the needs of children with the changes that are going on around in the world around us?



47:44

You know, I still think relationship is going to be the crux of any human beings existence, right? And you can't have relationships through technology. with people, you have to communicate with people. So whatever the technology was, I mean, we had television, right? Like there's always been something to distract from communicating with each other. Right? I think now, parents just have to be that much more proactive. You know, I mean, my granddaughter, my phone dropped on the floor that she's eight months old. The next minute I turned around, she's literally holding the phone. Doing this, she's eight months, she seen people turn around do selfies. And they they live what they see and they learn. So we never going it's hard to navigate technology in this environment. I don't think it should be brought into Montessori schools, to a large extent, the base that Montessori schools are giving children where they are learning to do problem solving and that are only going to stand in good stead for for them to be able to navigate the difficulties in life. I mean, there's a huge breakdown in family relationships right now post COVID. You know, all over the world because they've been thrown into these, like a pressure cooker situation, right? where parents are in environments without you know, I spoke to someone in Spain yesterday. It's like a pressure cooker and relationships aren't coping, you know, because they haven't got the skills, the problem solving skills to navigate through such crisis, you know, and so they think, Oh, we don't love each other anymore, or whatever, you know, or

it's just too hard. So, yeah,



49:42

I don't think



49:45

I think, you know, I've tried, I've helped a lot of families minimize their technology in ways because they thought they shouldn't. Oh, well, he just needs to watch the screen while he eats. Otherwise, he doesn't eat. You know, things like that. And I said, Well, do you want them to watch your screen? No, I want to talk to my children. So just so just pack your screen away, you know, that sometimes parents need to be given permission to this, because they're almost feeling they depriving their children of the latest learning gadgets, just like we would have felt, you know, other things, you know, getting the latest toy is what's loving towards your child, you know. So I think minimizing technology is the best parenting advice you can give them, you know, and by doing that, you have to model it yourself. You have to have technology free meal time and family time.



Barbara 50:41

Yeah, I absolutely agree that technology is such a powerful tool. And it is our behavior which demonstrate to the children that it is important, it's in our pockets all the time. toddler when she was a baby at eight months, was pulling the phone out of her mother's back pocket, because she saw it there. And we have made a very conscious decision to minimize the use of our access to them, the mobile phone or anything, but what I find interesting at the moment is that there are lots of Montessori nurseries in the UK who record the children's progress using iPads. So this becomes, again, a tool of importance. And I have had an iPad that I have never connected to the internet. And my granddaughter found it in my desk. And she was just amazed that I had the same thing as her teachers. And she, she comes and she knows how to turn it on. She knows how to check if it is charged properly or when needs to be charged. And then she can do some notes on it. So she can type in letters into the machine because that's all that it will do. And I could see that for her initially, this was she identified this the teachers in her classroom, and she would play this in for 20 minutes, and then she would believe it. And nowadays she she's might look at it perhaps once a week or so. But it's it has lost its importance important. So it was a stage that she has used in order to make a connection between our house and her experience in the nursery. And I think that is we should really talk about the teachers in the nursery much more about what that iPad represents to the

child, it represents control, it represents power, you know, and therefore, they want to they all want to be like us. So they will try to mirror it if it is if it is available. But I have also

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Barbara 53:08

got a friend with whom I work who is called when to Lin her daughter rides a horse and my family are very interested in animals. So I have shown Ffion little snippets of Wendelien's daughter riding a horse. And this whole scenario has now become part of her game. So she has got three animals, they are all horses. They've got two little, little people who leads and they are called Wendelien and Rose. And, and so I am learning how the child's kind of real experiences or experiences of things that are meaningful, can really be integrated into their play, and become an important opportunity to learn about horses and how to care for them. And really, this idea that the three and four year old needs to begin to roleplay and needs to develop play scenarios has become really such an important element of my observation of my of my four year old alongside these problem solving skills, because the other day them I said, I made little pigtailed on her door and she said, I said I made your pony I made give her ponytails and she said no, granted, they are pigtailed. So I said what's the difference between a tail and a ponytail? I don't understand. And she said it's simple. The ponytail is bigger and it is one the pigtailed are sinners and they are two. Now could you have had a better description from a child who is not even full. But it really shows you how, how much they understand if they have the language to explain it. I

