Growing Up in a Culture of Distraction:
Finding Positive Montessori Strategies to Support Concentration

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Growing Up in a Culture of Distraction: Finding Positive Montessori Strategies to Support Concentration

Concentration and engagement are the guideposts for our work, yet now more than ever we see children who are distracted, behaviors that are out of control, and an over-reliance on labels and specialized interventions. Montessori educators have the potential to help children find the right activity that will fully capture their attention and aid them in developing their full capacity. We have the tools to help children control their own actions and responses, to concentrate despite distractions, to integrate sensory perceptions, and to engage in positive social behaviors. But we too need help accessing these tools and strategies.

This conference will take a holistic, positive view of children who seek grounding in the physicality of the Montessori environment. We will explore supportive strategies to implement in the classroom as well as in the total school environment to help teachers develop an appreciation and understanding of the unique gifts of children who experience the world differently. Keynotes will feature author Maggie Jackson and Montessori trainers Annette Haines and Sarah Werner Andrews. Breakouts will include discussions about the design elements of environments that support concentration and creativity, strategies to support individual and social engagement, and how to better help all children find their own path to normality.

Thursday, January 14, 2016
7:00 – 8:00 p.m.
Registration
Friday, January 15, 2016

8:00 – 9:00 a.m.
Registration and Coffee

9:00 – 10:15 a.m.
**A Workmanship of Risk: The Craftsmanship of Thought in a Tech-Driven Age**

*Maggie Jackson*

Join award-winning author and journalist Maggie Jackson as she shares the simple steps we can take to harness and cultivate our most important human faculties: focus and reflection. Jackson will discuss what is at risk in this era of easy distraction and always-on connectivity and will also review the historic roots of our high-tech, high-speed culture and how our devices are redefining what it means to be smart. Learn how to ask the right questions of technology, role model for coming generations the wise balance between human and machine, and draw on the forgotten bonds between workmanship and higher-order thinking. Look ahead to a reflective, connective, and focused future.

10:15 – 10:45 a.m.
Break and Book Signing

10:45 a.m. – Noon

**Montessori and the Myth of the Perfect Child**

*Sarah Werner Andrews*

We’ve all heard, or perhaps even used, the phrase, “Oh she’s such a perfect Montessori child!” Often, this means a child who fits a particular template for behavior and work: She quietly concentrates and moves seamlessly from activity to activity. But are these expectations realistic for all children or even desirable? Does our vision of the “child who is not yet there” keep us from seeing and appreciating the “perfect” child who is in front of us now? This keynote will explore our attitudes and expectations of perfection and concentration and will explore how we can help each child become their own, unique, wonderful, best self.

Noon – 1:30 p.m.
Lunch
A. Helping Children with Attentional Challenges in a Montessori Classroom  
Part I of II: The Role of the Occupational Therapist  
*Catherine Nehring-Massie and Barbara Luborsky*

A medically informed Montessori approach can help children with attentional challenges. In this two-part session, two medical specialists will provide an overview of the physiological and psychological causes of common attentional dysfunctions. Understanding attention challenges from a medical perspective provides essential information that assists teachers in deciding when and how to make modifications. Ms. Nehring-Massie will describe how Dr. Montessori’s medical knowledge informed her as she developed her curriculum to support every aspect of a child’s development. She will highlight features that are helpful to children with ADHD and describe modifications that can enhance the Montessori classroom. Ms. Luborsky will discuss the importance of differential diagnosis in determining how to address the root causes attentional difficulties. She will focus on the physiological differences, such as sensory processing disorder, that can negatively impact a child’s ability to attend and work in a Montessori classroom. She will describe how occupational therapists and Montessori teachers can collaborate to build support systems for these children through modification of some materials, use of specific strategies, and specialized therapies. Practical strategies to promote regulation and improve attention can be implemented in a Montessori environment to create a therapeutic and educational experience for the child. (Part II will be presented on Saturday at 1:30 p.m.)

B. Finding Concentration through Art  
*Joni Perry*

Art is not just a study for the few gifted people; it is a way to look at and to communicate with the world. Art is often the way for children to find their natural way to concentrate. Most art exercises rely not on the final product created but on the meditative ritual of the creative process.  

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Art develops mental skills that are not created by any other discipline. In studying art, we are dealing with symbols that cannot be expressed in any other way and developing new forms of cognitive skills. In developing these skills, children are able to think independently and spontaneously, approach tasks from different perspectives, and think outside of the box, which are all skills needed for children to succeed in other disciplines. Artistic creations are born through the solving of problems. How do I use this paint to create a picture? How do I portray a particular emotion through dance? How will my character react in this situation? This practice in problem solving develops children’s skills in reasoning and understanding.

