

# The Montessori Notebook S02E10

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## SPEAKERS

Simone Davies

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Hi, everyone and welcome back to another episode of The Montessori notebook podcast. I'm Simone Davies, a Montessori educator since 2004, and a Montessori parent since I found out about Montessori nearly 20 years ago. And today we have a deep dive conversation with Hannah Bayhnam from Collaborative Montessori. And it's all about cosmic education in Montessori, an inclusive education, how we can help make our children, stewards of the world and so much more. So if you don't know what cosmic education is, then you've come to the right place as Hannah will guide us through it all. And I hope you'll leave it feeling as inspired as I did. And before we get to the conversation today, I wanted to talk about quizzing our children and why I mostly like to avoid it. So what I mean by quizzing is asking our child more those kind of closed questions like or close this and we'll close that. And what's this called? And what sound does this animal make? And I'll admit that when Oliver was small, before I knew about Montessori, I'd say all of those kinds of things. And can you clap your hands for grammar? or What does the dog say? And I'd often just get this blank look back, or he tried to guess, but often get it wrong, and then you end up correcting him, and you'll see their face just drop. And it's kind of like we're nonstop testing them. And in Montessori, instead of testing kids to know if they know something we rather observe and keep teaching and exploring until we see that they've

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got it.

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So let's just think about if someone, for example, asked us a question that only had a right or wrong answer, and we weren't sure. So maybe it's something like what's the capital of Australia? And we'd be thinking, is it Sydney? Or is it Canberra, so we have to make a guess. And if we get it wrong, we end up feeling silly or ashamed. And this is certainly not a way to teach us the capital of Australia, if we want to have confident learners. And it's confusing, because Canberra is the capital, even though Sydney is the largest city. So what might be a better way for us to learn it. I mean, maybe the person could keep repeating their name in natural ways, just in our daily life until we remember it. Or if they're being more explicit, we could look at a map to see which was the capital, they maybe could tell us a story about why camera was selected as the capital. And apparently it was as sort of compromise between the two biggest cities of Melbourne and Sydney, we could maybe pretend to plan a visit there or actually visit there, do some research on it, you know, you get the idea. So rather than just in the learning phase, asking, what's the capital, what's the capital,

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you know, before

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they ask us, again, what is the capital of Australia, they need to observe some evidence that we know it before they ask him, and then I'm sure we will be delighted to tell them as it's something new to us, and we're excited to share. And if they just keep asking us before we do know it, we might just lose our curiosity or lose some confidence otherwise, or we might just give up interest completely. So that kind of example, is almost like a three period lesson in Montessori. So the first period just means the first part is naming it. So this is yellow, for example. And there's many opportunities for the first period that we could be doing in our daily life, like, here's the yellow cup, and the buses yellow. And so you're pointing out the name of those kind of things in the first period. Then the second lesson, the second part of the lesson, is playing games, like matching to yellow objects, collecting lots of yellow items. And then you can actually visually see if they match or not, oh, yeah, that doesn't look the same. So that's not yellow. And you're working in that yourself. And then once I see that, you know, yellow Well, I could say, oh, what color is this, and then again, you're going to be delighted to say it's yellow, because it's something new that you've learned and mastered. So that's the third period. And in my Montessori training, we learned that we rarely use that third period, with children, particularly under three years old, until we absolutely know that they know the answer, and would be delighted to tell us. So it's kind of then about when to ask that question, and how often to ask it. And I'd say that it's a whole lot less than we usually do now. And we can rather stay in that teaching and exploring discovery phase for a lot longer. Because at the end of the day, like, what are we rushing them for? And it is a good

question. Like, why do we ask these questions so early? And so often? Are we trying to get our child to learn faster? or perform on cue? Or is maybe that just how we learned? So definitely don't worry if you've been doing it, or you notice yourself now saying these things a lot. But maybe just think about why you're asking them and what you could ask them or teach them in a more natural way instead. And I'm just thinking a lot about my conversations with toddlers and well with any age child, and I'm not so busy with testing or quizzing them, I want to be like in conversation with them. So we'll learning together. And I might say something and you know, leave time for them to respond. So Ah, yeah, look, there's a letter. And then I might look up at the error. And then just give some time and you might hear the child say,

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letter

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letter. And then they're repeating the word. Or it might ask an open question, I wonder what they're doing. And again, like, I try and remember to pause to see if, you know, they might say, oh, they're painting or climbing the ladder or anything like that. And maybe not, maybe I might fill in the gap. It looks like they might be doing some painting. Or it might like describe the louder Oh, it looks pretty tall and silver, and I think it's made from metal. And then, you know, you see if they respond in any way, or continue with like, I'm trying to remember if we've seen any letters before. Do you remember any letters and ask these kind of more open ended questions that lead to some conversations where they might like, then want to tell a story about when they have seen a letter. Maybe you were painting on a letter at home, or you used a letter to read something? Or they may even make that connection, like, oh, there's a letter on my fire engine. And if you actually want to learn about asking great questions, I have a really fun suggestion for you. I've just started listening to another podcast called the Art Engager podcast, and it's by Claire Bown of the Thinking Museum. And I actually know Claire personally as she came with her twins my classes 12 or 13 years ago, and She now works in the same building as a classroom. And I always love chatting to her when I see her because she's also busy with how humans learn and engage. And whilst her podcast is for museum educators to create engaging programs, episode four of the podcast is all about asking great questions. And I think it's really helpful if you find yourself always asking those kinds of closed questions where there's only a yes or no type answer. And there's also a really fun episode, which you should check out as well about slow looking, which reminds me a lot of Montessori observation, too. Anyway, all that to say that for building curiosity, I would love to suggest to try and have more open questions, questions that sparked their interest and save the right and wrong ones for when they're excited to tell you about what they've just learned. And one last thing, we do play games in Montessori, like Oh, can you find the octopus when we're working with like language baskets, or maybe reading a book? And if they show us the right one,

we say, Oh, you found the octopus. And if they point to something else, instead of saying, No, you that's not the octopus would say, Oh, you wanted to show me the giant squid. And so we're just simply naming the one they pointed to instead, and then make that mental note that they're still learning octopus, and might like to teach that to them again at another time. Anyway, I hope that's interesting. And something to think about. And I think now it's time for us to definitely jump into my conversation with Hannah. And I'll be back afterwards to answer another question.

