

The Times, They Have a-Changed:
**An Integral Perspective of the Montessori
Method in the 21st Century**

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At 10 O'clock on the morning of the 17th of December, 1903 five members of the Lifesaving Station at Kill Devil Hills, North Carolina trudged grimly down the wooden steps and across the sand. With their collars turned up against a cutting winter wind, they joined two brothers who had asked them to help test an experimental machine that few of them thought would ever work. After checking the wind speed, setting up their cameras and synchronizing their watches, the two Wright brothers, Orville and Wilbur, started the engine of their odd contraption and pushed off gingerly down a rickety wooden track. Twelve seconds later, the Kitty Hawk Flyer returned to the sands, changing the course of aviation and, with it, modern history.

In the same early years of the Twentieth century when the Wright Brothers were tinkering with their revolutionary invention, Dr. Maria Montessori was busy developing her own. On January 6th, 1907, in the San Lorenzo slum of Rome, she opened her first *Casa dei Bambini* – or “Children’s Home” to teach the “throw away” children of poor families who had never before had the chance of formal schooling. There, she led an effort to reconceive early childhood education based on the principles of scientific research, close observation, and her profound respect for the life of a child. Like the brothers Wright four years before her, Montessori quickly became a celebrity, honored by governments, national leaders and the global press; and immortalized in the history books as the founder of an entire educational movement.

Today, as we straddle the two centennial celebrations of what began in Kitty Hawk and San Lorenzo, we might ponder what has changed and also what has stayed the same in the respective worlds of aviation and education. Within a matter of a few years of its first flight, the odd back-to-front styling of the original Wright Flyer had given way to the familiar bi-planes of World War I. Within decades, those had yielded to the more formidable outlines of Spitfires Messerschmitts, and Flying Fortresses. Those warbirds then morphed into the sleek shapes of supersonic jets, massive passenger planes, and eventually, space shuttles – taking the limits of flight into realms that Wilber and Orville could never have imagined.

If, like Ebenezer Scrooge's hitch with the Ghost of Christmas Future, the Wrights could have glimpsed their own centennial celebration at the Smithsonian's Air and Space Museum – they may have been shocked at the wild variety of flying craft dangling from the ceiling, but also reassured that even the most fantastical contraptions all obeyed the same immutable laws – Lift, Thrust, Drag, and Gravity, that they had first wrestled off the ground so many years ago.

Were Maria Montessori to be afforded the same perspective two years from now, when the movement bearing her name breaks into triple digits and a shot at true posterity, what would she see? What would she think? Would she nod approvingly at all the Pink Towers, Red Rods and Brown Stairs, arranged just so, as they had been back in San Lorenzo? Would she smile with gratitude at all the teachers carefully training themselves and their students to replicate each movement in the classroom precisely as it had been handed down to them? Or would she feel then, much the same way that she felt ninety odd years earlier when she wrote, “anyone who wants to follow my method must understand that he should not honor me, but *follow the child as his leader*” (emphasis added).

If we allow Montessori a consistency of thought and conviction, so that we might accept her injunction to *follow the child as [our] leader*, as valid today--where would we be standing? Where *is* that child, exactly, in 2005? Standing patiently to be let in the front door of the *Casa dei Bambini*, or strapped into his car seat in a minivan whizzing down the highway while *Alladin* plays for the umpteenth time on the in-flight DVD?

So much has changed in the world at large, and in the lives of children in particular in these last hundred years, that it seems decidedly Quixotic to imagine that our classrooms should not change with them. Like that ill-informed, but well-intentioned Don who insisted on seeing the giants of past ages in the windmills of his own, traditionalism within the Montessori movement is hampered by its reluctance to update its original vision. This leaves us in the awkward position of hesitating to actually follow the child into the present because we would rather honor Montessori in the past – an error against which she explicitly cautioned.

Updating the Map: An Integral Cartography

In our attempt to find precisely where “the Child” has led us today, we might want to first determine where he found himself a century ago. To chart both as accurately as possible, we would want to map out the contours and features of early childhood at the beginning of the Twentieth century, then map out that same terrain in the early Twenty First, and finally, to superimpose one upon the

other to find out what has changed, what has remained the same, and what we, as Montessori educators might do to bring our theory and practice in line with these newly disclosed realities.

