



eARTICLE

MONTESSORI: EDUCATION FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

by Steve Hughes

For this eArticle, we share with you Dr Steve Hughes' wonderfully insightful presentation which followed the AMI Annual General Meeting in 2009. The talk looks at what really is "education for the 21st century". We are delighted to once again welcome Steve to Australia in September where he will give a series of parent talks around the country.

JUST HOW "21ST CENTURY" IS THE CURRENT APPROACH TO EDUCATION?

So: It's 2009, and we are well into the 21st century. And as you know, in the last century, certain promises were made. Things were going to be different. Things were going to be advanced by now. For example, when I was a boy reading science magazines in the 1970s, I specifically remember being told that we were going to have flying cars by this point – I understood these were coming in the 21st century.

The 21st Century was going to be incredible. As I recall, we were also promised that we'd have jet packs, and – boy – I was looking forward to this one! Also, I am pretty sure that we were promised a Mars base. Tucked in my bed on a snowy Minnesota winter night, my mind buzzing from the latest issue of *Popular Science*, I imagined that I would visit it someday.

Well, we've got some of those things. We've hit the 21st century, and it's not quite what we expected. Some promises were kept: We've got digital watches. We've got computers. We've also got the Internet (and everything that goes with it), big screen TVs and video games, and cable TV. Of course, these developments have led to certain changes in lifestyle. We don't go for walks so much anymore. As a result, obesity among children is at an all-time high, and we don't know our neighbours the way we once did, either.

Certainly, the cars we drive are greener, and while I've mostly been talking about technology, many positive social changes have occurred in the past 100 years – women in most countries got the right to vote and have enjoyed increasing parity of opportunity with men. Race relations in my country are better than they have ever been – who expected that we'd see Barack Obama elected in 2009?



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Promised Mars Base

So, some advances have been made. Maybe not everything we expected, and the changes have not all been good, but, nevertheless, many things have changed over the past 100 years.

However, some things, have not changed at all.

For most children, education still looks more or less the way it did around the beginning of the last century. There have been some experiments and attempts at innovation (I remember in various classrooms sitting at group tables instead of individual desks, or sitting with our desks to form a big U – this sort of thing), but no substantial improvement has been made on the basic model. Technology has fostered false hope.

The traditional model of education, at its foundation, was designed to provide basic literacy skills and to prepare people for many of the then-new jobs of the industrial age: piece-work, assembly line work, or clerking.

Many of you know the attributes of traditional education. It's content-centred. It involves direct instruction from the teacher. The teacher is an authority figure. This model emphasises mastery of factual information, book-based learning, memorisation of rules and isolated content areas. The student's role is to be a passive receiver of knowledge. Assessment is done by comparing a student's progress against that of his or her peers. Instruction takes place on the whole class level. Desks are typically arranged in rows and the teacher employs methods of discipline (punishment) to manage classroom conduct. The aim is to take "an empty brain" and fill it with things we think it should know.

THINKING ON EDUCATION

There were those who had ideas about how education could be different. Perhaps some of you have studied the work of John Dewey, or Caroline Pratt, or George Counts. Of course, you all know the work of Maria Montessori.

These people (and others) described a model of education that is, in some circles, described as "progressive education." The general goals of progressive education were to meet students' wider growth and developmental needs, rather than to fit the students to a specific curriculum. The emphasis was on broadening of intellect, and problem solving and critical thinking skills. Teachers tended to be warm and understanding, preoccupied with fostering the social and emotional development of their students. This approach tended to be community based; it focused on project-oriented learning and de-emphasises specific fact content that was so much a part of traditional education.

You all probably know many of the things that Maria Montessori wrote, and I think this quote here really captures the essence of those goals:

We cannot know the consequences of suppressing a child's spontaneity when he is just beginning to be active. We may even be suffocating life itself. That humanity which was revealed in all its intellectual splendour during the sweet and tender age of childhood should be respected with a kind of religious veneration. It is like the sun which appears at dawn or a flower just beginning to bloom. Education cannot be effective unless it helps a child to open up himself to life.

What a statement! (who writes like that anymore!). It is profound, it is beautiful, and we all know that she really, really meant it.