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everyone, Simone here, and today, I want to introduce you to Hannah Bayhnam, who is joining us. She's on holidays at the moment in the US. But really, when we get into it, you will hear that Hannah is from around the world. Hi, Hannah, thank you so much for joining us.

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Thank you so much. I'm really happy to be here.

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And I'm so excited to introduce you to Hannah, because she has such a rich experience of working in Montessori all around the world. And I guess it starts probably from your childhood, would you like to speak a little bit into as Hannah about where you grew up, and how that may be impacted on your work so far, like your commitment to give children a voice and promoting this global citizenship and all of the work you do on diversity and inclusion and respect.

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Thank you. Yes. So I was born and raised in India. My father is British and my mother's American. And they were hippies. Obviously. They ended up in India. And I spent most of my childhood again in India and but also traveling my parents were very interested in giving us an education through travel and through experiences. And I feel very privileged to have had those experiences. We never had a fancy car or a house or anything like that our currency our love language was plane tickets. We did a lot of traveling and and yeah, I think those experiences traveling and seeing children and connecting with children because as a child, you're always making friends, no matter where you went. Connecting with children working with children. My parents made sure that we did a lot of social impact work and charity work in our travels that it wasn't just about wasn't just about being a tourist. It was about really Seeing how communities worked and lived. And, and as a child, I maybe didn't appreciate all of the beautiful wonders. But as an adult, it's really has allowed me to reflect on the privilege of those experiences and those connections that I made. And also that worldview, which was so important to my parents that, that we had this worldview,

that it was more than just what happened in the US or the UK, it was really about having that international perspective. And that's, that's really helped shape my understanding of, of how children are, and how, how the world really supports children and how children are the product of our cultures and how children really are the changemakers in our culture, as well. And yeah, I, I started, I mean, I worked in the I worked in a lot of nurseries, and helped with in orphanages and things. And I think this kind of sparked my interest in working with children. And, and now I am a Montessori guide, and I'm very happy how Montessori has really integrated into my experience in terms of offering the children the world, you know, and, and that doesn't mean having to travel to all these beautiful places, although it's great if they can, but it's about about representing cultures and identities and representing authentic representation of the world to to really show what Montessori meant without being a citizen of the world.

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Oh, that's so fascinating, because I do think we get stuck on like Montessori being all about independence and the individual child. And I think, you know, for parents who are listening, you know, we are focused on our own child. But I actually am a big passionate supporter of like, we're working on our independence. So we can actually be a better human in society. And Dr. Montessori did write about the child in society. But I feel like in the next 10 years, we could get that message out there, that we're global citizens, and that we're caring for our earth for other people. That would be amazing. And I know that that's something you're really passionate about. And you talk about cosmic education starting from the early years. So maybe people don't know what cosmic education is. So maybe we could explain that. And then talk about how you've, in the work that you've done, been able to incorporate that idea.

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So, Montessori spent some time in India, which was very interesting to me, because again, I was born and raised in India, and during her time in India, and again, she was there during World War Two, and there was a lot of conflict in the world. She was very influenced by philosophers such as Gandhi and, and kind of seeing the social movements of that time. And she started talking about this idea of cosmic education. And cosmic education is really, I think, actually the most important parts of Montessori philosophy, and I don't think we talked about it a lot. It's that idea that everyone and everything in this world is interconnected, and that we have a responsibility. And we have to respect others and the environment around us. And she talked about this, this term being a citizen of the world. So if you think about Montessori during that time, in that context, you know, the war was happening, and there was a lot about individual countries identity and patriotism, and all of those things. fascism. Montessori really believes that children could be citizens of the world, and that instead of being identified with one specific country, that we need to be more of a community. And we need to, in order to create that community, we need to bring

cultures we need to bring understanding, we need to bring tolerance and love and respect and see the interconnections between everything around us. And I think that this is particularly important when we think about first of all sustainability and environmental actions is that seeing that interconnection between us and nature, and our effects that we have on nature and how we can improve that, but also our connections with each other, and our connections with the wider world and, and yeah, so I mean, for me, cosmic education starts with the early years starts with young children, even toddlers and and you know, Babies by listening and exposing children to something outside of their own culture. But by instilling aspects of respect and responsibility, and I think Montessori is very good at this, this idea of children being responsible, and being responsible citizens, and what does that mean, in the classroom? And what does that mean at home? And what does that mean in the wider community. And, again, part of this is, is really giving children agency and allowing children to have a voice. And I do believe children are the future, and children will shape the way the world reacts to things in the future, if we give them this concrete foundation now, and that happens during that absorbent mind stage. So yes, I think cosmic education, those seeds are planted in early years. And when you get to the second plane of developments, or the six to nine years, they start doing the history of the earth and longer cosmic lessons, which really expand and explore the idea of evolution and interdependence, and, and all of those things, but those key principles of respect and responsibility, and being a citizen of a community of a larger world, but just our families and just our school environments, our principles that we can start off with in the early years, so yeah,

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so how would that actually look like if a parent thought, yeah, I really like that idea. I really want to make my child realize that it's like, we're just a family, and then we're part of a community and how it gets that community goes bigger as their world, you know, as they get older, and those kinds of things. But in your classroom, for example, what concrete tangible things would you be working on? I know that it's such a holistic education, so maybe it's hard to pull it apart, because all of the layers build on each other. But what kind of things would you say, Show that's cosmic education happening in a three to six classroom, for example.