Just as cartographers favor certain types of projections to reduce the features of a three dimensional globe onto a two dimensional map, we might select a “projection” that most elegantly reduces the multi-dimensional contours of the human experience to a workable study. One such model would be that put forth by Integral Theory, a recent and growing school of thought first articulated by philosopher Ken Wilber. In its simplest formulations, Integral Theory suggests that any inquiry into life as we know it should include as much information as possible, and that the more information a given position includes, the more “integral” and therefore, useful, it is.

In brief, Wilber posits that human experience can be divided into equal quarters – the inside of the individual (**Self** – the “I”), the outside of the individual (**Body** – the “it”), the inside of the group (**Culture** – the “We”), and the outside of the group (**Society** – the “its”). Self and Group, inside and out. In addition to these horizontal quadrants, Wilber would echo Montessori (and Piaget and Kohlberg after her) in emphasizing the vertical planes, or stages of development, progressing from Body (pre-rational), to Mind (rational) to Spirit (post-rational).

To return to our little urchin of San Lorenzo, a.k.a. “the Child” that Montessori wrote so much about – where would we find him on this Integral map? Firstly, we would find him in the **Culture** of turn of the century Europe, steeped in religious tradition, patriarchal authority, nationalist identity, and, Victorian sentimentalism notwithstanding, a “Children are to be seen and not heard” perspective on the role of non-Grown-ups. That Culture would be rooted in the **Society** of its age, an early industrial nation state with a strongly agrarian base, stratified race, class and gender roles, and existing but limited systems of communication (e.g. the telegraph, print media, and later radio). The Child’s **Body** would generally resemble what children’s bodies always had been – fed from local seasonally available foodstuffs, exercised through an abundance of manual labor, child directed play and occasional sport, and stimulated through limited participation in the roles and activities of the broader adult society. The Child’s **Self**, while varying significantly between individuals, would generally have emphasized adherence to roles, fulfillment of norms, and exploration of individual choices within the constraints of family, Church and society.

Fast Forward One Century.

Today, in developed nations around the world, the Child finds himself in a **Culture** both globalized and Balkanized, centered on the authority of the Individual, the identity of the Consumer, and a perspective of childhood that simultaneously elevates and marginalizes the experience (e.g. Baby Einstein and strip mall kid care, respectively). This culture springs from an Information Age **Society** with a broad industrial base, permeable national, linguistic, ethnic and gender boundaries, and instantaneous omnipresent digital communications. The Child's **Body**, has undergone significant shifts from its "traditional" form, now fed from highly processed and refined foodstuffs, exercised predominantly through adult organized sports and "play-dates" (if at all, as recent studies of childhood obesity suggest) and stimulated through electronic games, media and social networks targeted specifically at this lucrative consumer demographic.

So much has changed within the physical and cognitive development of the child and the social and cultural forms surrounding him, that it is hard to underestimate the pronounced correspondent shift in that child's inner sense of **Self**. From the earliest ages, contemporary children are bombarded with images of precocious youth--the "hothouse flowers" of cartoons and films -- who seem so mature and savvy, but lack developed roots to provide a healthy foundation. These become their exemplars, where anything more innocent or childlike can seem hopelessly naïve to even young peer groups. Combined with apparently innocuous technologies like the home camcorder and the karaoke machine, and children spend much of their youth watching themselves perform in a host of ersatz adult situations. This intense self-reflexivity pushes children into more entrenched ego-development that, left unchecked, can lead to outright narcissism and act as a block to emerging ethics of concern and care for others. As childhood fashions ape older more sexualized and commercialized versions, children themselves absorb messages more complex and disingenuous than they are capable of decoding. The "Absorbent Mind" of the child, that serves as the cornerstone of the Montessori approach, has perhaps become the "Saturated Mind." Compared to a Nintendo Gameboy, the Pink Tower might seem a little one-dimensional. Compared to the rapid barrage of screen images on Nickelodeon (and parents' CNN), "quiet time" might seem more boring than serene.

