

Holistic Education for Educators



CELEBRATING 30 YEARS PROVIDING QUALITY MONTESSORI TRAINING

## Dedication

This book is dedicated to Beth Alcorn and Julie Spencer who worked tirelessly and determinedly to establish the Montessori education system throughout Australasia. Their dedication to the Montessori movement in Australasia was always underpinned by their strong belief that children are our hope for the future.

We, at the Montessori Institute, take this opportunity to record our lasting gratitude to Beth and Julie for their strength, passion, courage and persistence, in bringing Montessori education to the attention of national and state education authorities. Their deep enthusiasm for Montessori education and their positive influence on Australian educators are now clearly evident, with hundreds of Montessori schools and pre-schools having been established and thousands of children having had the blessing and all the lasting benefits that a Montessori education brings throughout one's life. School owners, lecturers, tutors, teachers, support staff, parents and children themselves are all indebted to Beth and Julie for their magnificent contribution to Dr Maria Montessori's world vision.

**We sincerely thank you both.**



# Contents

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Foreword .....	1
Montessori Institute History .....	2
Life Members .....	12
Personal Stories .....	23
Afterword .....	34

"We are the sowers – our children are those who reap.  
To labour that future generations may be better and  
nobler than we are – that is the task without egotism  
and without pride. Let us unite in this work then."

– Maria Montessori, Lecture in Amsterdam, June 1917.





# Foreword

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**MWEI is pleased to bring this special commemorative book to you, to celebrate the 30th Anniversary of its inception in Australia.**

Early in 1977, after attending a Montessori workshop conducted by Miss Margaret Homfray and Miss Phoebe Child (of St Nicholas Montessori Training Centre, London) in Christchurch, New Zealand, I moved back to Australia, and wanted to spread the word on this amazing method of education. With a few other interested folk, I inaugurated the Riverina Montessori Association in Wagga Wagga, NSW. Realising that there was a need for support and teacher training in Australasia, by 1980 I had written to as many training organisations around the world whose addresses I could find. Sadly, many did not reply; others saw it as an affront; and no one offered much help, except Miss Homfray and Miss Child. These two ladies had trained and worked with Dr Montessori herself, and had recently retired from St Nicholas', which they had set up in conjunction with Dr Montessori. They had been invited to lecture at the University of Santa Barbara, California, by several other educators who had trained at St Nicholas', and together they formed the Montessori World Educational Institute. (They had to submit a list of possible names for the organisation to the local authority, which finally chose "Montessori World Educational Institute" and incorporated it as a non-profit organisation).

Our family moved on to Perth at the end of 1980, and I was pleased to find a couple of Montessori schools and some individuals who shared my vision of Montessori teacher training in Australasia. In 1983, MWEI (Australia) was established, using the external studies course and illustrated manuals, developed under Miss Homfray's guidance, for teachers of children from 2½ to 8 years provided by MWEI (USA). Lecturers were also sent from California and England to give workshops and examinations.

The Institute has grown and developed into one of Australia's leading Montessori training institutes, as you will read in the following pages. It is very gratifying to see that from small beginnings, and with a lot of hard work by a number of dedicated people, MWEI has gained accreditation from the Higher Education Board, and been of service to the Montessori community and beyond, for thirty years.

One of the strengths of MWEI has been the consistency and continuity of Board Members, State Coordinators, Tutors, Workshop Presenters and Administration Staff. So many talented, committed folk have served with distinction over many years, and to them we express our sincere thanks for the many sacrifices they have made in the cause of Montessori education.

**Beth Alcorn 2013**

# Montessori Institute History



Julie Spencer, Dr Lesley Payne, Beth Alcorn  
**Australasian Directors**



## Aims

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The Montessori World Educational Institute (Australia) Inc. aims to develop and present world class Montessori courses, that enable students to pursue Montessori educational studies in a convenient and flexible manner. It now offers blended studies courses from Advanced Certificate to a Graduate Diploma.

## Overall Goals

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- » Meeting the needs of Montessori schools and the wider education environment for quality Montessori educators through flexibility, quality education and partnership.
- » Commitment to recognising and applying international and global perspective to course structures and outcomes.
- » Integrity of interactions and relationships with all stakeholders.
- » High level of professionalism and support for individuals to learn throughout their lives.
- » Innovation and advancement of knowledge and understanding.
- » Contributing to a democratic, equitable and civilized society.

## Beginnings

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The Montessori Institute acknowledges its debt to the St Nicholas, London and Californian training centres under the direction of Margaret Homfray (1908–1996) and Phoebe Child (1910–1990). There is a direct link between the training conducted in London from 1946 and the establishment of the Montessori Institute in Perth in 1983. Miss Homfray and Miss Child collaborated with Dr Maria Montessori for over twenty-two years and established permanent Montessori teacher training centres in England, Ireland, the United States and Australia.