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So for me, it really it is about those connections with the community. And if you think about the three to six classroom, it's that introduction to culture outside of the family, maybe for the first time. And, and so it's really being connected with the community. So it can be just little things like, you know, going to the markets, or, you know, talking to the shoe shining person or you know, haven't having those kinds of experiences where children start to see the connections and the world around them. In the classroom, we do that to many materials that want to sorry, you know, talked about or, or that an area of the environments that we call the culture area, or knowledge

and understanding of the world. And culture, I love this culture in Italian, isn't culture, it's called tuta, which means to cultivate. And I think that this is what we do with young children is we cultivate an interest. But this is based upon their own specific interests, or the community within their in their environment. So you know, talking to the families, the cultures that the families come from, and making sure those families are represented, but also thinking about those wider communities. And, you know, we do things by introducing puzzle maps and geography at a very young age, in a very concrete way, so children can start understanding where they come from, and what other continents look like. But also, I think it's important to again, bring in community, bring in the people from the community to speak about, about different celebrations, about festivals, about, you know that that's those ideas again, in practical life, we see those ideas of responsibility and respect, which we kind of nurture through our grace and courtesy lessons. It's all kind of layered in all many different layers. But for me, some of the most effective ways that I've brought in the community, again, is bringing people into the classroom to talk about specific things and that will, that will spark an interest in young children about a specific country or specific instruments or food. I think food is a great way to connect people because we all we all eat. And and Montessori really wanted us to focus on the similarities all human beings have and not just the differences. So it's not about being tokenistic and showing, oh, you know, this is what this is, you know what they do for Chinese New Year and they're wearing Chinese costumes, and then children have that impression that actually, all children were Chinese costumes all the time. And that's it. That's again, that's that's a tokenistic impression of maybe a stereotype or perpetuating stereotypes and my ideas again, bringing in those similarities. So one thing I love to do is connect Montessori classrooms around the world. And I think technology is a great way to do that. So we would have Skype sessions or zoom sessions with other Montessori classrooms, and it would just be in the corner and the children could go and talk and talk to each other. And they'd give each other tours around their classrooms. And they'd be so delighted to see, oh, you have a pink tower, we have a pink tower to and, and again, seeing those similarities, but then also talking about oh, you know, we, we eat this for lunch, or, you know, we like to do this, we like to play this. It's hot where we are, you know, it's winter, where we are, it's summer where we are really exposing the children to the world within the classroom. And I think that that's, those little things are really what makes Montessori special those opportunities are really what makes Montessori special.

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Oh, I love how you're just planting seeds, like it's going in, as you said in the absorbent mind period in the zero to six years. And so I mean, the three to six year old child is a conscious learner, but it's going to be built on then as they go into the second plane and go, Oh, yeah, that experience that we had earlier is like it isn't. And then they'll be out in the community and actually going out and helping the neighbors and going into their community to do they're going out. And I just love how it's a foundation that they'll be building on for years to come. And I think it's like

you say it's overlooked, because we don't think of cosmic education starting maybe until the six to 12 age group, when they're having their cosmic education lessons, they have the great lessons that gold. And so I love that. So many of the areas of the Montessori classroom the way we interact, like, relate to each other, have to walk around someone's mat that's being in community with someone. Right.

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Exactly. And I think that those early years, I mean, the absorbent mind, and I know I don't mean to preach to you about this is they're the most important years, they're laying the foundation for the rest of a child's life. And they're laying the foundation for learning and a love of learning. And that curiosity. And that wonder that happens with these young children. If you were able to capture that moment, and really develop that interest, the children will carry that on to the next plane and then the next plane. And it's, it's really about creating confidence in children, creating a love for learning, creating a social aspect. So they're starting to understand how they work within a bigger social society. But it really is, again, planting those seeds that will grow into flowers and trees as they grow up and continue on their lives. So

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and I know something else is really important to you is addressing inequities in the classroom or in society, you know, you talk about race or social status, gender, sexual orientation, or disability. And, you know, I just love you to speak to that, like, how can we start to address some of these inequities? Where do we even begin, because sometimes it just feels to be too huge, but what could we do in our work or in our homes

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is huge. There's, there's a lot of big, big issues out there. And I think that there could be a lot of fear when thinking about how to handle these issues in the house or, or within our small families or within our school communities. But I think addressing inequalities is fundamental. And I think it's especially fundamental in the early years, because again, we're planting those seeds where we are exposing children to not only their own culture, but the world around them, and in our classrooms and our work and our family experiences, you know, are really those windows out into the world, right and to see how the world, you know, what the different worlds the different people in the world are made up of. And I think in order to do that, we need to first examine ourselves as adults with our work, in Montessori, we call it the spiritual preparation for the teacher. And that is really about thinking and reflecting and preparing ourselves to be there for children to be listening and to, to examine our biases and our own experiences that have maybe shaped us as we are as human beings, and to examine our situation in the world and our own

views and how they might be limited by our lack of experience or lack of understanding. It's really about a lifelong learning for the adult, right. And so we're constantly re examining our practice, we're constantly thinking about how we can do things better were reflecting on specific situations that happened in the classroom and how we can change that. And how we could respond better how we can be better. Right. And I think that, as parents, I think parents often are hard on ourselves. I think, you know, they want to do everything right. And, and there's a lot of pressure from the world to to do things, right. But it's really about, first of all thinking about our own childhoods and our own experiences, and how that has, again, shaped our understanding. But I think within the early years, addressing inequalities is key. We need to go beyond just having inclusive books in the classroom, we need to again, have children be able to see and have experiences, right, I think a lot of hate and misunderstanding, comes from ignorance. And not knowing or never met someone of a certain sexual orientation are of a certain race, you know, and that that ignorance grows as we grew up, and unless we have those experiences, we have that exposure. So I think we talked about citizens of the world, and Montessori is concept of citizens of the world, I think, to be a citizen of the world, equity goes hand in hand, right? And we need to make sure that every voice and every child feels belonging and included within the community. And in order to do that, we need to continuously re examine our own selves. But we examine, you know, how we maybe perpetuate stereotypes in the classroom, or how we maybe perpetuates intolerance, or maybe not even you know, really examine some of the things that we do, the materials that we use, and the language that we use, I think language is so important. Here. Can you give us an example?