Compared to a hundred years ago, a given young person is likely to have traded the simple (if restrictive) certainty of life rooted in family, town, traditional faith and country for the more complex and possibly less reassuring world of surrogate parent care, geographic mobility, casual beliefs, informational overload and a volatile Global Village.

(This is *not* to suggest that Montessori lose its footings and try to become hip, edgy and contemporary in an effort to remain relevant. But it is to suggest that

we might first recognize this momentous shift in childhood development, devise strategies for wringing out the “Saturated Minds” of our students and returning them to a more absorbent state, and select materials that continue to entice and reward even after the initial presentation is mastered.)

Two Case Studies: ADD and HPP (High Pressure Parents)

As even this roughest of sketches suggests and as Mr. Zimmerman once so memorably warned, the times have indeed changed. And if we would like our sons and our daughters (and students), to remain *somewhat* within our command, we might want to update our maps to reflect current realities. If we do not, we will be ignoring Montessori’s own injunction to evolve and adapt our method based upon the children we teach, and we will keep getting lost in the new terrain that simply does not exist on the old parchment (no matter how lovingly it has been cared for and preserved).

If we were to consider for a moment the unique challenges facing us at the beginning of the 21st century in Montessori from a more integral perspective, we might see a pattern where before we could only detect random errata. It is not that the issues that concern us as Montessori educators today – like attention deficit and hyperactivity or “high stakes” educational accountability – did not exist a hundred years ago. Rather, it is that they existed within a fundamentally different matrix of body, self, culture and society.

ADD: Now and Then

To take the prevalent example of attention deficit – kids “these days” aren’t so much more squirrely than they used to be, nor have we as a society fabricated out of whole cloth an issue that used to resolve itself naturally. Rather, all four quadrants of experience (**Body, Self, Culture and Society**) in the past century have changed radically, and all of them converge to inform the experience that we and our students and their parents know as “ADD.”

Were one of the children of San Lorenzo to have lacked an ability to pay attention, this is what it might have looked like from each quadrant of his world (**Body, Society, Culture and Self**): In his **Body** he would have experienced a disruption to his cognitive processes specifically involved with sustained focus, impulsivity and sequential variegated tasks (so far, so good). In his **Society** he would have perceived little in the way of systems, structures or laws that would recognize any reality of his condition. Depending on class, race and gender, he would likely have found a default position in the lower ranks of society employed in a manner that minimized formal education. Were his symptoms sustained and pervasive enough, he might also have become classified as

“criminal” or “deviant” according to existing local and national law. In his **Culture**, he would have learned broadly accepted understandings of individual achievement and deficiency, ranging from Social Darwinism (the dumb are inferior) to Catholicism (hardship as sign of Sin or Grace) to Class--the Lesser and Better Sorts knowing their respective places. In his **Self** he would likely have assigned to his own persona one or more of the available labels (stupid, lazy, bad, Touched, degenerate) and would have moved on from there trying to craft a life of dignity and meaning.

A child today experiencing difficulty paying attention, would note in his **Body** a process similar to that of his predecessor – hardship with sustained focus, management of impulses and processing of sequential tasks. All of these might be newly informed by twenty to thirty hours per week of television viewing, decreased physical activity and reliance on passive entertainments, poor diet of processed and refined foods, and possible allergies, asthma, and obesity – each one making the task of sustained focus more difficult in its own way. In his **Society** he would perceive a host of complex relationships between federal and state disabilities acts that guarantee special provisions to the disabled (untimed standardized tests and supplemental support at school from specialists), a pharmaceutical industry producing (and in the case of Ritalin, repackaging) some of its most profitable drugs for the pediatric market, educational consulting and diagnostic testing supporting classification of children as “learning disabled,” and a medical insurance industry privileging pharmaceutical treatment of most cognitive/ psychological disorders over more extensive (and expensive) therapies. In his **Culture**, he might note (if he was especially observant) a shift away from blaming individuals for moral problems to reclassifying them as biological conditions (e.g. alcoholism, homosexuality, learning differences), an emphasis on “self-esteem” as opposed to categorical achievement, and an honoring of difference as opposed to conformity. In his **Self** he would likely assign to his persona one or more of the following labels (Special, Gifted, High Needs, Diagnosed Learning Difference). How this childhood perspective might play out into adulthood would range from the best case of a well-adjusted successful adult who has developed reliable coping skills for his ADD to a worst case of a developmentally immature person poorly adjusted to adult society, who avoided necessary stages of growth because of the protections of earlier educational labels.