B

Barbara 55:00

think that the giving children tools of language is, alongside the movement is really the most important than Montessori is chapters on language development are so powerful in understanding how it gets the child's tools to be understood. I think yeah,



55:22

I think that under three Montessori language materials are one of the best kind of tools or activities grandparents could have. I mean, you know, just putting just the simple thing of putting your kitchen utensils while you're cooking in a basket for the, you know, for the six month old, and simplifying those kinds of things. It's, it's the practicalities of Montessori education, are so helpful in the home environment, right to make life not only are so rich for the child, but so much more simple. And you don't need a lot of equipment, you know, parents need only about 10% of the stuff they buy for children, right to really give them a rich knowledge. And when I do home consults, he literally normally throw out 90% of

what parents have on the shelves, and they feel like a weights been lifted off them, you know, that, oh, my goodness, I just have to observe what they learning and put three or four activities out that they actually are interested in. And that's going to be enough, you know, and plus all that, you know,



56:39

Simone, your trainer used to say food isn't it is an opportunity, what an occasion for education, Judi Orion, and, you know, all my grandchildren just love working alongside us in the kitchen, we've got pictures of them all, as toddlers, you know, stirring spaghetti making salads, you know, all of those things on the two step stool. So



57:04

yeah, I think, you know, practical life. Next to practical life, you don't really need that much more between gardening and kitchen work, you know, that's kind of, you know, gives them a very rich foundation for confidence and self esteem.



Barbara 57:22

I absolutely agree the opportunity to help around in the kitchen or be around while you're doing things is so I remember when my daughter was tiny, we lived in a very, very small flat, and I had to sit her in the sink, so that she wouldn't be able to chop her vegetables whilst I was chopping my vegetables. And she became so proficient, she was the best celery chopper I have ever had. And equally, my oldest granddaughter, she can break eggs into a cake, like I have never seen she can do it more efficiently than I can. And once more, because we then dry the shells and we crush them to put on our allotment. That whole cycle of taking every part of the egg again, benefiting somebody around you is I really love that. And she remembers you know, she says Remember to dry those granny because I will need to smash them next time I come. And those are the kinds of little jobs that they come to be associated this coming to our house, which I think that's the gift of the grandparenting then you can create tiny little activities for the children that are then become synonymous with coming to your house.



Simone Davies 58:54

I think you have such a luxury because as a parent, we're worried are you ever going to learn to read ever going to you know, learn their maths and instead you're just let's do language by just naming everything in our kitchen as we're preparing the food together?

And do you think that that's easier as a grandparent to let go of the and you've seen it happen like your children did grow? They did learn to toilet and they did learn to read and they did learn you know, all those kinds of things. Barbara,



Barbara 59:18

what do you think? And I remember standing in the delicatessen when my children were small talking to a friend who had a child of the same age about the toileting there was a older lady in front of us said, ladies Don't worry, they will not be in nappies by the time they are 10. That's a such a fantastic advice. It will happen when the child is ready Of course we need to help them but each child will be ready at a different time. So just I think that Montessori is idea of the natural unfolding or spontaneous unfolding of child's development is such a wonderful idea. Because the rhythm of every child will be slightly different, the policy is very similar, but the rhythm of it and the speed of it will be so different. And again, it's to do with accepting our parents, our children for who they are, not whom we would like them to be. And I suppose the most difficult thing is not to compare the first child to the second child, because they are each different. And, you know, like, I already done it. In our conversation today, I said, Our youngest grandchild eats so well, and it is her pattern of eating is very different to, to our older grandchild. It is, that's the reality of it. But for the older child, that is already a comparison, isn't it? If she heard me say that, she would say, Granny, I, I do like my spaghetti, you know, over, she would remind me that he was not that different, there were things that mattered to her also. So perhaps just accepting the children for who they are. And the uniqueness that they bring to our life and the gifts they bring to our lives is so important.