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When you say language?

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I think often we say, okay, for teachers, we often say girls line up here and boys line up here, right? Just a simple thing, we just say that the top of our head girls line up here, boys sign up here, again, then we're telling children that there's only two choices they can have you you're either a girl or you're either Boy, you know, and and why are we separating genders in that way, you know, and so it's really thinking about how, how we can, you know, use, use inclusive language, and, you know, not maybe reflect on the language that we use, and why we're using it, and how we can, how we can do better, and how we can make and I think this this is about educating ourselves. This is about really understanding current topics. And if you don't understand it, you know, reading more talking to people within the community, is key. And, and I think, yeah, again, it goes back to that spiritual preparation. It's preparing yourself to be accessible to be available to be inclusive in your environments, and at your home.

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Yeah, and you mentioned this word belonging. And I feel like that's such a key word. Because I know like, in our as a Montessori educator, I'm trying to make adults and children feel safe in my space, because that's where they feel cared for, where they feel seen and those kind of things. And I think that in our homes, that idea of belonging is really important. And I've been in a couple of your workshops where you do like, visualizations, and you send us back to childhood. And I wonder if you could maybe do that with us now. Because for us to get into our child's, you know, shoes and to feel what that we could create for them. And for other children who were in contact with, would you mind to indulge us?

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Yeah, sure. I would love I would love to do that. I do these visualizations with adults, because I think that's the only child we will ever really 100% understand is the child that we were. Now as a parent, you will understand and love your children, but you're not going to be in their heads all the time. It's impossible, right? So the only child that we really know is ourselves and to give to give adults an opportunity to reflect on childhood. It's a way for us to understand the children in our care. And to reflect on those experiences and feelings and I think a lot of time as adults, our childhoods bring up trauma and bring up times where we uncomfortable feelings times where we felt we didn't belong. And I think That's, it's important to really be able to visualize that child's that we were and, and to go back and think about those feelings in order to really make sure we are available and able to be there for the children that we're working with today or the children that we're parenting. So a powerful visualization I did yesterday, I am currently working in the anti bias anti racist course with American Montessori Society, and we did a visualization about what you would want your teacher to know. So about yourself, so you're really thinking about that. But I think we can also do that about parents. So if you think if you close your eyes, wherever you are in the world, if you close your eyes, and you think about the child that you were, maybe you can be age 5, age 6, or maybe your earliest memory, wherever you can remember yourself. And if you think about, what would you really want to tell your parents? What would you want your parents to know? And maybe at that time, you didn't have the vocabulary, you didn't have the ways to express it. But what would you really want them to know about you. But we take a moment to really think about that. Just one little aspect, maybe it's a bigger theme. But if we take the time to, to connect with that child, and the child is in us, we are able to open up ourselves to think about what what others may may think what other children may think, or what other children are experiencing and feeling. And you know, last night when we did this, with these students in our in our anti bias, anti racist course, there was some beautiful statements that came and we did it on a jam board. It's all a very visual thing. And it was all anonymous. So everyone felt they could express themselves. There was some beautiful statements, and there was some really heartbreaking statements. And again, I think it's often easy. We'll often as adults, when we think about childhood, it's it's, it can be linked with those negative, those traumatic experiences. And

often, they were just little things that, you know, our parents did, or our teachers did that made us feel like we weren't seen, we weren't heard, and we weren't respected and our voices weren't important. And I think that this is key, this visualization technique is something that I love to do, because it connects us with that younger child. And it makes us think about what made us feel like we belonged. What made us feel important and special. And what would we want, you know, adults to know about us and what we want adults to see about us, and I think those connections with us, really helps us serve the child's better. So yeah,

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that's a beautiful I really, like was very easy to tap into what you I think the bit probably that wasn't seen. And so you can then think, oh, what would my child you know, be feeling right now, if you're an educator, what would the children in my classroom want me to know about them? It's such a powerful, like, small, but simple, like way to tap into that. Thank you. And another thing you've talked about with the spiritual preparation, the adult which I, I find challenging, like it's an enormous opportunity, but a responsibility, like we always say, is like, do we actually are we worthy of a child's trust and admiration, those words trust and admiration. And I think they're high and lofty goals, but something that we should try and seek for right?

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Definitely, again, we want as Montessori ins were taught that actually, it's the environments that teaches children that that really is a place for learning for children, and it is the adults. Adult is the steward of the environment, right? So we're supposed to take care of the environment, making sure that it really caters towards those individual children's needs. But that doesn't mean that the adults is an important parts in that and the adults, again, it's developing that trust with children. And I think we can think about, again, if you were to do a visualization, you think about those people that were really important in your life are often people that you really trusted and that really felt that you felt that they heard you and you were seen by them. And I think that that's the element Part of, of working with children or you know, being a parent and, and all of these aspects is is really thinking about, you know, do the children trust me? And am I worthy of admiration and, you know, we talk a lot about being a role model in Montessori. So are my actions worth children repeating, right, my actions, or my words, or my words worthy of children repeating and this is hard. I mean, I have made so many mistakes in my life. And, you know, I, it's, it's about that going back and reflecting on those experiences and thinking what you could have done and making sure that you do better and always trying to be better. And I tell I am a Montessori, teacher, educator, and trainer now, and I often tell my students, as soon as you stop learning, that's the time that you need to stop teaching. Because if you think you know it all, and you have all the experience and you're not growing anymore, then you shouldn't be a teacher, because the teacher, being a teacher, being a montessorian, is about a lifelong journey. And it's a

lifelong learning and, and you're not going to do it perfectly every time. But you can improve on that, and you need to work on on improving yourself, because the children deserve it. The children deserve the best you.