So, it is all of these factors, taken in concert, that begin to provide us with a more accurate picture of attention deficit in our children and in our schools. Past educators might not have acknowledged the reality of ADD in any form, save the unavoidable external behaviors of a child afflicted with it. Throughout the first

half of the Twentieth century when Montessori was developing her method, there existed no real recognition of ADD within the legal system, developmental research or medicine (**Society**), or within the traditional value systems of the countries in which she taught (**Culture**). Consequently, the inner experience of a child with the condition would have lacked many accurate cues or supports from other quadrants (**Self**), and would likely have been cobbled together fragments from a culture and society that interpreted his condition as a reflection of character and morals or class and genetics.

Current perspective tends to favor viewing ADD as occurring primarily in the exterior of the individual (i.e. the brain and **body** of a child) and consequently, much if not all of the debate surrounding treatment focuses exclusively on this sole quadrant of experience – and is reduced further still to the seemingly simpler task of “to medicate or to remediate?” As far as this position goes, it is correct – ADD does present as a host of cognitive patterns and psychological behaviors in a given child. As the above comparison shows however, ADD is also interpreted and experienced in the realms of the child’s **Self**, **Society** and **Culture**, and these additional components strongly inform the effectiveness of any solutions that we might develop as educators. Viewed from this position, the preemptive question “to medicate or remediate” seems more than hasty, and ignores a host of other decisions that we can make in other areas in concert with, or instead of that initial binary choice.

ADD: An Integrated Montessori Approach

Were we to apply an integrative approach to current responses to ADD in our schools, it might look something like this:

Body – continue to develop and promote healthful eating regimens for our children, including a return to organic whole foods with minimal processing and additives. To compensate for a marked decrease in early childhood stimulation and activity (e.g. television viewing, and generally sedentary family lifestyles) we might bolster our physical fitness curriculum and add “cognitive fitness” – training the body and brain to work more effectively together through balance, coordination, and movement (The DORE program is an international treatment for ADD and dyslexia that applies these concepts quite effectively). This would build on Montessori’s prescient intuition (later confirmed by Piaget and others) that children learn indirectly through gross and fine motor activity, and would add to the Practical Life activities of sweeping, polishing and pouring the more empirically derived and specifically targeted exercises of therapeutic rehabilitation and sports medicine.

Culture—closely examine the interrelationship between the shared experience within the *casa dei bambini* and the broader culture at large, and come to terms that *the former is unavoidably a subset of the latter*. Idealistic fervor of newly trained Montessori guides aside, we live, work and teach within a culture that Montessori had little to do with creating, and it is from there that our children come and it is to there that they all return. Parents serve as the educational equivalent of the Straits of Gibraltar, regulating the passage of children between the calm and hospitable sea of the Montessori classroom and the wilder, less predictable ocean of mainstream society. They are the strongest or weakest link in the chain of care, and become responsible for carrying out much of what will truly make the difference in a child's growth. Consequently, schools would need to place parent education as a priority equal to that of the children's. While this is often recommended in the pages of this journal and elsewhere, few school's budgets and calendars reflect that priority in actuality. Providing parents with the information they need to understand and respond productively to their children's learning differences, and then supporting them throughout the implementation of an integrated comprehensive plan is perhaps the single most important action a school could take.

Instead of resisting the exceptionalism and victimhood that can all too easily accompany a diagnosis of "learning disabled", we could celebrate the exceptionalism of those who have overcome disabilities and gone on to greatness. In this light, studies of Helen Keller, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the Para-Olympics, alter-abled mountaineers, and hosts of other stories of triumph over adversity can serve to inspire our students to reconceive their differences as an invitation to greatness rather than as a protection from challenge—creating a culture of Individual Excellence and Communal Responsibility.