Miss Margaret Homfray

Miss Homfray was given the unique privilege of written authorisation by Dr Montessori to grant a Montessori diploma.

Miss Homfray was in her teens when her aunt took her to a lecture given by Dr Montessori in London. Miss Child had attended a progressive school that used the Montessori Method and then gained her Montessori diploma at a residential Montessori training course offered by Dr Claude and Francesca Claremont (who worked with Montessori on early training courses). Miss Homfray and Miss Child met in 1929 when they both attended an evening course delivered by Dr Montessori in London. In 1930, they went to Rome to enrol in a full-time course presented by Dr Montessori.

Miss Homfray had studied Italian so she found herself assisting with translation for the English speaking students. Later in the 1930s, Miss Homfray was sent by the Foreign Office to Berlin to help to establish a less rigid system of education.

Both Miss Homfray and Miss Child assisted Dr Montessori to deliver training courses in London and Dublin in 1933 and 1934 and worked to keep Montessori education alive during the war years. Again, in 1946 they assisted Dr Montessori with the delivery of the training course in London.

After the 1946 training course, the two women decided to establish a permanent Montessori training centre in London. Even though they had very little money, they were able to negotiate a bank loan to open a London Montessori teacher training centre and school. Dr Montessori gave them the authority to award Montessori diplomas.



Through a personal misunderstanding, Miss Homfray and Miss Child became distanced from the Montessori family and in 1951 Phyllis Wallbank, who had attended the 1946 course and had opened the famous Gatehouse School in London, was asked by AMI to organise the 9th International Montessori Congress in London in their place. Nevertheless, in 1952, staying true to their understanding with Dr Montessori, Miss Homfray and Miss Child planned to launch their training college and school as a charitable educational trust, named St Nicholas, after the patron saint of children. It was finally opened in 1954.

In 1952 Miss Homfray and Miss Child designed a Montessori training course they could deliver externally with the aim to make Montessori education available to those who did not have the means or time to travel to Montessori training centres. They defended the decision on the grounds that their external studies course had done 'more than anything else to spread Montessori ideas and to help people get new schools started' (cited in Newby 1991: 72). The two women travelled widely giving lectures and workshops for those taking part in their course overseas.



Miss Margaret Homfray

## In Australia



Beth Alcorn

In 1977 while living in Christchurch, New Zealand, Beth Alcorn worked for Binda Goldsbrough (1912-2008), a central figure in the revival of Montessori in that country. Binda had been brought up in England by parents who had been inspired by Dr Montessori. At seventeen she trained as a Montessori teacher with Claude and Francesca Claremont and in 1931 attended the international course given by Dr Montessori in London. Along the way she became friends with Miss Homfray and Miss Child. As well as gaining conventional teaching qualifications and experience, Binda worked in Montessori schools and assisted Dr Montessori with several training courses, before moving to New Zealand in 1951.

Following a trip to England to visit her friends Miss Homfray and Miss Child, Binda invited them to come to New Zealand to give workshops for students enrolled in the St Nicholas correspondence course. They both visited in 1977 and 1978. On the first visit to deliver workshops, Binda fell ill and Beth stepped in to help. Beth was captivated by what she saw and heard and from then on became a devoted Montessorian.

Beth wrote to Montessori organisations throughout the world asking for support to initiate Montessori training 'down under,' but without success. After she moved to Wagga Wagga in NSW in 1978, she enrolled in the St Nicholas correspondence course and established the Riverina Montessori Association. In 1978, when Margaret Homfray travelled from New Zealand to give workshops in Australia, she included Wagga Wagga in her itinerary.

In 1978 Miss Homfray and Miss Child retired from the St Nicholas Training Centre they had founded in London, but did not give up their work. For a few years they lived in California, where they revised Montessori courses, curriculum guides, continued lecturing and giving workshops. While they were in California, they established a not for profit organisation, with Miss Homfray as Educational Director, to promote Montessori and to train teachers around the world. A ballot by the Californian authorities resulted in the organisation being given the name Montessori World Educational Institute (MWEI). In 1982, Miss Homfray and Miss Child returned to the United Kingdom where they lived in a stone cottage set in beautiful gardens in North Wales, having given their whole working lives to the spreading of Dr Montessori's philosophy.

Sadly, after Miss Child suffered a stroke, she could no longer travel, but Miss Homfray continued tirelessly for many years to train teachers and tutors around the world. She maintained her close involvement with teachers in the southern hemisphere, making regular visits to Australia and New Zealand. The idea of Montessori training being offered permanently in Australia grew from these regular visits by Miss Homfray to Australasia. Following workshops conducted by Miss Homfray in Perth in 1983, a chapter of the MWEI was formed and incorporated separately as the MWEI (Australia). The members of the first Board of Management were Mr Jim Breadmore, Mrs Jenny Burston, Mrs Pat Parker, Mrs Julie Crouch and Mrs Beth Alcorn as Co-ordinator.