The goals of all progressive educators, including Maria Montessori, were developmental, and the method was oriented around activity-based learning, engaging with the materials and resources of the world.



Traditional Education: Filling the empty brain.

Now, it was hard to make this approach work. Activity based learning required teachers to be flexible and creative. Students needed to be guided toward self-motivation. Teachers who were already entrenched in a traditional model of education had to alter their teaching style – and that was difficult. They had to find a way to be less of an authority figure, and more of a facilitator. Many found it difficult to integrate these principles because the curriculum was separated into departments (math, humanities, social studies, etc.). Also, progressive education can be costly.

Many felt that progressivism emphasised “amusement” of the students, rather than something that they understood to be “education.” Maybe there were aspects to it that were *developmental*, but it didn’t look like school.

WITH RESPECT FOR THE BRAIN

There were other problems. Dewey’s theories certainly enjoyed broad popularity during his lifetime and have remained topics of interest, but they showed a poor history of implementation. Despite the attractiveness of his ideas, there were really very few, if any, teachers who were fully able to implement them. The concepts were good, but it was hard to put them into practice.

My friend, John Raven, found that only about 5% of traditional education teachers have the knack, or innate ability to do this sort of thing (see www.johnraven.co.uk). Only 5%! Activity-based learning was – is – simply, hard for most people to do.

However, Maria Montessori showed us how to do it, and how to consistently do it well. She provided a culture, a method, and an astonishing set of materials that allowed a Montessori teacher, in a prepared environment, to guide children through activity-based learning, through experimental interactions with the environment, that helped them to discover the way the world works. Her system, philosophy, and way of fostering the growth and development of children, is comprehensive and unparalleled. There are elements within that environment that meet the developing brain at every stage of its formation.

As a paediatric neuropsychologist, I can barely contain my enthusiasm for this work – I continue to be floored by her genius. She anticipated so much that neuroscience now understands.

We now know much about how the brain matures through childhood into young adulthood. It is now well understood that human brains require the opportunity to engage in and interact with materials, to solve hands-on problems, and to apply developing abilities to new problems. You are all Montessorians, and I know you understand what I am talking about here.

COSMIC TASK AND GENERAL ABILITY

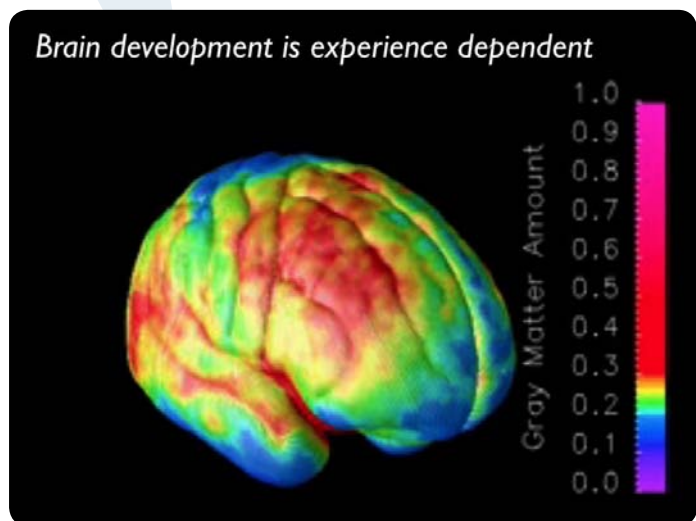
You also know how important it is that a child finds the unique gifts that they will bring to the world. Montessori described this as the discovery of one’s “cosmic task”: a child’s discovery, in the context of the past, present and future, of their unique contribution to the constant reinvention of living on planet Earth. Montessori really had this worked out, and she had it worked out 100 years ago! So why didn’t her method become the way we do “school” for all children, everywhere?

I think the reason is that, 100 years ago, her work was not yet really needed. Perhaps 100 years ago, knowing one’s “cosmic task” wasn’t necessary – and might even have been an obstacle – to performing factory work, clerking, and doing many of the other occupations that emerged during the industrial revolution. Maybe society didn’t really need that many high-level problem solvers, independent thinkers and moral reasoners. The nature of society and, especially, the nature of work didn’t demand a significant degree of high-level reasoning and problem solving skills.