Society—as with the hard reckoning required in coming to terms with Culture and its influence in a Montessori school, we as educators need to take the measure of the social structures and systems that inform our work. As mentioned above, our current relationship with ADD is powerfully shaped (in the United States) by the National Disabilities Act, the pharmaceutical, insurance and medical industries, and educational testing. The only way to alter our current default setting of mass medication is to do our best to shift those underlying structures into different forms. One example would be to research, collate and disseminate (at conferences, in professional journals, and within our schools) data and interpretations that provide different approaches to treating and working with ADD children. The Steiner community in North America seems quite effective in this regard, and has a selection of published works, consultants and speakers that support their efforts to explore alternate treatment with Waldorf families. The governing bodies of the Montessori movement could

conduct a similar process and provide education and outreach for their schools and parents on the subject of holistic treatment.

Creating a “prepared environment” within the school that is conducive to peaceful, centered and attentive learning is an existing and central part of the Montessori method; schools might want to continue to explore and refine those themes within the environments they design--from aesthetics to lighting to accessibility--and also to share the conscious process of that design with families so that the children’s homes (those with and without ADD) might come to resemble more closely the Children’s House.

Also, as we within the Montessori community craft support structures for coping with ADD and other learning differences, we would do well to acknowledge that many families come to Montessori searching for an alternative to mainstream approaches. This means that Montessori schools, particularly public and public charter Montessori schools (and any private Montessori with perennial under-enrollment), tend to see greater concentrations of LD students than traditional public or private programs. Here, again, is an opportunity within the challenge – we could either lament the fact that our schools are not what they could be because of “non-normalized” difficult children or we could again acknowledge that the genius of the method is such that it distinguishes Montessori as the perfect place to teach children of all abilities and dispositions. Since any adaptations we might introduce specifically for ADD children would also support those children without that diagnosis, Montessori could promote those curricular components as yet one more “added value” of the method.

Self: supported within an integrated “constellation of care” where their physical and cognitive growth, their surrounding culture (including the Montessori classroom and the home) and their learning environments all support and uplift their efforts, the self-sense of children with ADD might flourish. Armed with the knowledge of their own unique learning styles, trained with healthy diets and regular physical and cognitive exercises, supported by a school and family culture of serenity and simplicity, and backed by the medical and legal findings that protect and inform them, Montessori children with ADD might find the gift of innocence and possibility returned to them.

HPP: Now and Then

A second example that we might use to highlight the changes in all four quadrants of experience (Body, Culture, Society, Self) and detail the outlines of an integrated approach to Montessori is the familiar High Pressure Parent (HPP).

As a Montessori teacher, you first get a hint of a potential HPP when their 2 1/2 year old arrives for her first day of a primary program (they couldn't wait until she was 3). The child can belt out her ABC song and can count to one hundred, but when you sit down to "review" with her the sandpaper letters or the spindle box – she reveals her rote training and lack of deeper conceptual understanding.

Fast forward to the spring before Kindergarten and you find yourself reassuring anxious HPP's why it's ok that their child doesn't have to be reading chapter books and completing long division just yet, and that each child comes to these things in their own time. Another few years, and those HPP's that haven't already placed their kids in more "results oriented" schools start pressuring hard for "test-prep", tracking, and assurances that their children are "at or above grade-level," despite total familiarity with Sensitive Stages, Planes of Development and all that other "Montessori stuff." By the time you get to the beginning of high school, most of the HPP's and their offspring are long gone and you are faced with the daunting task of trying to develop an authentic Montessori secondary program with the handful of remainders and latecomers – those for whom Montessori is a last hope rather than a first choice.

While this caricature of contemporary parents might elicit a few knowing laughs from Montessori school leaders, the real joke is on us – as we struggle with enrollment in upper grades and struggle to position Montessori more broadly in the mainstream educational marketplace. They have been telling us all along, in no uncertain terms, what the "real world" (the quadrants of society and culture) that they and their children live in, requires of education. We, in our carefully prepared Montessori environments, often fall back into chapter and verse recitations of handed down Truth. Like any elect, we see our job as first to enlighten the benighted rather than to listen to them. And we console ourselves when they leave (as they almost always will) that these weren't the "right sort" for our school anyway.