**Saturday, January 16, 2016**

8:00 – 9:00 a.m.  
**Registration and Coffee**

9:00 – 10:15 a.m.  
**Finding the Path to Normality**  
*Annette Haines*

Normality comes through concentration. “Concentration is something that is gathered to a centre, something that is focused. When there is this focused point of activity, something seems to be constructed.” In a couple of vague lines, Maria Montessori distills the essence of her method. Montessori is not about helping a child to learn something, it is not about their becoming smarter or more skilled, it is about self-construction, a coming together of disparate psychic elements. Concentration is the center point of everything we do.

But how can we help today’s children, the children so distracted by hectic modern-day lifestyles and sated with electronic entertainment, to concentrate? In her keynote, Annette Haines will help us understand what is needed in order to generate the phenomenon of concentration in our classrooms so that each child can develop that which is his or her unique potential.

10:15 – 10:45 a.m.  
**Break**
Montessori has a deep, rich appreciation of the importance of our environment. Montessori principles have been developed, interpreted, and reinterpreted by classroom-trained Montessori adults in their search to provide a supportive prepared environment. Mamie Harvey, an architect with a Montessori background, will share her interpretation of a quality Montessori environment as demonstrated by the Montessori Training Center of Minnesota expansion and the Montessori ideas that have inspired the design. Among these ideals are self-construction, unity with nature, simplicity, order, and beauty, and ideas specific to Mamie’s personal experiences with Montessori.

Noon to 1:30 p.m.

Lunch

1:30 – 4:30 p.m. (Break 2:45 – 3:15 p.m.)

Workshops (Choose one)

C. Helping Children with Attentional Challenges in a Montessori Classroom

Part II of II: The Role of the Physician

Catherine Nehring-Massie and Maureen Murphy-Ryan

In Part II, Ms. Nehring-Massey will discuss why the Montessori classroom is a great place for students with attention challenges because of the built-in supports it offers. She will highlight the essential role of medical experts in identifying what modifications a student might need and will address the complex issue of medication and the challenges of determining its use. Figuring out the best way to help these students is complex, but with ongoing collaboration between medical specialists and teachers, and implementation of a collaborative problem-solving approach, these children can do well in the Montessori classroom. Dr. Murphy-Ryan will explore the role of the physician in supporting the academic and life success of children with significant attentional dysfunction. Starting with valuable observations by teachers and parents, physicians also seek an accurate diagnosis in order to discern the root psychological, neuro-physiological, or cognitive
causes. Medications for attention issues have benefits and drawbacks, and not treating children with ADHD also has risks. Evidence-based nonmedication treatments do support the success of children in a Montessori classroom and at home.

D. Adventures in Space and in Design that Optimize Teaching
Annette Haines and Mamie Harvey

Today's learning-environment design community focuses on developing formal and informal group learning spaces, from listening and watching formal presentations to active learning, these spaces facilitate and support informal small-group collaboration. This workshop will look to critique and dissect these contemporary and mainstream space types and will compare these spaces to Montessori ideals and the Montessori prepared environment. Participants will gain an understanding of how the environment can promote concentration and creativity in group settings.

Sunday, January 17, 2016
9:00 – 10:30 a.m.
Conference Summary
Discussion with Conference Speakers

Featured Speaker

Maggie Jackson is an award-winning author and former Boston Globe columnist known for her penetrating coverage of social issues, especially technology’s impact on humanity. Her essays and articles have appeared in The New York Times, Business Week, Utne, and on National Public Radio. Her acclaimed book Distracted: The Erosion of Attention and the Coming Dark Age jumpstarted our global conversation on the steep costs of fragmenting our attention.

A former foreign correspondent in Tokyo and London, Jackson has won numerous awards for her coverage of work-life issues, including the prestigious Media Award from the Work-Life Council of the Conference Board. She is a vice president and senior fellow at the New York-based think tank The Center for Talent Innovation, a past affiliate of the Institute of the Future in Palo Alto, and a former journalism fellow in child and family policy at the University of Maryland.
Sarah Werner Andrews is an AMI teacher trainer, international speaker, Montessori consultant, and is currently part of the training faculty at Montessori Northwest, in Portland, Oregon. She holds a bachelor’s degree in music performance, an M.Ed from Loyola University, and AMI primary and elementary diplomas. Sarah has worked in Montessori education since 1987 and has several years of teaching experience at both the primary and elementary levels and experience in administration.