That may be why for much of the past 100 years, Montessori Education has generally been seen as a something that’s maybe only for certain people. Perhaps the privileged (those who may need to be high-level problem solvers), or perhaps it’s for the underprivileged (to help “level the playing field”), or maybe for hippies (who are into “peace and all that”), or maybe for odd people who have funny ideas about what might be possible for the world.

In fact, for most of the last century, there has been a kind of battle between traditional and progressive education – one model asserting, ‘we are here to fill an empty brain,’ and the other saying ‘we are here to foster the growth and development of a mind, and really, a whole person.’

In recent years, in my country, and many other countries in the West, we have been testing the theory that the only thing that matters in education is performance on standardised tests. This is the epitome of the “empty brain” model. It assumes that every child will proceed through the same amount of material at more or less the same pace, learning the same material, and that those who are unable (or unwilling) to proceed along with the rest of the pack probably have some kind of disorder. Yet, we all know that all children do *not* all proceed through academic material at the same pace, that brains have wildly different developmental trajectories across domains, and that,



Human cortical development

while we can make some generalisations about growth and development, there is no such thing as a truly “generalised” child – a matter that is almost wholly neglected in this “empty brain” model.

THE FALLACY OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

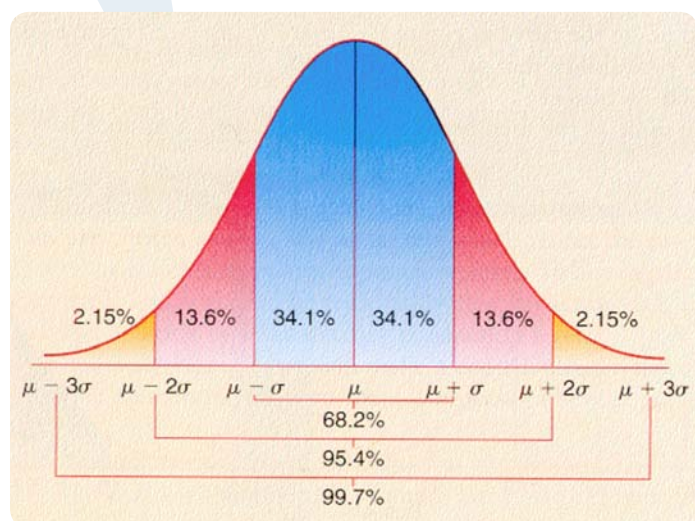
There is another problem, and that is this: While there is no such thing as a “generalised” child, there is such a thing as “general ability.” That is, human intelligence – and variations therein – is *real*. Speaking as a man who has spent most of his adult life measuring intelligence and other cognitive attributes in children and adolescents, I’m here to tell you that “general ability” is real. Some children are high in general ability, some few are extraordinarily high. Some are low, and some few are extraordinarily low. By definition, most are about average.

Now, I’ve got a short quiz for you: How much does general ability predict lifetime success? Does it predict 5-10% of success? Does it predict 20-30%? Or how about 50-60%?

How many of you say 60% or more? Well, the answer is somewhere between 5 and 10%. Not that much. General ability predicts occupational attainment, but not success within one’s occupation, and not satisfaction with one’s life, or one’s general wellbeing.

There is something that this single factor of general ability does predict, and it predicts it extremely well. The factor of general ability (which we sometimes term “IQ”), more than anything else, predicts *academic performance*.

And I will let Sir Ken Robinson tell you what is wrong with *that*. Some of you saw Sir Ken speak at the AMI/USA Refresher Course earlier this year. He is a popular author and speaker on innovation and creativity. He has been described as one of the most popular business speakers in the world. He is the author of a number of books including *The Arts in Schools: Principles, Practices and Provisions*, and *Out of Our Minds: Learning To Be Creative*. And this, is what Sir Ken Robinson has to say about single factor models:



Distribution of general intellectual ability.