An external studies course was offered using illustrated manuals, developed under Margaret Homfray's guidance, for teachers of children from 3 to 8 years provided by MWEI (USA), through the University of California Santa Barbara. Lecturers were also sent from California and England to give workshops and examinations. At the same time, Beth Alcorn began to conduct workshops using videos of Miss Homfray's detailed presentations. These first weekend workshops were held at the Churchlands College of Advanced Education, now Edith Cowan University, where quite often the janitor would forget to open the rooms or arrange for the use of the audio-visual equipment.

Miss Homfray gave Beth Alcorn, Coordinator and later Educational Director of MWEI (Australia), the authority to sign diplomas, a position she held until 2006.

During the 1980s, as more and more students from across Australia enrolled in the MWEI (Australia) courses, it became apparent that an Australasian version of the cultural subjects was needed. To this end, Beth revised all the manuals, adding more detail and better quality colour photographs for each step of every lesson, finally producing a large loose-leaf manual entitled 'An Introduction to the Cultural Subjects'. The manual was written specifically for teachers working in Australia and New Zealand. It was based on original material by Anna Maccheroni, one of Dr Montessori's earliest collaborators and covered a wide range of cultural subjects including botany, biology, zoology, geography, history, art and craft, and music.

The first Montessori Institute office was in Perth in a small room attached to Cygnet Montessori School, which was founded by Beth and Roger Alcorn in 1982. The Montessori Institute followed Cygnet Montessori's move to larger premises, which facilitated more space, as well as access to a classroom and Montessori materials for workshops. Later the Montessori Institute moved its headquarters to historic Meerilinga in West Perth, where in 1922 the Kindergarten Union of Western Australia had opened a model Montessori kindergarten.

After visits to Adelaide by Margaret Homfray in 1979 and 1984, a branch of Montessori World Educational Institute was also set up in South Australia by Jen Gibson, a co-founder of the Hills Montessori School in Adelaide.

In 1992, after Helen Wheatley, a past Principal of the St Nicholas Montessori Training Centre in London, gave workshops around Australia, a Diploma course for teachers of children to 12 years was launched by MWEI (Australia). Eventually there were lecturers in each state, trained first to deliver video workshops and then lectures. Lecturers to the present day in South Australia have been Jen Gibson, Cynthia Morris, Margaret Cronin, Nita Maloney, Barbara Colquhoun, Barbara Langford, Anna Golab, Fran Thulborn and Susan Harris Evans.

MWEI (Australia) has also had a strong presence in Victoria, where a branch was established by Ann Singh, the first coordinator there. From the mid-1980s, the role of Victorian coordinator was taken over by Wilma Carter, a student of Margaret Homfray and lecturer at the Burwood Teachers'



Miss Margaret Homfray – Wagga Wagga 1980

MWEI (Australia) graduates are awarded a brass brooch with their certificate, a replica of the silver brooch presented by Miss Homfray in the 1920s and 1930s. She described the brooch as a child 'paddling his own canoe', the same image described by AMI as a child 'rowing on the sea of life'.





College. She remained in this position until 2006. Wilma regularly held weekend and holiday workshops in her home, mentored innumerable Montessori students and teachers in Victoria, as well as 'externally' tutoring MWEI (Australia) students in other states. Lecturers in Victoria have been Wilma Carter, Marina Rich, Karen Bennetts and Dianne Davis.

In New South Wales was Jean Newman, who was Directress of the Montessori School at Armidale and also lectured at the University of New England, followed by Jenni Kaye, owner of two schools in Newcastle. Today Deirdre O'Reilly is a lecturer in NSW.

Queensland had Georgiana Poulter, who had moved from Adelaide after being part of the Montessori movement there. Marion O'Donnell and Eva Nislev are presently the main lecturers in Queensland. In New Zealand lecturers were Beth Alcorn, Pam Shand and Leonid Grebennikov.

In 1993, through the efforts of Beth Alcorn and Julie Spencer, MWEI (Australia) was placed on the National Register of Training Organisations, a form of accreditation that required updating every two years. Julie became National Director of MWEI (Australia) in 2004. Her husband, Dr Laurence Spencer, served on the board of MWEI (Australia) from 1984 to the present. In 2005 the Montessori Institute added a qualification for adults working in Montessori with the 0-3 years age group with curriculum guides written by Naomi Stuckey.

In 2006 Dr Lesley Payne became Educational Director of MWEI (Australia) and in 2008 Ineke Oliver became National Director. Lesley, who has been a Montessori School Principal and University Lecturer, holds both AMI and MWEI (Aust.) diplomas. Under Lesley's leadership, MWEI (Australia) became an accredited higher education provider offering three levels of qualifications.