In the first half of the last century when Montessori formulated her approach, the High Pressure Parent barely existed. Montessori's own experience as the first female doctor in Italy notwithstanding, career prospects and class positions were much more closely defined and stratified (**Society**), and approaches to advancement and self betterment were aristocratic rather than meritocratic (**Culture**). Without any broadly administered aptitude testing (**Body**) to distinguish himself for a path outside cultural and societal norms the Child would have perceived his options as remarkably circumscribed (**Self**). That is to say that a brilliant Italian girl able to attend a Montessori school in the slum of San Lorenzo still would have been limited in her life choices by class, gender, family and tradition – her parents would have known this, and would never have expected the Montessori school to somehow change those constants.

Conversely, a decidedly average upper-middle class English boy attending a Montessori school in London would likely have gone on to Eton and Cambridge despite a lifetime of “gentleman’s C’s.” His parents would have known this too, and barring any severe hiccups, would have left the school to its own devices.

Since the resurgence of Montessori in the United States in the 1960’s, and increasingly over the last few decades, Montessori has come to be defined, for better and worse, as a prime vehicle for giving the child a “head start” on the competitive game of high stakes schooling (**Society**). The promise of early literacy and numeracy and fluency in foreign languages does more to ensure the continued favor of Montessori in affluent suburbs than any of its more central benefits.

The global Information Economy has upset many of the comfortable balances of the post World War II era, and left our younger generations facing a future less certain and more dynamic than any in recent decades. The social and cultural gates reserving access to the world of prestigious educational institutions have been unceremoniously crashed by aspirants of all races, classes and nationalities. Now, at increasingly crowded admissions interviews at every level from primary to collegiate, the proper zip code and last name mean less than the proper test score and list of extracurricular activities.

The High Pressure Parent that we face in the Montessori community can come from either side of these old divisions – on the one hand, upwardly mobile parents who have worked hard and overcome countless obstacles and prejudices on their road to success might be determined to provide their child with all of the advantages they never enjoyed. On the other hand, parents of what is sometimes called the “cultural elite” might be acutely aware that it now takes much more than a legacy and “gentleman’s C’s” to ensure a place at a favored alma mater. In either case, these parents are perhaps far more in tune with the realities of current education than we are within it.

Today, children are diagnosed, assessed and prescribed more than at any time in history (**Body/Self**). The slightest twitch or statistical abnormality prompts a flurry of specialists and experts to weigh in with comprehensive analyses and programs for whatever ailment or aptitude needs attention. By the time children reach school age, a “normal” child – i.e. one without a learning difference, a food allergy, a gifted designation, behavioral medication, speech therapy, or counseling is himself the exception rather than the norm. In the past, only extreme cases at either end of the developmental spectrum (e.g. gifted or delayed) received extensive learning profiles and assessment. Now, with the prevalence of comprehensive testing of all kinds, and the increasing emphasis

placed upon those results, most children have a detailed learning profile that their parents feel obliged to support.

In the realm of **Culture**, we have experienced a significant shift towards meritocracy and pluralism, which elevates ability and diversity over rank and exclusivity. We also have (at least in the middle class) a relentless culture of self improvement focused on childhood, and many parents have come to view themselves as an extension of the life of their children.

HPP: An Integrated Montessori Approach

An integrated Montessori approach to the high pressure parent might look something like this:

Body: As a result of the evolution of the behavioral and biological sciences, we possess increasingly sophisticated tests to determine cognitive, kinesthetic, linguistic, and ethical development in children. To date, Montessori educators (and most within the progressive and alternative educational movements) have resisted acknowledging the usefulness of these tools, for fear that their results might hijack the educational enterprise. This concern is not without merit, as the *No Child Left Behind Act* and some of the clumsy “one size fits all” standardized tests do seem to threaten unique individualized responses to the child and their learning.