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Yeah, I think it's so beautiful. And I think that, yes, the environment is really important. But without any connection with the adults, you know, the child is going to miss something, you know, they might be able to do all of the activities in the classroom, but without purpose or without a connection. And I think that if you took actually away any Montessori material, you can still do Montessori because you can connect with the child, you can wonder about the world around you, you can go out for a walk and look at the tree and notice and drop a little water. How does that happen? You know,

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and it's really about being present. I think as adults, we're thinking about, you know, what happened in the past, or what we need to do in the future, and really about being present with children. And this is something that's my mentor Barbara Isaacs talks about a lot is really appreciating those small moments with children. And I mean, for example, yesterday, I was out with my four year old nephew, we were walking in the rain, we saw a big earthworm in the path that we're walking, and then it became, it became an hour and a half of us rescuing these earthworms. So we would pick it up with the stick, we'd put it on the in the dirt to make sure no one stepped on it and smashed and smashed it. And there was a real sense of, first of all I was we were talking about that interconnectedness, right that that relationship between humans and animals, but there was a sense of respect, responsibility, and we were able to have a conversation about earthworms, and talking about different things, and and really honing in on that child's interest, my nephew's interests, which, which was such a beautiful moment, and if I would have just continued on and just okay, we're going to the coffee shop, and I had plans in mind, and there was just going to go there, I would have missed that moments. And it's about stopping and not thinking about, you know, making sure that all of your plans happen or that you've done this beautiful lesson plan and you have it all prepared and and maybe it won't work out that day, because it's really about the children tuning in to the children and being there for those moments and listen to them in those moments. So

38:30

yeah, I think that's so perfect. Such a perfect example. Because we want to teach the children how we will look after our environment. We're not going to give this lesson it's like that in practice, like how do we respect an insect or a worm, you know, that is the work in a way like, oh, if I just go,

Oh, this annoying fly, instead of like, oh, what's the cosmic task of this? Why? So there's so much learning everywhere. And actually, I think it touches on something that you speak to a lot in your sustainability work is like how do we start to teach children about how to care for their environment? But without that fear like that we're destroying the planet because I don't think a three to six year old really, that's not really the way we want to come at it.

39:09

Oh, definitely. I think there's a lot of fear when, when we talk about, you know, climate change, and when we talk about issues of sustainability, it's easy to focus on the negatives. But with young children, we can really talk about that stewardship and we can really talk about the connections between things and I've had many children in my classes over the years that you know, as soon as you start talking about recycling and they see the aspects of recycling if you were able to visit a recycling plants or whatever. children that are really interested in that they will become those stewards in the classroom and they will make sure that things are recycled or the only chippings are recycled at home. I've had many parents complained to me My child saves everything, they want to save everything. But children can be the teachers to the parents, right children go home. And, and so these lessons, oh, we need to put this in this box and we need to, you know, we need to recycle or we can reuse this children are creative children have those problem solving skills, we need to encourage those problem solving skills. And I think that that's the most valuable way we can encourage sustainability at home or in our classrooms within the early years is really helping them see some problems and finding small ways to fix it, right. But also manageable, small things that they can do to really make a difference. And it's little things like in our pouring activities. In Montessori, we've got lots of different water pouring activities. At the end of the day, we never poured that water out, we go up water plants with it. So the plants were watered at the end of the day to make sure that water was reused. Or we did a whole thing about collecting rainwater. So in England, it rains a lot. And this is very easy activity to do, you just kind of put the bucket up rainwater, and we would use that rainwater in our pouring activities. So again, seeing those connections, those small little things, and it's more than just planting seeds and flowers in your environments, those are lovely ways to, to see those interconnections. But it's about showing that responsibility and acting and living and role modeling those responsibilities. And I think as montessorian, we need to be really focused on this. Because, you know, again, these ideas of cosmic education and interdependence, and being a citizen of the world, and really giving children agency involves listening to them, but also helping them make actions that will make a difference. And even if it's small, it makes a difference.

42:05

Yeah, it just makes me actually see, like, reminds me of the power of Montessori, that there's so

much depth and richness in this Montessori approach that's beyond just playing. It's so deep in building citizens of the world. It's such a young age,

42:19

definitely, definitely. And I, I started off my career as a teacher, a traditional teacher, and I found Montessori about halfway through my, my education, career, and Montessori has changed my life. And I know a lot of one saurians talk about this. But it changed how I view society, it changed how I have made connections, and I really feel it is it's such a beautiful philosophy. It's such a beautiful way to really empower children to be agents of change, and to really empower them. Because there's such respect, and because we're encouraging independence and responsibility at that young age, children feel confidence, and they children feel able to do things. And I think, you know, to, to introduce a five year old to long division. You know, when I was a traditional teacher, I would say no, that's not that's not possible. That's not possible. And the way that I learned math was, you know, I never understood it in a concrete way, because I was given worksheets, and it was, it was very abstract to me. And, you know, Montessori really is taking those abstract concepts, but making them concrete and making them smaller for children to really build that confidence and for children to really understand. And I think that that is the beauty of what we do. And and yeah, again, I think it can happen just in our philosophy. It doesn't have to be all about the materials. It's just about the philosophy, are we giving children concrete experiences, and to help them understand and are we really listening to what they want and their interests? And how are we building upon their knowledge based upon what they've shown us that they're interested in?

44:15

It's really beautiful. And another thing that I think goes beyond like what you'd expect in a preschool is the idea of peace and justice in our classrooms. And if someone said to me, oh, how do you practice peace in a Montessori classroom? I think I will probably just say like by being peaceful myself, because people often think of like that you need a peace table or that you need these certain, like a peace lily or a peace rose. But I would love to hear about how you think of peace education in your classroom. I mean, Montessori said that you can't peace cannot exist without justice. And so I think it really talks to a lot of the work that you do.