Bernadette Hendry took the position of Administrative Secretary in 1993, and has given invaluable service right up to the present day in the roles of Financial Officer and Workshop Coordinator. Jo Harvey became the Administrative Secretary in February 2008 taking over the position from Bernadette Hendry. Jo Harvey has a MWEI Diploma 3-6yrs and has worked in many Montessori schools in Perth. Rebecca Harvey is the Institute's part-time Librarian and Administrative Assistant. Rebecca was a Montessori student from Children's House to the end of primary school, giving her a unique understanding of the Montessori philosophy.

We also welcomed our newest National Director, Rachael Stevens, in 2013. Rachael comes to the Institute with a wealth of Montessori knowledge and experience. Rachael holds a Montessori qualification, a Law degree and has worked as an educator in a Western Australian women's prison.

Lecturers in Western Australia have been Beth Alcorn, Julie Spencer, Cheryl Morcombe, Janet Laing, Jenny Moyles, Marilyn Southern, Sheryl Ridout, Mel Purcell and Naomi Stuckey.



Meerilinga House, West Perth

## Current Chair, Directors and Administrators

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Bernadette Hendry  
Accounts Manager and  
Workshop Coordinator



Rachael Stevens  
National Director



Jo Harvey  
Secretary and  
Student Coordinator



Lesley Payne  
Educational Director



Rebecca Harvey  
Administrator



Laurence Spencer  
Chair



## Past and Present Chairs, Directors and Secretaries/Administrators

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### Directors

**Mrs Beth Alcorn**

Australian/Educational Director 1983 – 2007

**Mrs Julie Spencer**

National Director 2004 – 2007

**Mrs Ineke Oliver**

National Director 2008 – 2009

**Dr Lesley Payne**

Educational Director 2006 to present

Acting National Director 2009 – 2013

**Mrs Rachael Stevens**

National Director 2013 to present

### Chairs

**Dr Jim Breadmore**

1983 – 1987

**Dr Laurence Spencer**

1987 – 1998, 2001 – 2004, 2006, 2009 to present

**Mr Richard Alderson**

1998 – 2001

**Ms Jennifer Moyles**

2004 – 2005

**Mrs Sheryl Ridout**

2007 – 2008

### Secretaries/Administrators

**Mrs Vicky Chantry**

1983 – 1986

**Ms Kay Fendick**

1986 – 1988

**Mrs Diana Reed**

1988 – 1990

**Ms Kay Fendick**

1990 – 1993

**Mrs Bernadette Hendry**

1993 to present – in roles of Secretary, Treasurer, Accounts Manager and Workshop Coordinator

**Mrs Jo Harvey**

2008 to present

**Miss Rebecca Harvey**

Administrator

# Life members

In appreciation...





## Beth Alcorn

Beth gained her NSW teaching qualifications after training to teach infants and children up to twelve years of age, from the Newcastle Teachers' College. She taught differing age groups in Canberra and South Windsor before relocating to New Zealand. Following her marriage and while raising her two children, Beth continued to take courses in remedial education, special needs in early childhood education, child development and child psychology, and taught traditional and remedial classes as required.

Beth first attended a Montessori workshop conducted by Miss Homfray and Miss Child in Christchurch, NZ, at the beginning of 1977. This convinced her that Dr Montessori's approach to education would have better outcomes for children, teachers, parents and the community, than the traditional system. She enrolled in the home study course and after the Alcorn family moved to Wagga Wagga, NSW, Beth established the Riverina Montessori Association, and subsequently organised several more workshops with Miss Homfray, assisted with the revision of curriculum manuals and was awarded her Montessori Diploma for teaching children up to five years of age from the Montessori World Educational Institute and later the Diploma to teach students aged 6 – 9 and 9 – 12 years.

Another move at the end of 1980 took the Alcorns to Perth. Finding there were only two Montessori schools in Perth at that time, but no State Association, Beth set about bringing interested Montessorians together, and worked on a committee which inaugurated the Montessori Society of Western Australia in March, 1982. In the same month, she set up the Cygnet Montessori School, where she was Principal for over 10 years. Simultaneously, she participated in discussions that were being held for the formation of the Montessori Association of Australia (MAA).

In 1983, Miss Homfray appointed Beth as the Australasian Coordinator for the Montessori World Educational Institute. She held this position until 2004, after which she followed in Miss Homfray's footsteps as the Educational Director. She was a tutor and examiner for the external studies courses, and it was during her tenure that these courses were successfully accredited by the Australian Council for Tertiary Awards. She also conducted regular seminars, workshops and training sessions in Australia and New Zealand for Montessori students, state teachers and trainees, early childhood and child care staff, parents and the general community. Her consultancy work and teacher-training has extended into South-East Asia and the South Pacific as well. She has also written a number of phonetic and phonogram reading materials and story books, which have been published in Kuala Lumpur as the "D'Argo Readers".