On the other hand, what are we so afraid of? Tests, like any other technology, are in themselves, value neutral – neither inherently good nor bad. Appropriately selected and skillfully administered, comprehensive testing of Montessori students would become the greatest asset of the movement – ratifying in the external dimensions what we have anecdotally known in the inner dimensions – namely, that Montessori is a powerfully effective means of raising whole children. Rather than getting trapped in the “teach to the test” conundrum where we must steer our students from wherever they are productively engaged toward an arbitrary set of data – we should take a deliberate and proactive approach to metrics of all kinds. Each child, upon entering a Montessori program should have a benchmark set of kinesthetic, cognitive and ethical tests (Body, Mind, Spirit) – the results of which serve as starting points for their subsequent studies. Periodically (at least once, possibly twice a year) each child would take those tests again, and the ensuing progress would serve to increase our attentiveness to our children’s strengths and weaknesses (as well as those of our curricula). Armed with (but not driven by) this information, we could empirically demonstrate those correlates to the inner growth of the child that Montessorians tend to value and that High Pressure Parents can sometimes come to doubt.

Culture: we need to acknowledge the gulf between the views and attitudes within Montessori schools and the communities that support them – specifically, that parents’ anxiety for their children focuses most strongly in the realm of educational placement, and culminates in admission to the “right” college (and all of the assumed long term advantages that would afford). We as Montessori educators need to realize that our task is not to simply keep reiterating to parents what we believe, until they believe it too. Instead, it is to acknowledge that their perspective – that the world is increasingly competitive and that all but the best positioned might be left behind – is valid and that our programs address this concern directly. As with the ADD question, Montessori is supremely well adapted to speak to the task, and just needs to tailor its public image in that direction. Preparing independent, creative learners and workers for a fluid international economy is *exactly* what Montessori does, and we would be remiss if we did not promote that as enthusiastically as some of our “softer and fuzzier” attributes (i.e. those of the inner quadrants of Self and Community).

Society: here the confluence of volatile global informational economies, increasingly prescriptive state and federal legislation, and heightened selectivity in higher education point to a potent trend that Montessori must either capitalize upon or be buried by. Put simply, if Montessori ever hopes to break out of the comfortable but limited ghetto of preschool care and fulfill Maria Montessori’s sweeping vision for comprehensive preK-University education, we need to make our case quickly and compellingly or risk obsolescence.

When a High Pressure Parent repeatedly seeks our assurances that their child will read, write, or compute at an “appropriate” level – it is negligent of us to pass it off with the “they’ll do it when they are ready” standby. For the more unavoidably mechanical skills, like walking, potty training, and even reading and writing – that response makes sense and carries some validity. But as we progress further up the educational ladder and the skills in question become more subtle and complex (such as when will my child have a grasp of Western literature, or when will they be able to solve problems logically) we hold a distinct responsibility to make sure that the environment is prepared in such a way and that the child is being led in such a way that they do meet those markers at an “appropriate” age. If, for any host of reasons they are not on schedule to meet such goals, then that should be identified early, communicated often, and balanced by specific, measurable strategies toward the eventual outcome.

Even more effectively, the Montessori movement would do well to consider aligning itself with an existing multi-year curriculum in the higher grades to balance what is so well outlined with the Materials in the lower grades. As it stands, the consistency and quality of Montessori curriculum from upper

elementary through high school varies from excellent to barely excusable. That variation hurts the great schools as well as the mediocre ones, and leaves many families simply unwilling to risk those years of schooling (esp. grades 7-12) on an unknown educational quantity.

While it is beyond the scope of this article to make the case here in full (the Montessori Foundation regularly advocates this approach in writing and in presentations), adopting the International Baccalaureate Diploma program and possibly its corresponding Middle Years Program could be a decisive step in ensuring that High Pressure Parents and loyal Montessori families alike have a widely known, consistently administered outcome to their substantial investment in Montessori education. By offering the most respected and accepted high school degree in the world at its schools, Montessori would, in one step, be following up on its core mission of global education, shoring up the anxieties of “what to do after Montessori?” and delivering an essential component of internal accountability to its offerings.

Self: in this particular discussion of the High Pressure Parent, there are at least two individual selves that merit attention – that of the Child, and that of the HPP herself. For the Child, our primary goal might be to provide a sanctuary in which they can learn and grow protected from the anxieties and uncertainties of the world around them (and the pressures that their parents may feel on their behalf). Montessori education holds the inner life of the child in the highest regard, and there is little in that realm to improve upon.