If you were to visit education as an alien and say what’s it for... I think you’d have to conclude, if you look at the output – who really succeeds by this, who does everything they should, who gets all the brownie points, who are the winners – I think you’d have to conclude the whole purpose of public education throughout the world is to produce university professors. Isn’t it? They’re the people who come out the top. And I used to be one. So there!

Of course, his point is that not every child is destined to be a scholar, *but every child is destined to be something*.

This point has been made before. In 1925, Charles Spearman, one of the fathers of modern psychology, wrote ‘Every normal man, woman, and child is ... a genius at something ... It remains to discover at what ... This must be a most difficult matter. It certainly cannot be detected by any of the testing procedures at present in current usage’ (quoted in Raven, 2008, p. 26).

What Spearman observed, and what Montessori knew, was that there may, in fact, be a place for every child – a reason for every life – and a way for each one of us to make a contribution to the family of humankind. Montessori’s model of education helps every child discover what his or her unique contribution might be.

All meaningful work is driven by personal values. To develop a sense of purpose, to know one’s cosmic task, is essential for the maturation of a child into adolescence, and for the adolescent to become an adult. This is where the work to identify one’s cosmic task is so essential. This awareness provides the foundation from which children will develop the skills that, far more than general ability, contribute to their own life success, to the success of their projects, and to their world.

Only with a sense of their cosmic task, can a child begin to develop the skills of leadership and followership. Only with a purpose in mind will he or she spontaneously identify problems or resources that may affect goal attainment, learn to mobilise emotions in the service of goal attainment, and be willing to try different strategies that might help them accomplish their goal. Only with a sense of purpose is a child willing to tolerate the fear, anxiety, ambiguity and frustration that occur when working on a meaningful project.

These are the sorts of skills that ultimately, actually determine what happens to people in their lives, and what sort of contribution they will make to the world. None of these abilities are easily formed, and no one develops these abilities as simple ends in themselves. In fact, no one develops any of these important life skills unless they are working on a mission that is *personally meaningful to them*. Indeed, to demonstrate leadership, *one must know what one wants to lead others towards*.

The single factor model that dominates traditional education has little if anything to do with this. In fact, you could argue that traditional education simply rewards those who are good at getting grades – they’re doing what they are told, they seek external rewards, and they are bright enough. Sometimes, what gets rewarded is simply *interest in advancement*. One’s own advancement.

There is another problem with the single factor model and that is simply this: It’s not working.

THE TRAPS OF TRADITION

Each child actually learns at his or her own unique pace. Think of a typical 9-month school year in a traditional classroom. Mary may be moving along quite nicely. Marcus shoots ahead of his peers, but then gets bored by the slow pace and becomes distracted. Juan is making steady progress. Sam started well behind the starting line, but is catching up and is accelerating. Keiko is making much slower progress. Danika has done well and is keeping pace with her peers. Before you know it, it's summer time, and what's wrong with Mary? What's wrong with Keiko? What's wrong with Jennifer? Perhaps it's a learning disorder!

We know a bit about what may lie in store for them. B.E. Anderson, an educational researcher in Sweden, has done research on how children experience traditional education. His work shows that about 1/3 of students are quite successful in traditional education environments. Another third are more or less "killing time," waiting to get out of school and get into something more interesting, and about 1/3 are destroyed by their experiences in traditional education.

Similar findings have been obtained in the UK. In the *Independent* in October of 2007 we saw the headline 'Our young children are anxious and badly behaved, stressed, depressed and obsessed with the cult of celebrity.' Many are familiar with the "Alexander Report," from which that headline was drawn. This survey of satisfaction with the education system reported that: the negativity, and this tendency to consensus on the big issues transcends both constituency and location. No less striking is the pessimistic and critical tenor of much that we've heard.' All over the UK, people are frustrated and angry about what was happening in schools.

Some of you know that I'm from Minnesota, in the US. Not long ago, our local newspapers ran similar stories: 'Hundreds more public schools fall short: The list of public schools failing to meet the "no child left behind" standards rose from 483 to 729.' In our other newspaper that same day we read, 'Schools struggle

to hit state marks: more than a third of Minnesota schools are labelled "poor performers."