As a tutor, Beth was supportive and diligent and always worked to assist students through their studies. As a lecturer, she brought a depth of knowledge and experiences which she shared willingly with others.

Beth retired from the Institute in March 2007, but continued as a Montessori Consultant for several years, as and where needed, with trips in 2007 to Shanghai, to speak at the 2nd International Conference of the China Montessori Society, and a month teacher training at Cebu in the Philippines. She was invited back to China for the 4th Conference at Guanzhou (Canton) in 2009. The Alcorns now enjoy their 'retirement' beside Lake Macquarie at Toronto NSW.

We sincerely thank Beth for her enormous contributions to the Institute and Montessori education over the years.





## Julie Spencer

Julie was a strong contributor to the Montessori Institute from her first contact. She was born in England, and taught there and in Hong Kong (where she first encountered Montessori) before coming to live in Perth. She began teaching at the Beehive Montessori School in 1980 and continued there, and at various other Perth Schools, over many years.

Julie worked tirelessly for the Montessori cause in Australia and held positions within the Montessori Institute as Australasian Director, workshop lecturer, tutor, examiner and Academic Board Member. She was instrumental in the accreditation of the Graduate Diploma of Education (Montessori) Course which is now recognised as a post-graduate qualification. This was, and still remains, the only post-graduate Montessori qualification in Australia for teacher registration.

As a tutor, Julie was supportive and diligent and always worked to assist students through their studies. As a lecturer, Julie was inspirational, bringing a wealth of knowledge and insight which she shared selflessly with others. As Australasian Director, she had a clear vision for the successful future of the Institute and was committed to the wider support of Montessori education.

Sadly, Julie passed away with cancer on 22 June, 2010. She had fought with bravery and without complaint for 5 years, and her strong faith helped her through these difficult times. She has left a legacy that will not be forgotten by the Institute and those involved in Montessori education. Below are tributes from some of those whose lives she touched.

"Julie was my tutor when I did my Montessori training. I will forever remember her constant encouragement into a job that I so enjoy today." — Lone Hand (Victoria)

"I remember our time together in Melbourne in 1996 at Plenty Valley School. Julie 'did' science and really spurred me on." — Roberta Coutts (Dunedin, NZ)

"She was indeed a worker, very generous with her time and energy and expertise." — Jenny Moyles (MWEI (Aust.) & Blue Gum School, Perth).

"Julie was definitely a Montessori companion! Wonderful that despite grief, her family can celebrate a life well lived." — Pam Shand (Blenheim, NZ)

"Julie's loss is a very sad time for the family and the MWEI community. I have been looking through some photos of Julie, and remembering..." — Jenni Kaye (Newcastle)

We sincerely thank Julie for her contribution to the Institute and Montessori education over the years.



## Wilma Carter

Wilma Carter has been a MWEI (Australia) tutor, workshop lecturer and examiner for many years. She has also been on the Board of Management and the Academic Board. When she joined the Montessori Institute in the late 1970s after training under Miss Homfray, she brought with her a wealth of educational expertise from her position as a Lecturer in Education at the then Burwood (Vic) Teachers' College.

From the mid-1980s, the role of Victorian MWEI (Australia) Coordinator was taken on by Wilma Carter and she remained in this position until 2006. Wilma regularly held weekend and holiday workshops in her home, and personally mentored innumerable Montessori students and teachers who have benefited from her expertise and professional approach. Wilma has always demonstrated an empathy with students, and has gone 'the second mile' because of her firm belief that Montessori education is not just good for the child, but also appeals to the spirit and personal development of the teacher.

We sincerely thank Wilma for her contribution to the Institute and Montessori education over the years.



## Dr Laurence Spencer

Always supportive of his wife Julie who was a strong contributor to the Montessori Institute, all of their five children attended a Montessori school. Laurence was invited to join MWEI (Australia) Board of Management in March 1986 when it was less than two years old. Laurence has served on the Board continuously since that time.

An Associate Professor with the University of Western Australia, Laurence brought a wealth of experience and knowledge to the management of the Institute. He served on various university committees including oversight for university compliance with legislation, policies etc.

Laurence has lived and worked in a number of countries, including several in the Third World, and his major research interests have centred on the issues of Third World poverty, especially the problems of providing water and energy supplies in rural areas.

His contributions to the Montessori Institute have been unstinting, serving as Chairperson, Treasurer and Board Member as needed, always bringing his gentle humour and strong organisational skills to the best interests of the Institute and Montessori education.

We sincerely thank Laurence for his contribution to the Institute and Montessori education over the years.