44:53

Yeah, I think there's some beautiful symbols and peace in our environments, things like the pieces of pieces. are beautiful symbols. And as an outsider, you're like, oh, wow, that's just such a lovely, lovely thing. But again, I think the peace comes through, like you said role modeling that peaceful behavior. I think also the peace comes from creating a non competitive environment, a lot of the

conflicts that we have are, I am better than me or I can do this better, I can do that better. You know, if you listen to children, some of the conflicts are, are based upon competitiveness, right. And in Montessori, by not encouraging that competitiveness and encouraging to see that each child is unique, and each child is special, and each child has their unique talents. It's really placing value on how the community works together, right, and how the community can work together peacefully. And, you know, we do things through simple things, such as only having one of every material rights, that ideas is showing the concept of sharing and taking turns, and that has to happen peacefully. But also, I think, that idea of no rewards and no punishments, right? We're not punishing children who misbehave, we're seeing what's wrong with the environment that might be creating that behavior, or creating that feeling within them that they need to react, right. And so, and we're not, you know, rewarding children, we're not giving stickers, we're not saying good job all the time. Because then those rewards become an external force that children need to, you know, they're, they're getting that external satisfaction, where we need to develop that internal internal satisfaction, that internal piece, and that comes from, you know, learning how to express your feelings and giving them tech techniques of expressing their feelings in a positive way. But also, you know, talking about, it's okay to be angry. It's okay to be sad, right? emotions are big, and we need to let children have those emotions. And we need to give them a safe space where they can have those emotions. And we need to help them realize that their emotions or their actions can affect others. And again, that's that interconnectedness. And that's that respect and responsibility. And it all comes down to cosmic education, which is why we need to keep talking about those key principles, planting those seeds of peace in the classroom.

47:38

Another thing I really appreciate from your work is joy. I speak about a lot about it on the podcast. I think everyone's like, yeah, Montessori enjoy it, but really like you to say like childhood should be joyful. Right? And so, there are times for Yeah, joy in learning to read and all those other things. What kind of joy do you see in your work in Montessori?

48:02

My middle name is Hannah joy. I think my parents were kind of forecasting what they what they hoped would bring, I mean, to me, the joy comes from children, really loving what they're doing. It's him and, you know, Montessori use the word work in her in her classroom, in her in her reading and her books, because she wanted to show that children's work, it should be respected and that children's play should be respected because it's how children learn. For me, that joy comes from doing something that you love, and I think children often will be in the classroom when they find something that they really love, when you see the classroom really working is when children find that connection with what they really love doing. And that can be you know, washing and scrubbing chairs, the whole three hour work cycle, or, you know, that could be just, you know,

pouring or transferring something or that could be doing, you know, beginning reading or whatever, it's, it's really, it's allowing children, it's not forcing children to do something, it's allowing them to choose something that they will love but also seeing when the child is ready for that next step. And I think that that's where as Montessori Ian's, I feel very privileged that we are given the tool of observation. I think a lot of teachers I know in my teacher training before, I wasn't taught how to observe, I was taught how to just kind of, you know, deliver something and you deliver it to the child was in the middle that's not too hard and not too easy. You kind of live with the middle child and you hope the rest of the children figure it out. You know, you can kind of support them in different ways. But that that tool of observation and really seeing how what the child needs and what the child is Ready for and being there at that exact moment and offering that to the child really brings that joy because the child doesn't feel pressured, the child has the right to say no. And, and I think yeah, I think freedom. Freedom also brings joy, right? So those freedoms that we have the freedom to contemplate the freedom to participate or not, right, the freedom of movement, all of those things cultivates cultivate joy, because we're not feeling restricted. And when the children are not feeling limited or forced to do something that they're not ready for or want to do.

50:40

And I love that your work is like taking you all over the world. Like I've written down that in India, you helped turn a traditional kindergarten for Tibetan refugees into a Montessori School in Hong Kong, you helped open a new early years one story setting. in Istanbul, you helped open first Montessori parent cooperative in Turkey, and all of these fascinating things. And I know you're about to head on to Malta. But I guess I mean, from everything you've already been saying people are already understanding that, you know, the global citizens a big part of your work. But I would love to hear about some of this work like maybe with the Tibetan refugees or the parent initiative in Turkey.

51:20

Yeah, I've been so privileged again to, to have these experiences of travel. And it's the reason I got into teaching in the first place. I said, How do I how can I continue traveling and the world everywhere in the world, you need to you need to education, they need teachers. And that I've learned that everywhere in the world. There is Montessori right? And and really, it's about connecting with these Montessori communities. So yes, I had, after I'd finished my Montessori training, I was fresh out of train at teaching college. And I went to Dharamsala, India, and I definitely didn't feel I was ready. But my mentor, Barbara said, you're ready, come on, go do it, I'll come visit you. And I helped transform a traditional kindergarten into a Montessori kindergarten, which involves training teachers involved, again, translating some of the materials and into Tibetan. And it was, you know, in in Dharamsala, it's really about preserving Tibetan identity and