Simone Davies 1:01:19

And Ferne, do you find it more, like easier as a grandparent to let go of those learning milestones and things like that, and really just allow that,



1:01:26

I just think there's just opportunity. Yeah, like, you don't even think of learning milestones, really, I just think you you're present in, I think your focus is having a relationship with the child, which, you know, is one thing that I would have loved to, you know, if you could redo your parenting, hey, Barbara, if you could go back and correct all the mistakes you made, you know, one of the things that I would do is be just more present that, you know, I mean, I was a kind of mother that used to play and let them play in the mud and not worry about messing things. But there was still that wanting to get it, right. Like Barbara

said, you know, you have this intense thing that it's all up to me, I think, especially as a mum, you know, to get it, right. Whereas as a, as a, as a grandparent, your your focus shifts to, I mean, for me, it just became, I really want to be a grandmother that my grandkids know, and have an individual relationship with, whereas I remember visiting grandparents, and you you are, it had to be on your best behavior, you know, you had to make sure that you didn't spill anything and didn't do this and didn't do that. And, and didn't do the next thing. And, you know, I mean, after one bad shot, like, this is a tall order to be able to have the same kind of rape relationship and involvement in my grandchildren's lives, as I had with the first one, you know, but you can do it, because if you, if you look at them as individuals, there are beautiful things that they each would love to do with you, you know, like with my nine year old, we collecting all the bottles, they get 10 cents at the moment and going in the garage, and then I've made that something that I'll do with him and take him to the Depo and, you know, something that parents wouldn't do not for the 10 cents for each bottle, whereas I'm getting everyone, you know, just the boxes getting full and for that, and, you know, cooking with him, he loves to cook with his with my husband, you know, you know, cutting the the Herbes for the meat meals, those kind of things, you know, taking my granddaughter for a drive now in her car, you know, yeah, this this things, it's really important. You have to be proactive. As a grandparent, you can't expect your children to bring your, their children to you to give that them you or relationship with their children. Right. Because that they're each so unique. You can't actually develop a relationship with four grandchildren all at once at the same time in an afternoon when you're having a meal with the whole family. So I you know, I mean that's the richness, the fact that, you know, Barbara says you're being their favorite person is is a wonderful thing to be, you know, one of the other favorite people, you know, like my grandson is Susie's leaving, you know what, I don't want to leave you. And then I say, Oh, it's so hard. You want to be with mommy and you want to be with granny. And that you know, it's it's very, it's very beautiful. You just got to relish the moments.

B

Barbara 1:04:54

My daughter said before serin was born. I'm just anxious. You will not love her as much as you love Ffion. And I said, That's not possible, of course, we will love her. And yes, the loving relationship has unfolded. This her as the person she is this robust, sturdy child who wants to be present in everything, and we love her for her energy and for who she is. So yes, I think that that having the privilege of being the special person for the different reasons for each one of your grandchildren, I think it means that we have developed some kind of relationship or something that is meaningful to them. And I think that is really important in, in what we try to create how we try to help our children, but for me in the recent conversations, the one question that my daughter came to me with was, Do you really think that children have lost on learning because there's in the UK, there is this huge

agenda, then the children have missed a whole year of their life. And I said, Don't be ridiculous, children are learn all the time. And they have learned about COVID things which we have never known because we haven't had to experience that. But having recognizes that the child learns from absolutely everything, you cannot limit opportunities to learn, I happen, that whole agenda of missing missing out on what. And I know that people say that children who are living in very difficult circumstances, miss out. But it doesn't mean that they don't stop learning, they still learn. And sadly, maybe the experiences are not what we would like them to be. But the learning doesn't stop. It's part of childhood. We learn, we experience life, and

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Ferne 1:07:05

we learn from it. And also most of us grew more out of the tough experiences in our lives than the easy time. I mean, if you have gone without education for a year, it's much more likely that you're going to have, you know, an appreciation for what education is, you know, or what alone time it is, you know, all of the things that they've had to do without in difficult circumstances, you know, sometimes, you know, the problems in society we having is that, you know, the last couple of generations in some countries haven't had any hardships, you know, they haven't had wars or anything to deal with, that they're not risk takers. Because difficulties, they haven't got the emotional resilience to actually deal with, with difficulties, you know. So, as you said, Barbara, you know, every everything that happens in our lives, you know, is is we're learning from and, and, you know, my mom and dad took me up for three months for an overseas trip when I was nine, just because they didn't have anyone to look after me, you know, while they wind, and I, I, that experience of traveling around Europe, even a first child in my family to travel in a jumbo jet. And that really shaped my life, you know, in terms of the way I think, you know, broadened my perspective, it made me be able to deal with migration later in my life, you know, I mean, all of these things, you know, they they are the richness of a child's education.