## Dr Marion O'donnell

Marion O'Donnell has been a tutor, workshop presenter, and examiner for the Montessori Institute for many years and has also been on the Board of Management and the Academic Board. She has worked as a teacher in the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia with children of 3-8 years, mostly with society's disadvantaged such as low socio-economic groups, inner-city children in Glasgow's slums, children with ethnic and cultural background differences and isolated pupils in Queensland's outback (Distance Education).

Marion lectured at the Queensland University of Technology and has been a researcher at the University of Queensland. She was awarded a Doctorate of Education from Deakin University in 2003.

Marion joined the Montessori Institute in the 1980s and as well as her tutoring and lecturing roles, has undertaken the position of Queensland MWEI (Australia) Coordinator. In this role she has organised local network meetings and student practice and revision sessions as well as personally mentoring Institute students who have needed extra support.

As a tutor, Marion has gone beyond the expected to support and assist students through their studies. As a lecturer, Marion has always been well organised and prepared, seeking to meet the needs of participants and bringing her deep knowledge and understanding of Montessori theory and materials to the task.

As a member of the Academic Board, Marion has spent countless hours proofreading and offering suggestions for improvements to the curriculum guides as well as writing and marking examination papers.

We sincerely thank Marion for her contribution to the Institute and Montessori education over the years.



## Bernadette Hendry

Bernadette joined MWEI (Australia) in the position of Administrative Secretary in 1993. Her introduction to Montessori came when her daughter attended a Montessori playgroup in Newlands, Cape Town, South Africa in 1987. In 1991 she held the positions of Secretary and House Coordinator with the Valley Independent (Montessori) School. From her previous roles as both financial and legal secretary in past employment, Bernadette brought valuable skills and experiences to the Montessori Institute.

Her contributions to the Montessori Institute since that time are many fold and immeasurable. In the beginning she was the bond that held the organisation together. Always working and giving hours beyond her employment requirements, the Montessori Institute would not be where it is today without her dedication and determination.

Bernadette has given invaluable service right up to the present in the various roles of Secretary, Treasurer, Financial Officer and Workshop Coordinator.

As Administrative Secretary, her contributions were vital to the Institute being successfully accredited, first as a Registered Training Organisation and later as a Higher Education Provider. She ensured policies, processes and organisational structures were in place. In her financial roles she has been diligent in building and protecting the future of the Montessori Institute and instrumental in the Montessori Institute having its own premises and the range of courses and services it now offers.

As Workshop Coordinator, Bernadette has managed an increasingly complex task with evident proficiency, continued patience and the wonderful ability to work with a wide range of centres, schools and individuals as well as changing course requirements.

We sincerely thank Bernadette for her contribution to the Institute and Montessori education over the years.



## Frances Thulborn

Fran commenced her Montessori career as a teacher at Southern Montessori School in the early 1990s where she remained until retirement, a dedicated teacher and a constant student of Montessori education, always striving to improve.

Fran has always had a strong sense of social justice being an advocate of indigenous people and regularly volunteering to teach English to new arrivals and refugees. She has also trained with Dr Cameron Camp in the Montessori approach to working with people with dementia, and taught many people working as 'diversional therapists' in aged care facilities. She has sat on Association of Independent Schools of South Australia committees including one that worked with both the government and Catholic sectors to develop the first HIV Aids Policy and formally served as a Board Member for Family Life South Australia.

Fran has been a dedicated supporter of MWEI and Montessori in SA in roles as Secretary of MWEI SA in the early days and Academic Board Member, tutor, lecturer and examiner for MWEI (Australia).

She has been a driving member of the Montessori Education SA group to further the advance of Montessori education in this state, working many long hours to make and procure Montessori equipment for workshops and the schools.

In all her roles Fran was particular, incredibly well organised and prepared, always seeking to improve year after year by reviewing and updating her notes and adding new reference material. As a member of the Academic Board, she has offered suggestions for improvements to the curriculum guides as well as writing and marking examination papers.

Fran personally supported many students through the stress of sitting their exams and encouraged them to persevere. With a great sense of humour, she is a marvellous travel companion, a loyal friend and colleague and most importantly an advocate for the child.

We sincerely thank Fran for her contribution to the Institute and Montessori education over the years.

# Brand Progression

We have come a long way from our early separation with the Californian Institute and feel our recently embraced, distinctive logo, represents the Institutes place in the modern Australian context.



1983 – 2009



2009 – 2012



2013 – Present









1. Andrea Mahiepala's Kiwirrkurra remote Aboriginal school.
2. Maths workshop, NSW, March 2004.
3. South Australia, January 1993.
4. Sensorial Workshop, Hamilton New Zealand, January 2002.
5. 3-6 Maths workshop, Perth 2005.
6. Montessori training workshop, Victoria.
7. Shannon Ellis, our first graduate of the Graduate Diploma in Education (Montessori), February 2008.
8. Plenty Valley Montessori, Victoria. Past and present lecturers. 9-12 workshop. Helen Wheatley is seated behind Beth Alcorn to the left.
9. 6-12 Cosmic Education, Brisbane 2005.