How often do we see headlines like this? Think about it for a moment. It's interesting, isn't it, that the only thing that is shocking about these headlines is that *they no longer shock us!* This is what we've come to expect when we see a news story about education.

Here's another headline: 'Students dropping out of high school at epidemic levels.' Now we are a sophisticated group here, and we know full well what the next stop for many for them is going to be. It's going to be jail. And we also know what comes after that for some of these children. It's the morgue. Can we afford to waste this much humanity? Can we afford to squander a third or more of our young people?

Who among us thinks that if we keep it up, push traditional education harder and harder, if we put more pressure on teachers and schools to improve academic test scores, to do better, to teach more, who, at this point, thinks that we'll get 50% improvement? Nobody thinks this. Probably nobody really thinks we have 20% more to gain. I really wonder if anyone, anywhere really thinks we could realistically get 10% more by squeezing traditional education harder.

Myself, I think education is right up against the wall: it has no more to give and we may, in fact, be moving into diminishing returns at this point.

BACK TO THE FUTURE

In 1909, the purpose of education was to prepare people for hourly wage jobs as part of the Industrial Revolution. In 1958, education was about securing lifetime employment. My father worked for the Minneapolis public school system for 35 years. He graduated from college, got a teaching job and stayed there for the rest of his working life. My mother worked for the Minneapolis public school system for 30 years. This was typical for people of their generation.



I'm now in my third career. Job security? Lifetime employment? Those days are over. To an extent never before seen in human history, in this century, in 2009, our children need to be prepared to be more-or-less independent agents for the rest of their working lives. Maybe that doesn't mean that they will all be home-based knowledge workers, sipping coffee and typing at their PCs, but it almost certainly means that they will get ahead basically through their wits and their ability to make things happen, to get things done, to solve problems that do not yet even exist.

For children of the 21st century to be successful, they will have to bring something unique to the table. Perhaps it will be a knack for unusual creativity, or the ability to sift through chaos to find hidden meaning, or the ability to put together a team and keep it running. They will certainly need to have enough specialist knowledge to understand their field, but they will only be successful because of their general *wide-scope problem abilities*.

How should education prepare children for this century? What is "education for the 21st century?"

Well, as with every other question that confronts us in this century, at least some of the answers can be found by searching Google. Indeed, I *googled* the phrase "education for the 21st century" not long ago and found over 147,000 hits. Now, I'd like to tell you that, in preparation for this talk, I read them all. But of course, I didn't. However, what I did read was remarkable. Why?

Because in reviewing what people everywhere in the world are writing about education for the 21st century, I discovered that *progressive education is back* – possibly for the first time.

For example, on the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) web site, I found a model of education based on four pillars: Learning to Know, Learning to Do, Learning to Live Together, Learning to Be. These goals sound quite familiar to a Montessori crowd, don't they?

I also found the 2006 commencement address for the Massachusetts Institute of Technology by Dr Woodie Flowers. According to Flowers, 'The world has changed ... Learning differential equations is training. Learning to think using the insights from differential equations is *education*.' He called for a focus on 'creativity and synthesis, rather than analysis.' He called for education that emphasises 'leadership and team participation.' These goals, too, will sound familiar to Montessorians.

I also came across a speech from September 2002, by Dr Donald Markwell, warden of Trinity College in Melbourne, Australia. It was entitled, "Undergraduate Education for the 21st Century," Professor Markwell called for education that helps students become active citizens in society, who have 'thought carefully about [their] values and beliefs' and have 'wide and humane international and intercultural awareness and understanding.' Markwell stated that this kind of education should come 'before or at very least accompany purely vocation or career specific education.' Again, these goals will be familiar to Montessorians.

Indeed, it is difficult to imagine any educational approach that would be more helpful in helping young people becoming 'active citizens in the world who have thought carefully about their values and beliefs', and have 'wide and humane international and intercultural awareness!'

I even came across a paper describing what undergraduate medical education should look like in the 21st century. The paper called for an emphasis on leadership and teamwork, even as it acknowledged that there is no history of fostering leadership and teamwork in medical education. Leadership and teamwork: Again Montessori shows its relevance.