It is equally important to acknowledge the life and Self of High Pressure Parents. While the motives and origins of their behaviors vary widely, we can assume that the most acute cases stem from a deep love of and fear for their children and their futures. If we can speak knowledgeably and professionally to those concerns, *before they have metastasized* then we have created an opportunity to build profound and lasting relationships based on trust and not suspicion.

Conclusion: The Mutable and Immutable

One of Montessori’s great geniuses lay in her ability to intuitively grasp the four quadrants of human experience and to develop a method that speaks to the inner Self of the child, his outer Body, the rich Culture shared between the Directress and children of the *Casa dei Bambini*, and the realities of the Society for which any learning would eventually prepare them. By addressing all four arenas of the child’s experience, Montessori ensured a more powerful and effective program than if she had concentrated solely on the exterior development of the child, as so many more industrial models did (and do).

While Montessori correctly intuited those four realms of life, she could not anticipate how each of them (Body, Self, Culture and Society) would change or evolve over time. The two case studies of ADD and High Pressure Parents illustrate this fact – that while “the Child” may serve as some sort of abstract constant in educational theory, the real world around him is ever evolving and changing. By using more recent and accurate maps, such as the one put forth by Integral Theory, we gain the chance to follow Montessori’s child into the present without getting lost ourselves.

By nudging ourselves to make sure that we are not favoring some quadrants and excluding others, such as valuing the interior development of the child over exterior testing of his achievement, we can ensure that we are taking the full measure of any challenge that we face and response we choose. By understanding that all four quadrants develop over time, as in the emergence of Attention Deficit Disorder as a widespread phenomenon, we can develop a fluid and developmental perspective to our own movement, and avoid static orthodoxy.

If, by overlaying the two maps of Montessori: Then and Now over each other, we can see things differently, and can spot new opportunities, then the exercise has been a fruitful one. The High Pressure Parents might well need some assurances in a hectic world, but how better to give that than by showing them clear markers of their children’s growth? The “Absorbent Mind” of the child might indeed be a little saturated these days, but where better to dry it out than in the sunlit spaces of a Montessori classroom?

It is one of the truisms of history that it is written by the victors. This is as accurate in the fields of innovation as it is in the realms of conquest, and provides all those who come after with a distorted sense of the uniqueness of many great “firsts.” While we remember Maria Montessori and even Orville and Wilbur Wright as revolutionary individuals, they saw themselves much more as participants in ongoing conversations – ones that did not and should not stop with their last words. Before ever beginning their own designs, the Wrights studied the works of Leonardo, Thomas Edison, Alexander Graham Bell, Otto Lilienthal, Samuel Langley, Octave Chanute and countless others to learn what might best work for them.

Montessori too, borrowed and adapted heavily from those who had come before her. Starting with Jean Jacques Rousseau and Heinrich Pestalozzi, and continuing on to Friedrich Froebel, the father of Kindergarten and the originator of many of the most recognizable “Montessori” materials, and Edouard Seguin,

the father of special education – Montessori joined a conversation well under way.

Her genius then, lay not in her unassailable originality, but rather in her skillful synthesis. She wove threads into the weave and helped create a richer tapestry, just as those who came after her, like Jean Piaget and Ken Wilber have added theirs. To recognize that the world of the Child has changed radically is not to disregard the profound insights that Montessori offered while mapping her time and place. To honor Montessori fully is to discern between what of her work was mutable and subject to historic processes, and what was immutable and capturing the timeless essence of humanity. Just as Lift, Thrust, Drag and Gravity served as physical constants long after the Wrights first apprehended them, so do Sensitive Stages, Prepared Environments, Observant Teachers, and Spiritual Children serve as educational constants long after Montessori gave them life and meaning.

Like Orville and Wilbur, who gazed up at the moon from the beaches of Carolina, but could never build the craft to get there, Montessori could not anticipate the adventures and discoveries of education in the Twenty First century. But, inspired with the love and profound respect for the Child that she has given us, and guided by her maps and ours, we might follow the Child into undiscovered realms, learning as much about ourselves in the journey as about those we presume to teach.