# Personal Stories

## Laurence Spencer

### MWEI from my perspective 1986 – 2013

Having been invited to join the MWEI (Australia) Board of Management in March 1986 when it was less than two years old, and having served on the Board continuously since that time, it gives me enormous pleasure to write a few observations of our journey from my perspective. It was then just under two years since the Montessori Institute became a formal entity, thanks to the tireless efforts of Beth Alcorn at the instigation of Miss Margaret Homfray. At that time, we acted largely as a branch of the California parent body, facilitating throughout Australia the provision of their correspondence courses, and arranging localised workshops to show Miss Homfray's demonstration video tapes, and arranging local examinations which were then marked in USA. This was not a fruitless task, because the enthusiasm of Beth Alcorn and others conducting the video workshops was contagious, and resulted in many new students commencing MWEI courses.

The early years were characterised by the earnest efforts of dedicated and either under-paid or unpaid people around the country, often difficult communication with California (in an age where post was the principal medium), and the usual teething problems of a young organisation. With a lot of goodwill developed over the years, these challenges were overcome.

Communication and logistical challenges with California gradually forced us to take on more and more of the running of courses, until we were producing our own versions of the course materials, tailored for Australian conditions. Perhaps the most significant initiative came from Beth when she suggested we needed to have our courses accredited in Australia. Looking back, this was the turning point for MWEI (Australia), and was the beginning of a new era as we began to meet a need that nobody else was meeting. Even with the progressive increase in legislation demanding ever higher qualifications for teachers and small education providers, we have been able to keep ahead of the game.

Since that time, we have been able to develop and improve our courses and methods of presentation continuously and in recent years have been able to introduce a Graduate Diploma, thus making a Montessori qualification an asset even to those holding an education degree but needing teacher registration.

As we look to the next thirty years, I find myself excited at the prospects for the Institute. We have a great team, and I believe on the horizon and beyond there are opportunities for us to spread the benefits of Montessori education even wider. I would like to thank the many people who have over the past thirty years brought the Institute to where it is now, and wish all the best to those who will take it to new and exciting places in the decades ahead. We still have much to offer the children and society in general, and that is a great incentive!



## Ineke Oliver

### Personal Story

In 1995 I returned to Australia from a few years in Singapore, having commenced a Montessori training course in the UK. I needed to transfer my course to an accredited Montessori course in Australia and so began my journey with MWEI.

Julie Spencer was the lecturer at all the workshops I attended as part of my course and I have very fond memories of this dedicated, gracious person with an eternal smile.

During 2004 to 2005 I accepted the role of WA Regional Co-ordinator with MWEI as well as tutor and lecturer. Workshops were held in schools and MWEI (Australia) equipment supplies were limited, we had a positive relationship with the schools and equipment was borrowed when needed.

Board meetings were held around a table in the office in the CWA building in West Perth, with telephone connections around Australia. It was wonderful as time went on and I met the voices on the phone in person as I attended Montessori conferences and workshops around the country. Some of our meeting discussions were spirited discussions, but always with professional respect and dignity.

In 2008 I accepted the position of National Director. I felt honoured to be involved at that level with MWEI, working with dedicated professionals with a common cause – to provide Montessori trained people to promote the future of Montessori in Australia.

I worked closely with Dr Lesley Payne, Educational Director. Lesley and I had known each other for some years and she is someone who I consider to be an icon in Montessori in Australia. Her knowledge and academic experience and expertise is to be admired and continues to be of immense value to MWEI.

During my time as National Director, Lesley and I travelled to other states to meet with the tutors and lecturers. These were always extremely beneficial, to have face-to-face meetings for open and frank discussions, as well as enjoyable social occasions. At one such event I fell and sprained my ankle and then whilst at the hospital I broke the toe on my other foot whilst getting used to the crutches. It became a great source of amusement to us all as I returned to the venue with both feet bandaged and is an event that is still remembered today as I meet people from that time.

I believe it was a great achievement for MWEI to purchase the property in Ellenbrook, moving from renting a small office to quite a large space with its own training room.

This was a time of faith and hope for all of us and over the years it has proven to be a sound decision.

In 2010 it was necessary for me to resign as National Director, as I took on the fulltime role of Principal at Riverlands Montessori School. Our school continues to have staff undergoing MWEI training as well as some parents. My husband Geoff is now a member of the Board of MWEI, my daughter is currently enrolled in an MWEI course, and so our journey continues ....