culture, which is important within any refugee community is preserving culture and language and identity. And so, Montessori really complements that right, it really kind of can help. It can be adapted to different cultures and different understanding. So you know, instead of, for example, pouring water, you know, might not have been appropriate, but every day on the altar, in, in a home, you will have little cups of water that you're offering to either the Tibetan goddesses or gods or also His Holiness, the Dalai Lama says always little things of water. So I help the children be involved with that. And it's about bringing the altar down to the children's level. So they could be involved in pouring and to be involved in those traditions of practicing their religious practices, by being involved within the community, community and also their families as well. It's a lovely experience. And, and then yes, I have traveled to Tibet itself and done summer camps for children in nomadic communities, which, again, was a wonderful experience. And yeah, that I ended up in Istanbul. My dream was to open up my own school. And I found the best way to do it was to develop a parent cooperative. And so it was a group of parents who were interested in Montessori education, and Montessori wasn't something that was available in its symbol or turkey at that time. And so I came in, and I was able to start to this cooperative model with these parents. And it was lovely, again, talking about that sense of community. Every parent wants what's best for their child, and I found the best business partners are parents, because they are going to help you find all the resources, they're going to help you in any way they can to make school. The school is the best experience for their children. So it was in a stumble that I really learned to work alongside parents, to create community. I think that was important to communicate what Montessori meant to parents and I know this is something you do so well. You know, communicating and talking about Montessori in a way that's almost contagious, but also, in the same way that we look at individual children and the individual talents within our parent cooperative. We had individuals We'd help us with specific things, right? So we had a dietitian that would help us with planning the menu. And we had a architects that helped us in designing our playgrounds or outdoor area or outdoor environments. We had someone help us with web design, we had parents come in read, and it was really about creating a community that wasn't just about dropping the children off at the door and removing themselves. They were a part of it. And they had to, you know, show that dedication by being a part part of it. And it was a really beautiful thing. And it's still it still exists. It's called Montessori club is stumble. And it's still going on. And and yeah, I think it's a lovely model to create a nursery or to create a early childhood setting.

55:45

Yeah, I think that's such, it's still exists is like, must be amazing, because your work was actually to build this community that didn't need you a bit like Montessori, right? She's like, the children are working without me now. And so you build that nation.

56:02

Exactly. It's lovely, because every three years, the parents changed. Because, you know, the three year cycles and the parents changed, but again, it's still that kind of community. And it's still about, you know, creating, it's a nonprofit school, it's really about creating that community and making sure that children have those experiences. And I think that that's key with working alongside parents. And I think often as teachers and as guides, I know, I've been fearful of parents. Because the reason why I started working with children is because I don't kind of scare me, I like I like communicating with children. But to create what, what Montessori talked about that idea of, of community and interconnectedness, parents really needs to be a part of that and, and your communication with parents is so important. And it's a skill that you need to practice and a skill that you need to work on. And again, I've made many mistakes. But I was really happy for that opportunity to work alongside parents to achieve something.

57:08

And I love in both examples that you talked about, like culturally responsive, Montessori because I think that I've had people say like that they come from Asia, but they expect that their classroom is meant to look a certain way. And actually, like you adapted to Tibet, you know, to a refugee camp, but you're not coming in, say we know better than you. We're actually working with you. Yeah, cultural responsive. Montessori needs to be spoken more about as well. I think

57:32

it definitely is. And I think that we need to be critical about some aspects of Montessori as well. I think there's a colonial perspective, sometimes when we think about Montessori kind of implementing our ideas on another culture or making sure that every Montessori setting looks the same. I don't think that that is valuable, because the setting is actually a little microcosm of what the culture looks like and of what the environment is round. And it's that introduction to society, almost for, for young children. And so it needs to be reflective of what's appropriate in that culture and it needs to be reflective of what is appropriate also within the diverse diversity within the classroom that can that comes back to that idea of inclusion. Making sure Montessori is accessible, making sure that, you know, Montessori is, is used in a way that is beneficial to children and beneficial to communities and not something that we we say oh, this is something that we have to protect, and we have to you know, it can only be done this way. And there's no there's no room for improvement. So there's no room for, you know, thinking about the child of today. I think Montessori was a scientist she was adopted, she would have wanted Montessori up today to reflect the children of today. And I think that's an important part is, you know, that continuous continuously learning to, to really adapt and to make sure that our environments are culturally responsive and realize that environments aren't going to look the same and they shouldn't look the same. Because each child is different and the children in the community and the families are different.

59:19

And so I have a big question for you, you know, talking about making Montessori accessible, you know, Montessori is not a copyrighted name. And anyone can say that they are doing Montessori and sometimes that can actually damage our reputation because you get these chains of Montessori schools that are just trying to make profit. So how do you make access accessible but without losing the quality? You know? Have you got any good ideas or seen programs that are interesting?

59:43

Yeah. Again, I think that that's always the challenge. And it's a big discussion that we had in the Montessori community community. I think we need to stop working in silos. We need to start sharing our practice, we need to start sharing Within the wider communities, we can't just say, Oh, this is only for Montessori, we have all these tools where it's only for Montessori. We need to start talking to people in education, people in early education, to government policies, all of those things, we need to start talking to each other. And this comes with my passion of, again, creating unity within the Montessori community coming together. Rather than having all these frictions or being so dependent on where we did our training and kind of being so fixated on on certain things, I think we need to come together because we are only going to better and stronger together. I think we need to, again, think about reaching out into the communities and I think Montessori everywhere, does this very well, in that idea of, you know, thinking about who are we training as Montessori teachers and are we reaching a wide group of people? Are the children able to see themselves in their teachers? Are we able to, to provide scholarship spots for children? Are we able to help create Montessori communities in areas that need it? Are we doing it in a way that, again, is culturally responsive? We're not coming in saying we were going to save you all with our Montessori. But it making sure that it is responsible but it is needed and that's done sensitively. And it's not just a tokenistic thing, and I think it's a big work, but I think it will only happen if we come together and if we collaborate.