B

Barbara 1:08:51

And education is not only what we learn at school, I think that that's the message I would like to give to parents that the opportunity to learn this, your parents, the things that they love, and that they enjoy, will become part and parcel of the chance like, they may initially resent it. Because my children when they were kind of in the second plane of development, would complain bitterly about having to go on walks, but the joy that I have this walking, visit them now. I can trace back to the early days when we walked together. And I think that, you know, there is a huge amount that parents can give to their children in the first six years of life before they start going to school because before other influences come. And I just would like the parents to believe that they have got the power

to really give their values and their special killings and the important things to their children because that is The gift you are giving them for life. Nobody is going to take it away. Yeah, that's beautiful. It actually



Simone Davies 1:10:05

reminds me, Barbara of on your website, you have the men dollar of life.



Barbara 1:10:09

Yes.



Simone Davies 1:10:11

Tell us about the Mandela life.



Barbara 1:10:12

Well, I've been very fortunate because for my grandparenting podcasts on which I have become very overwhelmed by other work that I have not committed, contributed to the minute but when I started, I wanted to share this idea that life is many faceted and very beautiful. And I have been very fortunate that David Gettman, who helped me to set up the website, actually, it is for me, the mandala became like a kaleidoscope. Do you remember those kaleidoscopes that you turn around, and you get this exquisite arrangement. So if you hover the cursor over the mandala, it will do it will continue to change. And that, to me is what life is all about. It continues to change, it continues to evolve, and continues to give us the opportunity to learn from our environment from our children, but also about ourselves. And in the recent months, when I have since I have retired, I have felt this huge joy of having more opportunity to learn from all of you guys. Life is so rich, to be able to engage in these conversations. Yeah, I think that yes. So this idea of continuing joyfully and Curiously, as we move through life, irrespective of which plane of development we are, is, is really important.



1:11:46

You know, you know, the journey of life. Yeah, I share with parents, you know, when they, when you intense in that first plane, you know that zero to three parents think these problems that, you know, parenting problems, this is the worst of the parenting problems I'm ever gonna have, you know, and I just say to them, like, you know, we need to get

skills, parents don't need more love, you know, we actually need skills to navigate the changes, because our children are growing and developing so quick, it's hard to keep up with a child's development. And if you have recently met a mom with 12 children, I saw her standing there with the 12, children aged 18 to one, and I just went my mouth just been, like, I know how, you know how much negotiate, like trying to keep those balls up with four children was, you know, and, but it's, yeah, if you can just be present with your children and actually enjoy the ride. And some reason, most of us won't care, you know, you can't take anything with you, you know, you can only take people with you and the relationship, and you can only leave a legacy of what you've, you've built into people through relationship, right. So, you know, taking time to have more fun, as families, I think, and having a, you know, something that a bigger vision for your families as well. I think I love that idea of Steven Covey's. But if you start with the mission and the families or working towards a mission together, you know, that is a generational thing that happens, you know, through families, leaving something behind for the next generation to learn from



Simone Davies 1:13:39

so beautiful. But I think what I've taken away from this, you know, conversation has been this gift of time that you get to give to your grandchildren, the gift of connection. And I'm so grateful to both of you for sharing your beautiful Montessori grand parenting and parenting journeys with us. So thank you both for being here today.



Barbara 1:13:57

Thank you so much for having us. It was such fun to do. It was.



Simone Davies 1:14:15

Well, I hope that conversation gives you some inspiration for being with grandparents. Or if we don't have grandparents or aren't in contact with them anymore, then these ideas could be applicable with any family members or carers too. And we can all adopt Ferne and Barbara maybe as our Montessori grandparents, so I'll put links to their websites in the show notes so you can keep following their grandparenting journey and seek them out for some grandparenting wisdom. And if you are a Montessori grandparent, my friend Pamela green has just started a community for Montessori grandparents. So check out the show notes how to join the group and I'll put all the information there. And remember, you can find all the links to everything we mentioned in the show over at the Montessori notebook.com and then click on the podcast tab and you can also drop any Listening questions there as well. So now let's move on today's question. This one I answered in a

