



Montessori School Design and Implementation

Paul Epstein, Ph.D. Designs for Lifelong Learning

Children throughout the world have benefited from the Montessori System of Education since 1907. Students enrolled today in Montessori schools excel academically and socially.

They develop lifelong habits of thinking, persistence, decision making, problem-solving, creativity, communication, time management, project management, and working effectively with teams. These are essential if children today are to become readied for adult life in an ever-changing, international community.

Successful Montessori school implementation occurs when adults – administrators, teachers, parents, and involved officials – understand and put into place all guiding Montessori principles.

dLL Implementation Process

Designs for Lifelong Learning (dLL) provides a four-step Montessori school development process. These steps include

- Understanding the client's vision and intention;
- Orienting administrators, faculty, and parents to the principles and components found in successful Montessori schools;
- Defining the implementation steps; and
- Guiding the implementation process.

1. Understand

Implementation of a successful Montessori school begins with focused conversations designed to understand your vision and purposes. We also work to understand the scope of your proposed Montessori school. Montessori schools enroll children from infancy through the high school years.

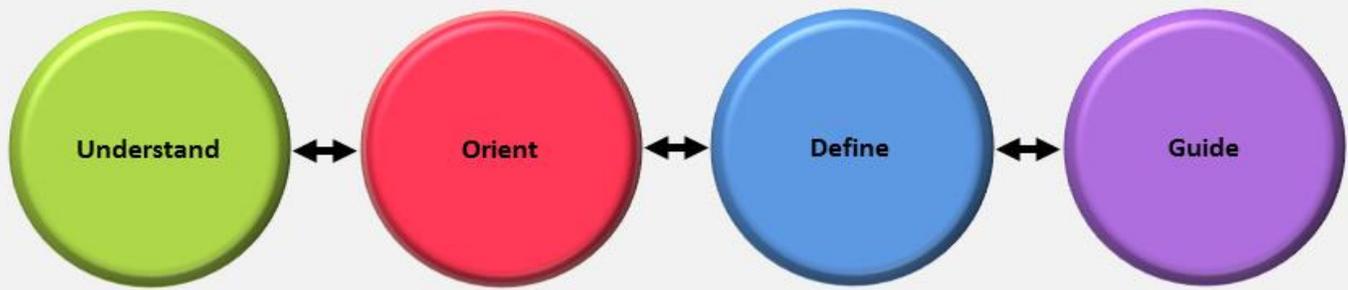
Based on conversations with you, we define current obstacles to be eliminated, opportunities to be pursued, and institutional strengths to be maximized. We also identify who will be involved. Successful implementation requires teachers, assistants, parents, community leaders, education officials, and others understand their new and emerging roles.

2. Orient

During the orientation phase, we provide an in-depth overview of the Montessori Methods of Education. This includes identifying key Montessori principles and the instructional and curricular methods.

When possible, we will bring you to one or more Montessori schools for observations and discussions.

Montessori classrooms are rich and vibrant learning communities. Well over 120 learning activities are found in Montessori early childhood and elementary classrooms. The activities are designed for children to ex-



The dLL Implementation Process

plore, investigate, and discover. Concept development and understanding replace memorization. Children learn, in other words, to become self-reliant as they develop habits of thinking and lifelong learning skills. These are further extended into the middle and high school years as students engage in academic studies as well as various apprenticeships and entrepreneurial experiences.

3. Define

During this phase we will work with you to define the essential components of successful Montessori schools and professional learning cultures. We prepare necessary budgets and funding, and we audit current facilities and educational resources. We will identify and guide purchasing necessary Montessori furniture and learning materials.

Successful Montessori schools occur when everyone is prepared. This will require enrollment of administrators and teachers into Montessori education programs. Becoming a certified Montessori educator is a critical component of successful Montessori schools. We also define a series of recommended parent education seminars.



4. Guide

During this final step, defined plans are implemented. dLL can guide each step of this process to insure the success of your Montessori school and community. This involves on-going mentoring of administrative procedures, teachers, and parent seminars. You should anticipate a process of several years.

Why Montessori?

