

Lane Community College

**Sabbatical Report
Winter 2020
Kathleen Lloyd, Ph.D.**

Social Science - Early Childhood Education

Project Title:
Archive Interviews:
Capturing the Oral Tradition of
Dr. Maria Montessori's Discovery of Children's Ability to Self-Regulate
by Designing the Environment for Focused Attention

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Introduction

The purpose of this study was to spend winter term, 2020 editing audio-recorded interviews and the corresponding transcripts gathered during my dissertation research (from 2007) on self-regulation in young children. These interviews, and follow-up conversations, were recorded individually with 12 *Association Montessori Internationale* (AMI) primary teacher trainers. Since AMI teacher trainers embody an oral tradition and represent the highest authority on Montessori theory, the content of these recorded and transcribed interviews represents vital information for future generations currently unavailable in published form.

The original plan for this sabbatical project was to prepare the interviews to be archived at the University of Hartford Connecticut and at AMI headquarters in Amsterdam. I had also planned to travel to Connecticut to meet with Paige Bray (Associate Professor of Early Childhood Education and director of Montessori Studies at the University of Hartford) and to Amsterdam to meet with Lynn Lawrence (the executive director of AMI). Although I did meet with each of these individuals, I did not travel to Connecticut or to Amsterdam. The reasons for these changes will be discussed in this report.

Discussion of Process

Preparation - Summer 2019

In preparation for the project in July 2019, I contacted Michael Boock (Associate Professor and Scholarly Communication Librarian at Oregon State University) and Brian Davis (OSU Library's Digital Production Unit Supervisor; an expert in digital preservation). They both generously shared their expertise in a series of emails and offered ongoing professional support for the digital preservation and editing of the audio interviews in my possession.

In August 2019, I traveled to Helena, Montana to meet with Jacquie Maughan, the president of the North American Montessori Teachers Association (NAMTA), an AMI board member, and the founding director of Access Montessori to discuss this project.

During this meeting, Maughan questioned the merits of archiving the interviews in the AMI library in Amsterdam, stating they would simply be placed in a basement with little oversight. She raised similar concerns about sending them to the University of Hartford (for their newly created Center for Montessori studies; launched in 2017). In effect, Maughan said there are currently no real archives, although there needs to be. As the president of NAMTA, Maughan is interested in locating a digital archive, where along with decades of NAMTA journals, Montessori's work could be preserved and made available to scholars and practitioners around the world. Jacquie expressed interest in bepress digital commons and encouraged me to explore it further. She asked if I would write a brief summary, so she could introduce this digital archive to AMI at their next board meeting, which I did.

Maughan also invited me to attend a series of upcoming meetings for early learning stakeholders she was organizing in Seattle in October (2019) and again in February (2020). She was hoping several of my prospective sabbatical contacts would be in attendance. She suggested I wait until after these meetings to discuss where and how to archive the interviews.

Preparation - Fall Term 2019

To ensure that the proposed project was on solid ethical ground, I emailed Lisa Leventhal, the administrator in the Human Research Protection Program at Oregon State University (OSU). I completed my dissertation at OSU in 2008, and this sabbatical project continues research I conducted in 2007 under the auspices of OSU's Institutional Review Board (IRB). I was concerned about two issues in the IRB agreement participants signed:

- 1) "If the results of this project are published, your identity will not be made public" and,
- 2) "If at any time these tapes are deemed valuable to the AMI Montessori community for archival purposes within a Montessori library or collection, you, the participant, will be contacted for your permission."

Since four of the 12 interview participants have died since conducting the study and cannot be contacted for permission, was I allowed to archive their recordings? Should I archive their written transcripts with pseudonyms? Leventhal and I met to review the original IRB documents on October 16, 2019. According to her, the interviews are not sensitive information and are therefore exempt from federal regulations, so legally I can proceed. Ethically, however, it's a different story. If I were to proceed, I should write to the eight living participants to ask for their permission to archive their audio and written transcripts.

Later that month, I attended the first Montessori Early Learning Convening that Maughan, and Access Montessori organized at Cedarbrook Lodge in Seattle (October 31 - November 1, 2019). Dr. Angeline Lillard, researcher, author, and professor of psychology at the University of Virginia, presented research from her recent article, "Shunned and Admired: Montessori, Self-Determination, and a case for Radical School Reform." Rich Neimand, President of the Neimand Collaborative, discussed breaking through political polarization to create advances in education. He and his colleagues are working to change the national dialogue around investing in early childhood development programs through their work with the Nobel Laureate economist, James Heckman. The intention of the two-day meeting was to inspire and challenge participants to expand Montessori early learning programs as a choice for all children and families, regardless of their socioeconomic status.