Annette Haines is the director of training for the Montessori Training Center of St. Louis. Haines is an internationally recognized lecturer, examiner, and trainer of the Association Montessori Internationale. She has been involved in the field of Montessori education since 1972 and has extensive background in the Children’s House classroom. Haines holds both AMI primary and elementary diplomas. Additionally, she has a bachelor of arts degree in English literature from Washington University, a master’s degree in education from Cleveland State University, and a doctorate in education from Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville with research focused on concentration and normalization within the Montessori prepared environment. She is currently chairperson of the AMI Scientific Pedagogical Group. Her articles have been published in *AMI Communications*, *The NAMTA Journal*, and *Montessori Talks to Parents*.

Mamie Harvey is an architect at Alliance in Minneapolis. She has maintained a lifelong interest in the principles of Montessori education through her mother, Annette Haines, as a student of Montessori, with her own children in a Montessori school, and in the design of the Montessori Center of Minnesota. She holds a master’s degree in architecture from the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities. Through research and design of Montessori environments for many years and from differing perspectives, Mamie has successfully translated the basic principles of learning through discovery into unique learning environments. She has created dynamic design solutions for academic and corporate science research clients. Mamie has presented at numerous conferences on Montessori education and interdisciplinary research environments including the International Montessori Education Conference in Nara, Japan; at the School Building Expo in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and at a University of Minnesota seminar titled “Curriculum, Pedagogy and the Built Environment.”

Barbara Luborsky is a pediatric occupational therapist and owner of Way to Grow, in Frederick, Maryland, a pediatric OT and speech therapy practice. Barbara utilizes developmental, functional and sensory integrative approaches to practice and has over 20 years of experience working with children ages 0-18 years. She has great respect and a long connection to Montessori education, as a Montessori parent for 13 years and as a therapist-consultant and trainer for the past 10 years.
Maureen Murphy-Ryan is currently a second year resident in Virginia Tech University’s Psychiatry Residency Program at Carilion Clinic in Roanoke, Virginia. She completed medical school at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota in 2012. She received a full scholarship to attend Mayo Medical School after graduating Magna Cum Laude from Duke University with a bachelor’s degree in molecular biology and evolutionary anthropology. She has published original genetics research in the *American Journal of Medical Genetics* as a medical student. Maureen remembers her time as a Montessori student fondly, and hopes to use the intellectual curiosity and passion for learning she developed to contribute to a better understanding of the mind, from genes to behavior.

Catherine Nehring-Massie is the director of the Frederick Country Day Montessori & Arts School. She holds an AMI elementary diploma from Bergamo, Italy, an MA in education, and Maryland certification in elementary and special education. Catherine also holds special education training certificates in Orton-Gillingham tutoring for children with Dyslexia, the Dubard Association Method for children with hearing disabilities or aphasia, Montessori Applied To Children At Risk, Autism-A Montessori Approach, and Laubach Tutoring for English language learners.

Joni Perry has been teaching at Marin Montessori School since 1996. She has taught in public schools as well as Montessori schools, from Chicago to Hawaii and from Santa Cruz to Marin. She holds a BA in fine arts from the University of Missouri and a masters degree in education from Loyola College of Maryland. She also holds an AMI elementary diploma and has been certified to teach K-8 (multiple subjects) in California and K-12 (single subject/Art) in Missouri.

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**Hotel and Transportation Information**

**Doubletree by Hilton, Houston Intercontinental Airport**  
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A NAMTA Conference in Houston, Texas

Registration

Register by December 31, 2015 for early registration rates!

NAMTA member tuition fee: ☐ $300 ( ☐ $315 after December 31)
Non-member tuition fee: ☐ $360 ( ☐ $375 after December 31)

Tuition fees include Friday and Saturday luncheons. Choose one:
☐ Non-Vegetarian ☐ Vegetarian

Friday workshops (Choose one):
☐ A. Challenges Part I: OT
☐ B. Art

Saturday workshops (Choose one):
☐ C. Challenges Part II: MD
☐ D. Space and Design

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Join NAMTA and register for the conference online at www.montessori-namta.org!
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• The NAMTA Online Montessori Bibliography is a searchable database of
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**Featuring author Maggie Jackson and Montessori teacher trainers Annette Haines and Sarah Werner Andrews**

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