Here is a final example from an unexpected source, the military journal, *Army*. I found an article called, "Transforming Advanced Military Education for the 21st Century." In this article, the author, James Schneider, wrote that:

Learning takes place along a spectrum. At one end is the kind of learning that occurs through training... this learning is reflexive and rote in nature. At the other extreme is education which is mostly reflective and self-reinforcing.

Schneider notes *that the successful military artist in the role of field commander is also an expert learner who has discovered how to improvise, anticipate, create, and exploit opportunities as they unfold during the course of operation.*

Now of course, Schneider was writing about warfare, but are there not a multitude of settings where one needs to improvise, anticipate, create and adapt to changing conditions? Can one imagine a better environment to develop such skills (hopefully to be applied to peaceful ends!) than the prepared environment of a Montessori classroom?



THE CONCEPTUAL AGE

Some of you may have seen Daniel Pink speak at the AMI/USA refresher course last year in Atlanta. His best-seller book *A Whole New Mind*, specifically addresses some of the things that I have been talking about.

Here is what he says about the world we are heading for:

We are moving from an economy and society built on the logical, linear, computer-like capabilities of the information age, to an economy and society built on the innovative, and empathetic, big-picture capabilities of what's rising in its place. The conceptual age.

So what skills are necessary for success in the conceptual age? Well, for Pink, it's the following:

Storytelling: The ability to persuade or communicate one's message or point to others.

Design: The ability to create beauty, or whimsy, to engage the aesthetic sense of others in one's message.

Synthesis: The capacity for big picture thinking.

Empathy: The ability to connect to and forge genuine relationships, with people regardless of their background.

Pink also discusses the importance of being able to create *Play*, to promote wellbeing and positive shared experiences.

Perhaps most importantly, Pink describes the ability to create *Meaning:* To know one's purpose, to live a meaningful life, to find fulfilment, and to help others to do the same.

When I first read Pink's book, two things struck me: First, came the recognition that without realising it, he was describing Montessori-educated children. Second, came the awareness that *you can't fake these things*. You might get in the door because you can talk the talk, but these skills are very much about *who you are*. There is no faking the capacity for storytelling, design, synthesis, empathy, play or meaning. Just like there is no faking the ability to improvise, anticipate, create or adapt, no faking leadership and teamwork, citizenship, or the ability to live well with others. These attributes are at the core of a person's being – they are skills that say more about *who one is* than *what one knows*.

How can we help children become young people and adults who possess these abilities?

The relevance of Dr Montessori's work could not be more clear. These are the things that progressive education was all about, and no one put those goals into effect better than she. I've spoken about the culture, method, and materials, the prepared environment, where children, every day, discover new things, stretch their minds, and teach themselves about the way the world works. You've all seen how children learn to assist a younger child, or play with an older child, or solve problems on their own or in collaboration with a friend. And when they move on into elementary school and further into the world, you've seen them engage in activities with

meaning and purpose; they're discovering how to measure, how to estimate, how to work as part of a community. They are solving problems and learning to anticipate, compromise, hold a group together (even in the face of conflict); developing the skills necessary to collaborate and cooperate. They're learning self-expression, cooperation, and trust. Learning how to forge a sense of community. All of these things and more: Indeed, all the skills necessary for a successful life in the 21st century.

MONTESSORI'S ANSWER

In investigating the question, 'what is education for the 21st century?' we find that, Montessori is, in the 21st century, more relevant than it ever has been. Quite simply, Montessori education is the very essence of 'education for the 21st century.'

In the past, Montessorians have been preoccupied by the question, 'does Montessori education work?' For many, the question has really been, 'do children from Montessori schools do as well on standardised tests as children from traditional classrooms?' Even though Montessori does not in any way "teach to the test" it has been shown that Montessori children perform very well indeed on academic tests. This question has been answered by the work of Angeline Lillard, and by others.

It is, however, the wrong question to ask.

When we answer the question 'Does Montessori education work?' we must turn to the broader outcomes that are actually relevant to the lives of children and their communities, and to the solution of problems that threaten our world and survival.