recent newsletter, but I decided that it's such a commonly asked question that I'd share with you too. And the question is, my son is seven months old. I've been following all the Montessori principles that I can find and using it with my son. I live in Kathmandu, and the concept is there in a very superficial way. Schools are called Montessori, but they don't follow the principles. So my question is regarding my son visiting his peers, or friends who live in a mountain of electronic toys, how will my son deal with an environment when no one is vaguely following the method? All these toys are wooden Montessori toys, and his friends have just plastic and battery operated toys? What can I expect from his interaction with his peers? And what will the difference be between him and his friends when they're older? So indeed, yes, we can't control how other people raise their children. And as parents and caregivers, do know that you have an enormous impact on how you are raising your child. They're with you so much of the day, even if they're at school, they're at home on the evenings and afternoons and the weekends. So it will definitely lay a beautiful Foundation, and it just may be quite different to how others are raising their children. So with other people, I think you can be very clear on what your approach is in your home. So you can clearly communicate to that to loved ones or people who are visiting. So, you know, you can say things like it's important to us. And I always find that a useful phrase to use to communicate something that is important to you. And that's more likely to be heard. so that it can be clear on whether you want electronic toys or not in your home. The second thing would be like in the early years, you have more control over what your baby's going to be spending time. So if you visiting other's homes for a short time each week, then your child's gonna just start learning that that's where electronic toys will be. And actually, you know, observe how does your child react to them, sometimes I can be honest, I was horrified that my child was enjoying them. But then know that most of the time your baby's going to be playing in a different way, hopefully, like a more active way with more passive toys with things that you've selected for your own home. So if it's more often that you visit other people, then I might think about like making an appointment to meet them outside or going for a walk together, visiting a playground, Park nature and that kind of thing. So that then you're not always being exposed to the electronic toys there. And if someone was actually caring for your child, then maybe that's a place that you choose not to, or you have a discussion with them about that in a very positive way that everyone can have their needs met. Definitely, if you feeling a little bit isolated in Kathmandu, then keep connecting with other Montessori families. So if they're not in your local area, you could look online to find like minded families to support each other. I mean, I think that's the beauty of social media is that we actually don't have to feel alone when we're traveling this path. And that can just give you an extra little bit of support. And like, don't give up because even though you may be parenting in a way that's quite different, don't underestimate that actually, people may be inspired by you. Because when you say something like, look at the way they're observing that tree for so long. They're kicking their legs, and they look like they're really enjoying it, you know, just

like, do you remember Gabrielle was talking about that, you know, talking about the joy the child's having not necessarily using the word Montessori, but other people might start to see that Yeah, their children need less how they can observe their child and how you can interact with respect with your baby. There's also some interesting research being done about the outcomes with Montessori children. And so for those interested I'll drop a link in the show notes to a blog post where I shared some of the latest research being done about Montessori.



Simone Davies 1:18:46

But for me, the most important part of Montessori parenting is knowing that we've supported our child's unique development and help them to remain curious in the world around them. And in the long run, hopefully helping them become responsible humans and Montessori children will I promise, you still have ups and downs, but you're going to be there along the road to support them in those experiences. And then, lastly, with regard to electronic toys and technology, as a Montessori educator, I prefer the hands on learning and definitely for children under six years old. And for over six years old. I really like the book, toxic childhood. It's by Sue Palmer. And then the subtitle is how the modern world is damaging our children and what we can do about it. And it's a surprisingly interesting and positive guide because it says, Okay, this is what the situation is, but also this is what we can do about it. So her ideas on technology, say that, you know, a small amount of well selected good quality media could help your child like understand what's going on with their peers, but without having to take over their lives. So we keep talking to our children about the choices that they're making, what our family values are, and as your children grow, you know, your values are developing along with them. So, I hope that's really helpful. If you enjoyed this episode, please share it with a friend or drop a rating in your podcast app. And I hope that you all have a lovely week. And now I'm going to go and talk myself into bed. And I'll be back next Friday with another episode. Bye, everyone. Thanks for joining me for The Montessori Notebook podcast. The podcast was edited by Luke Davies from Filmprov Media and podcasts art by Hiyoko. To find out more about me and my online courses visit the Montessori notebook comm follow me on Instagram at the Montessori notebook for pick up a copy of my book The Montessori Toddler for its new prequel The Montessori Baby from your local bookstore, Amazon or where books are sold. They're also available as ebooks, audio books, and have been translated into over 20 languages. I'll be back in a week with more Montessori inspiration. And in the meantime, perhaps you'll join me in spreading some more peace and positivity



1:20:57

around the world.