Discussion

My sabbatical project began in earnest at the beginning of winter term 2020 by revisiting the audio recordings and rereading the transcripts. Listening to the audio recordings, I gained new respect for the significance of the human voice. Audio content is brimming with nuanced tone, spirit, passion, and commitment; an entire universe of meaning is held within the sound of a voice, which is unavailable in written form. However, in my attempt to honor the beauty and wisdom expressed in each voice, I remember how in 2007 I struggled to accurately transcribe each interview. Now, years later, rereading each transcript, I concluded that such replication is impossible, and the project began to take a turn in another direction.

The transcripts did not follow traditional grammatical or linguistic structure. Conversations are an emergent process and include the complexity of dynamic thought and personal reflection. Sometimes thoughts overlap and part of a discarded fragment is left behind as a new thought is pursued and gains momentum. In conversation the use of *ums* and *uhs* are natural elements that provide the speaker time for reflection and consideration. But in written text they appear awkward and cumbersome (and may even bring one's expertise or intelligence into question). Because I wanted each transcript to represent, as accurately as possible, the original conversation, I included all of these elements in the text. I also included any false starts and stops that tend to go along with the thinking process. Commas were used to show where a pause occurs in a conversation. If the pause was sustained longer, then three periods were used. If the pause in speaking continued even longer, six periods were used. If the voice was used to emphasize a point, the words were sometimes placed in italics or capital letters. To begin with, the transcripts needed to be edited to conform with basic grammatical structure.

As I listened to each audio recording I was surprised by how many participants shared their private concerns, their vulnerabilities, and insecurities at the beginning of each interview. They knew I was conducting interviews with their colleagues. Many of them wondered whose interview would provide better information? They were certain I would find more value in talking with the others. I realized they were probably much more comfortable (and confident) presenting in formal settings: prepared talks, teacher training lectures, and carefully written articles. However, these interviews were an informal conversation where I was asking them to allow key insights to emerge from the interaction of our time together. Information shared in a conversation is very different from prepared writing. It is more intimate and unscripted. Trust needed to be established. I began to feel very protective of each participant and of the intimacy created in our private time together.

I also remembered the original IRB document told participants their audio recordings would be destroyed after the dissertation was completed. Did this give them an additional sense of security? It was only after all the interviews were finished and transcripts were sent to each participant for review that one of them (now deceased) asked me to change this policy, which I did. I sent out a revised IRB addendum, with the new policy stating I would save the audio recordings.

While I listened to the recordings and worked on revising the transcripts, I also re-read articles and books I used in the literature review for my dissertation, comparing Montessori's theories to current research on self-regulation in young children. The literature review is an overview of self-regulation and its relationship to sustained or focused attention (concentration).

I was reminded of the profound significance of the research conducted by Mary Rothbart, Ph.D., and Michael Posner, Ph.D. (both Distinguished Professors Emerita of Psychology at the University of Oregon). Their work on the development of attentional systems in young children and corresponding networks in the brain was pivotal in my own work. I contacted Rothbart and Posner to see if we could meet and discuss their research. I wanted to know if my understanding (and interpretation) of their work was accurate. Michael Posner quickly wrote back and invited me to meet in his office, which I was delighted to do. We met on January 30th, 2020. I wanted to discuss the results of their research, particularly their claims that successful self-regulation depends on the efficiency of the attentional system. According to them, there is considerable development in this attention network between the ages of 2-7, with very little development after age 10. And because this attention network shows substantial development between the ages of 2-7, Rueda, Posner, and Rothbart suggest this would be an important time to provide support for learning how to focus and sustain attention. They recommend a "systematic training of attention as an important addition to preschool education (2004),"

precisely what Dr. Montessori recommended over 100 years ago. And yet it has been all too clear that precious few have understood the importance of this work.

In my meeting with Posner, he affirmed my interpretation of their research. I asked him why the results of their work have been so difficult to get into the educational mainstream. He said at one point they had tried to be more influential in the field of education but they just couldn't. It's such a big business and there is so much money involved in textbook companies, and Posner and Rothbart never wrote popular books for a general audience. When I said I completed my dissertation in 2008 and at that time I referred to their work as "emerging research on self-regulation," he commented, well it was new in 2004 but even today very few people have heard about it!

When I shared my frustration with the strength and influence of behaviorism on education, he understood and encouraged me to promote their work on the importance of supporting concentration and focused attention in early childhood. When I said my background was in Montessori's work, he asked if I was familiar with Angeline Lillard's work. Yes. I was fortunate to have just spent time with her in Seattle during the first convening Jacquie Maughan (and Access Montessori) organized at Cedarbrook conference center (in the fall of 2019).