1:01:39

Yeah, I love all the work that you do with a Montessori Movement Unites,

1:01:42

yes, Montessori movement Unites, which is my facebook group. And yeah, I've recently helped co found a collaborative initiative. My dream was to make a teacher's coop, instead of just a parent coop, a teacher's coop. And this is a teacher trainers coop, where we're working within the community to collaborate to really listen to the Montessori community to consult, but to really

make change and, and that will only happen if we can come together as a community and listen, and and help out we know, we all need to be involved in this change. We all need to volunteer our skills and our time and our expertise to make a difference. And that's what I hope we will be able to do with collaborative Montessori. So

1:02:28

yeah, I will definitely I'm very excited. It's really new. And I'm going to put the links to collaborative Montessori in the show notes so people can find you and also to the Facebook group if people want to connect that way, as well to see how we can connect with each other to make these big changes. And there was a quote that you used from nurturing the spirit by Eileen de wolf. And I'll read it which says, in order to love others, all of us must first love ourselves. This self love is not to be confused with selfishness, which means over concern with oneself without regard to the others. A healthy self love tells the child that she is a worthy person, unique in the universe with special attributes and talents to contribute to the world. It does not say that she is better than anyone else. And I just feel like that's such a beautiful summary of what we've been speaking about today, like the unique child but contributing to the world. It's just, yeah, it really sums up a lot of the work that you do as well.

1:03:22

Exactly I can. I think empowering children is the greatest work right is is really listening and valuing them, will will help them feel belonging will help them feel part of a bigger, bigger world. And I think so often, children aren't listened to or children aren't respected in the way that that we would hope to. And I think that that's our ultimate dream is to kind of the kind of show that that respects that tolerance that love to make bigger changes in the world. Hmm.

1:03:56

So is there anything that we didn't get to speak about that you don't get a chance to often speak about or that you'd like to leave us with a word of wisdom,

1:04:04

word of wisdom, again, I am by no means and experts. I just I love I love talking I love talking to the community. I love sharing and learning from the community. And I mean, just just love the love the children you're with love the children you work with love the children, your parents with and know that this is a continuous journey and keep reflecting and keep learning. I think that's the key thing we can do as adults. Thank you so much for for letting me be here and share with you today. Oh, I

1:04:39

am so inspired because like we can get busy with like the small parts of Montessori you know, the little lessons that are really cute and all that and like setting up the spaces but today we're speaking about the big picture. And I think that's really beautiful to realize that there's so much possibility and it's really exciting. I'm feeling hopeful from this conversation. Great. I

1:04:59

mean, I think That's, that's the thing is we need to feel hopeful. And because there is potential, there's both possibility. But it will only happen when we start working together and we start listening to each other. So thank you for listening today. Thank you

1:05:13

so much for coming.

1:05:30

Well, I hope you found that fascinating to hear about all the work Hannah has been doing around the world, and how you can take some of these ideas into your homes and your classrooms. And once again, we are reminded that Montessori is about us adults and the work that we can do on ourselves to do better, because as Hannah reminds us, the children deserve it. And now it's time for a listener question from Ruth. And I think it's a good one to follow on from that conversation with Hannah as Ruth asks, I am a mother of a nine month old baby and I knew about Montessori before becoming a mother but dove into learning more once that baby was born. I'm passionate about the Montessori approach to development, especially the principles like follow the child, the prepared environment and prepared parent, building peace and being in nature. Lately, I find myself getting too focused on the stuff on materials. It feels like consumerism, waste, and endless activities are the visuals and Montessori that I see online all the time, expensive wooden toys and materials, perfectly clean spaces. And I know this isn't what it's about. But I still feel some pressure to meet all my baby's developmental needs with the right thing at the right time. I'd love to hear a discussion about this and how I can reset my focus on the bigger picture. I love following you and Aubrey from child of the redwoods, you always help to keep it real and dissent the stuff. I guess this isn't really a question but maybe an idea for discussion. I feel Montessori must be accessible and inclusive. And I don't want to lose sight of that. Thanks. So Ruth, I hope that today's conversation with Hannah already shed some light on this, as we talked about some of those bigger concepts of Montessori, even like the inclusiveness and how we see ourselves and nature and others as interconnected. And to add to that, for me, Montessori is about including our children in just our regular daily life and making them feel like they belong, and they are part of

our family. It's about making time for conversation and connection. It's about slowing down and allowing time for exploration and movement. It's about those hands on learning moments rather than passively learning from us or a screen. It's really about respect for our children. And it's about being someone who our children admire and respect in return is about connecting in nature.

When we have that connection with nature, we want to take care of it and be as Hannah said, like stewards of it caring for it. It's about keeping kids curious. And it's about loving our child for who they are, to help them feel like they belong and have a gift to share with the world. It's about accepting our child's own timeline and learning in their unique way. It's about including others, accepting others and making others feel like they belong. And it's about joy. And I kind of just want to add my middle name now to be joy she just like had his parents did for her. So you can all join me in that if you want. It's about the prepared environment where the child can feel capable and part of the family surrounded by their culture and some beauty, but it won't be perfect. We want our homes to be lived in. We want our children to know they can explore safely here. And then it's just a little bit about the wooden toys and materials if you want to add those. But even if you didn't, you are already doing what sorry. And I also discussed this in season two, episode eight, just a couple of episodes back with Teresa of Montessori in Real Life. So that could be a good episode to go back to as well where we talked about sharing a little of our spaces to inspire others, yet it not being the only thing that we want to share. And to remember that folks are generally sharing on days when we're feeling good, and that this is not the reality all of the time. So there's messy stuff happening that we don't share, sometimes to show respect for our children because we want to be present with our children at those times. And we're not recording everything for social media. So Ruth, I hope that was a bit of a pep talk in case you ever feel overwhelmed by the pretty pictures on social media. And I hope that helps you kind of reset and also to any other listeners feeling the same. And that's it for today everyone. I'll be back next week with a lovely conversation with Jeanne-Marie Paynel, Your Parenting Mentor, and Pilar Bewley of Mainly Montessori and until then, everyone, bye.

1:09:44

Thanks for joining me for the Montessori notebook podcast. The podcast was edited by Luke Davies from Filmprov media and podcasts art by Hiyoko Imai. To find out more about me and my online courses visit [themontessorinotebook.com](http://themontessorinotebook.com), follow me on Instagram @[@themontessorinotebook](https://www.instagram.com/themontessorinotebook), or pick up a copy of my book The Montessori Toddler or 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 are being 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 around the world.