'Does Montessori work?' Ask the children who attend East Dallas Community School, a Montessori school in Dallas, Texas. They live in a community where only about 50% of children graduate from high school. Yet, of those who attend East Dallas Community School, year after year, 97% or more graduate from high school. And of those, at least 80% go on to attend at least some college. Yes, their achievement is an academic one, but their life outcomes are far broader than a simple grade point average.

'Does Montessori work?' We know from Dr Angeline Lillard's work that beyond simple academic skills (where Montessori children performed beyond their regular-education peers) they show social and creative outcomes that exceed those of their peers in traditional education. The real news is not about their grades, however, it's about their ability to function in a community. Montessori educated children are *better prepared for life in a functioning democracy*.

'Does Montessori education work?' The research is there. Children who leave Montessori environments and go into traditional education environments are rated as more respectful of other students and teachers, they work more independently, demonstrate greater creativity, they have an enthusiasm for learning. And yes, they show higher math and reading skills. But, again, the question really should not be about academic skills. These are, as Daniel Pink notes, 'necessary

but not sufficient' for life in the 21st century. Future research will address the sort of attributes that Pink and others described: storytelling, design, synthesis, empathy, play, meaning. The ability to improvise, anticipate, create or adapt. Leadership and teamwork, citizenship, and the ability to live and work with others. These are the skills that we need for the 21st century, and here, Montessori education will surely be seen as vastly superior to traditional models of education.

More fundamentally, evidence is accumulating that traditional education has run its course. The world is now ready for something different. Daniel Pink is on the best-seller list with a book that de-emphasises the importance of traditional education!

There has been a sea change; exciting times are ahead. Montessori education, which has not really changed at all in the last 100 years, has nevertheless become more relevant than ever, because something else has changed: The world.

In the 21st century, the world is finally ready for what Montessori had in mind.

I had intended to end this talk on that general note. I wanted to say something encouraging and maybe even crowd-pleasing. I thought of saying something along the lines of, 'Montessori children are ready to compete, survive, and thrive, in the exciting 21st century!'

But that didn't seem appropriate. Montessori really was playing a bigger game than "personal success now and in the future." She wanted to save the world. As it happens, while I was preparing this talk a few weeks ago, I was also rereading a favourite book by an author I enjoyed when I was quite a bit younger. The author was Douglas Adams. The book was, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, which I was rereading for perhaps the 100th time. It's funny, smart, and subversive. Quite Montessorian, if you think about it.

I was reading a passage where one of Adams's characters describes the concept of an "S.E.P." Who knows what an "S.E.P." is?

It's not a common term. If you don't know, I'll tell you in a moment. Anyway, I was reading the passage, and I suddenly realised the actual reason why the 21st century is ready for Montessori, why it's more relevant now than ever before.

This is what Adams wrote about "S.E.P.'s".

An S.E.P is something that we can't see, or don't see, or our brain doesn't let us see because we think it's 'somebody else's problem.' That's what an S.E.P. means. 'Somebody else's problem.' The brain just edits it out. It's like a blind spot.

I believe that the reason that Montessori education is now so relevant, so necessary, is that Montessori educated children, are, *profoundly deficient in this ability*. Montessori educated children aren't good at having "S.E.P.s."

Montessori children know what they are here for and know what their purpose is. They have a sense of their place in history and the world. They are aware of what they can do with their lives, and have thought about how they can contribute to humanity. They care, and they are ready to climb mountains.

And in this century, as you know, there are many mountains that need climbing. Mountain-sized problems such as climate change, population size, pollution of the land and seas, and resource depletion. Problems that threaten our very existence, yet are regarded by so many of us adults as "Someone Else's Problem."

I believe that every child that attends a Montessori programme, every bright little flame of enlightenment, every creative, committed mountain climber, is one more chance for us all. We need children like this, more than ever before in our history.

So the 21st century has indeed caught up with Montessori education. Perhaps the needs of the 21st century, the needs for all humanity, have caught up with Montessori education.

Are you ready for it? We have no time to waste. If you are ready for it, this could be *your* century. The 21st century could be the Montessori Century. The world is ready for it, it's asking for it, and it needs it. Please, let it begin.

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