The second follow up convening Maughan and Access Montessori organized was also held at Cedarbrook conference center, February 12-14, just before the AMI/USA National Montessori Refresher Course, held in Seattle, February 14-17, 2020. I attended both.

It was during these meetings that I was able to meet with three stakeholders identified as pivotal to my sabbatical project: Paige Bray (Associate Professor of Early Childhood Education and director of Montessori Studies at the University of Hartford), Lynn Lawrence (the executive director of AMI in Amsterdam), and Mary Linden Sepulveda (the Seattle University special collection librarian). Both Bray and Lawrence were very supportive and offered to help me. At this point in time, I was still considering archiving the interviews, so it was reassuring to know that I had critical support from both AMI and University of Hartford.

I also attended a private gathering where Mary Linden Sepulveda (Coordinator of Collections at the Lemieux Special Collections Library at Seattle University) presented information about The E.M. Standing Collection of Maria Montessori Materials. Over the years, I have been fortunate to visit this collection (even when it was stored in old file cabinets in an attic, years before it was archived as a special collection in the library). Sepulveda shared that Seattle University had just contracted with bepress digital commons to preserve the entire Standing Collection of

Montessori materials. The hope was that AMI or Hartford University might be inspired to follow suit.

After my return from that trip to the Seattle area, the first community transmission of COVID-19 was detected. And it was just a few weeks later (in mid-March), when Kate Brown, Oregon's governor, declared our first lockdown. My sabbatical was shortened by a week to prepare for emergency online teaching for spring term.

Results and Outcomes

The Montessori community is a small group and AMI teacher trainers are revered and well known. I knew the voices of the 12 interview participants would be easily recognized as would their style of communication in the written transcripts. I was left wondering how best to protect each participant, one of whom was in the active stage of dying.

Although I learned a great deal about the archival process, I ultimately decided *not* to archive the interviews. Ethically, it just didn't feel right, which I was not expecting, which is not to say that I will never offer them to an archive, it's just that given the nature of the interviews and the participants' candor, vulnerability, and the trust they placed in me I don't feel comfortable releasing them at this time.

I also began to doubt my original plan to archive the audio-recordings and transcripts. Did I decide on this direction because it seemed like the easiest thing to do? Was I actually avoiding the better, more difficult choice, which would be to distill, summarize, and synthesize the interviews into a more readable format? I began to "see" each interview as a potential chapter with directed questions in a Montessori Study Guide to deepen and improve classroom practice. Although a daunting task, an even better idea is to write a compendium on Montessori's theory of *Normalization* (spontaneous self-discipline), weaving these conversations together. This would also allow me to write about the critically important neurological research done by Michael Posner and Mary Rothbart (and colleagues), which is still unknown to the Montessori community, let alone the general public. And as I did in my dissertation, I could also include a comparison of Montessori's work with Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's research on flow and concentration (Optimal Experience Theory) and the work of Edward Deci and Richard Ryan (Self-Determination Theory).

The challenge for student teachers, practitioners (and parents) living and working with young children (2–7-year-olds), is how to prepare an environment that encourages independence, responsibility, and offers ways for young children to participate in meaningful activities that

lead to concentration. It is the process of concentration during this stage of development that builds the architecture in the brain that supports the development of self-regulation across the lifespan. The value of these interviews is the contribution they make to this endeavor, which would simply be lost by releasing them to an archive at this point in time.

An intended outcome of this sabbatical project was that I developed two public talks/workshops to introduce the value of Montessori's theoretical perspective. These have been delivered as a Zoom class for childcare providers and educators, titled: Dr. Maria Montessori's Contribution - Key Principles to Support Optimal Human Development. I collaborated with Jacquie Maughan and Access Montessori to offer Zoom classes to the Montana Child Care Resource and Referral Professional Development Conference. We were also invited to be guest speakers for Christine Lux, Ed.D. at Montana State University, where we presented a Zoom class to an education course. I developed another Zoom class around similar ideas for a parent education night at Philomath Montessori School, in Philomath, Oregon.

I look forward to returning to the LCC campus to continue my work with student teachers in Early Childhood Education, highlighting the importance of promoting concentration through an intentionally prepared environment and curriculum. Posner and Rothbart's work on the development of attention and its positive impact on self-regulation needs to be communicated to a far wider audience. I'd like to begin with the early childhood and education communities as my audience, helping both ECE and Education students and classroom teachers learn how to develop a curriculum (prepared environment) that supports focused attention.

I plan to offer similar Zoom classes developed for the Montana audience for our local Oregon Child Care Resource and Referral Network via LCC's Quality Care Connections (QCC) as well as for local, national, and international conferences.

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