Given the continual and rapid pace of global economic, social, political, technological, and environmental change, we live now in an ever-changing future. The implications of this for education and child rearing practices are immediate: We cannot send children to schools designed for and operating with 19th/20th century principles. Simply, the schools that prepared us for our adult lives are inadequate and inappropriate for children today.

The schools we attended were designed for a predictable future. Our parents, and teachers, could reasonably expect that the opportunities and challenges we would meet as adults would resemble their own. Consequently, how we learned and what we learned resembled the education of our parents.

Our schools were designed according to industrial age principles. It was as if we were products becoming more assembled with each passing school year. Our teachers were line managers, and we sat in rows. Information was parceled out according to our grade level. Like machine parts in an assembly line, we students were interchangeable. That is, we were taught as if we were the same person. We were collectively told when to open a book, which page to turn to, and when to respond to the teacher's questions. Learning to conform and comply were part of the curriculum.

“To date, studies of Montessori children ... show that graduates have benefited significantly from Montessori programs at both the pre-school and elementary levels. They have scored higher on nationally standardized tests than their non-Montessori peers. Equally important, they have rated higher in characteristics important to school success, such as the ability to use basic skills, follow directions, complete work on time, listen attentively, ask provocative questions, and adapt to new situations.” - Paula Polk Lillard, author and researcher

We demonstrated our learning narrowly; we gave back the information that was given to us. The primary transmission of information occurred through memorization. Curiously, while we were taught as if we were the same person, we demonstrated our learning as individuals, and some of us could memorize and respond better than others. Still, like assembled products, our demonstrations of memorization fit within acceptable tolerance standards or bell-curve distributions.

Memorization of soon to be forgotten information will not ready children for new circumstances, opportunities, and challenges. Instead of memorization, children must learn how to learn. That is, they must practice and develop lifelong habits of thinking, problem-solving, creativity, communication, time management, project management, and working effectively with teams. Instead of becoming an assembled product, children must become self-reliant and learn to think like entrepreneurs. Children must learn to be caring and open-minded, take risks, and persist.

In an ever-changing future, the fundamental principles of education will be based upon a different set of principles: Children must learn how to think; they must be readied to adapt. Because no two children learn in the same way, education must be personalized. Children are individuals, and individuals possess unique personalities, capabilities, learning styles, and interests. Children do not learn at the same time; and they do not understand until they are ready to do so. The kinds of schools children need now have developmentally-appropriate learning environments that are specifically designed for each child's unique capabilities.

For nearly 110 years, the Montessori system of education continues to successfully educate in ways that max-



imizes each child's unique learning capabilities. The Montessori prepared classroom environment offers some 120 learning activities. Children think with objects. By observing each child, a Montessori teacher knows when to offer new lessons and when the child needs more time to master a concept or skill. The materials, in other words, give immediate feedback to both the teacher and the child.



About Designs for Lifelong Learning

Designs for Lifelong Learning (dLL) was begun by Paul Epstein to bring transformative learning experiences to administrators, teachers, and parents. His work draws upon over forty years of guiding children and adults as they learn.

Paul has worked as an administrator, teacher, researcher, consultant, speaker, and author. Paul's administrative experiences include head of schools, director of a public school magnet program, executive director of a school consulting agency, and director of Montessori teacher education programs. He coordinated, for example, the development of an accredited Montessori early childhood teacher education program in China. Paul has also directed Montessori teacher education programs for secondary programs.

Paul holds Montessori teacher certification in early childhood and secondary levels one and two from the American Montessori Society.

Paul was an associate professor at Transylvania University, and he was an adjunct professor at Northwestern University.

Paul's work as a speaker and educational consultant has taken him to schools and conferences throughout the United States and also to Canada, Great Britain, Sweden, Mexico, Russia, Brazil, Japan, China, Australia, Hong Kong, Nepal, South Africa, and Poland.

Paul completed his B.A. at Dartmouth College and his M.A. and Ph.D. in Cultural Anthropology at S.U.N.Y. Buffalo. Paul has published numerous articles. His most



recent publication is *An Observer's Notebook: Learning from Children with the Observation C.O.R.E.* He is also the co-author of *The Montessori Way*, a definitive work about the Montessori experience.