## Wilma Carter

### Some Reflections

Ann Singh was the co-ordinator for MWEI in Victoria when I became involved with Montessori Education. I had 'inherited' a set of Montessori material when taking the role of tutor in Junior Primary Education at Burwood State College in 1978. I was prompted to enrol in workshops given by Miss Homfray in Melbourne and Narooma, NSW in 1984/5.

A student wrote of Miss Homfray following one of these workshops: "There was a 'feeling' I saw in her -- she looked to be in perfect peace and beauty, aged well into her 70s." Miss Homfray advised me to 'do the course' and then became my tutor, so that I became a qualified Montessori teacher.

Becoming a member of the Montessori Association of Victoria brought me in contact with the Montessori practitioners and their schools. When the Education Department advised that three year trained teachers should upgrade their qualifications, a successful application was made to the Department to have the Montessori Diploma recognised as equivalent to the fourth year.

Ann Singh resigned when her husband was transferred and Victoria Wood and I became the Victorian Co-ordinators. At this time, workshops were conducted by interstate or overseas visiting lecturers - or would be Montessori teachers had to travel interstate for training.

However, with the growing expansion of the Montessori Method in the State it became evident that we needed training to be available in Victoria, so Beth Alcorn obtained permission for workshops to be conducted using the video tapes of workshops taken by Margaret Homfray in California. This was rather onerous as we had to order the videos to be sent from Perth with costs of hire, postage and insurance quite expensive. That led us into the 'fund raising' era. To be consistent with 'healthy diet' we bought dried fruit in bulk and sold it in retail size quantities to the parents in schools where the students worked!

We were so relieved when permission was granted from the Californian Association personnel to have the tapes copied to VHS with a set for each state, where needed. This was done in South Australia with the assistance of Margaret Cronin. It was also a time of recognition for the Australian MWEI; through the efforts of Beth Alcorn, the Australian Association could act independently and conduct our own workshops and examinations, rather than having exams set and assessed in the United States of America.

Victoria Wood was expanding from her 'home school' to a new purpose built school and had to concentrate on that, so I became the Co-ordinator on my own for many years.

About the time I retired in 1990, there was a great overhaul of facilities due to expansion of Burwood becoming Deakin University. I no longer had access to the classroom and materials at Burwood, so workshops were held at my home, then in rented premises in Mount Waverley, every second weekend in school terms.

Mireille Beaufremetz, who had done the third cycle course offered her assistance with workshops. Her dedication, encouragement and careful examples were a constant source of inspiration which I sincerely appreciated. We gradually acquired more of our own material and sometimes, students brought material for practice from the schools where they worked.

I must also acknowledge the wonderful patience and assistance given by my husband during these years, as he was a skilled woodturner and often tried his skill in making materials for the classes. With the restructure of MWEI it was time for Mireille and me to retire. It is rewarding to note the careers of so many of our former students. Best wishes to all.

## Eva Nislev

### An Amusing Anecdote

About 15 years ago Beth was in Brisbane running a workshop and we had all gone along and it was absolutely freezing at Auchenflower, (by the last day I came with a blanket and ugg boots!). Anyway, we decided to go out for lunch at a local Mediterranean tapas bar (very new and sophisticated), Jan and I had ordered lots of yummies to try. The last lecture Beth had given was all about how we should never be afraid to try anything and that it was good role modelling etc. ... so... as the char-grilled octopus came around I put one on Beth's plate and reminded her about the lesson. She told me years later she was torn between revulsion and carrying through with the deed. To give her her due she did try it, HATED it, and dreamt about all the little legs! Many years later we met up at a conference in New Zealand and when Carmel and I offered her a seat at our dining table, she declined, saying she still clearly remembered what happened last time she sat next to me for a meal!

## Jenni Kaye

### Personal Story

For what it's worth I would like to state that if it wasn't for MWEI's contribution to the training of the staff at the two Newcastle 3-6 centres and the 0-3 program, then Montessori would not be as strong in Newcastle as it is today.

I knew that to start and keep Montessori strong in Newcastle we couldn't rely on people with the training already to just turn up and do the job. So I started on a systematic training program for all staff with the main input coming from Montessori Institute. The advantages of this were that staff would end up with a (now recognised) qualification in Montessori education that all staff would be aware of what each other had done. This was a huge advantage in the classroom and when we did get people with other Montessori training, they could align what they had learnt with what MWEI was teaching and knew what each other were doing. This brought continuity of delivery within the classroom and between staff.

I required all my full time staff to enrol in a Montessori qualification. MWEI was the perfect choice because of the external study approach and I had experienced myself the high standard of workshops, presenters, tutors, administration and management.

Beth Alcorn was our main workshop presenter for the 3-6 component. She had been my tutor and workshop presenter when I studied my diploma, so this provided further continuity for myself and the staff. Also her direct link to Margaret Homfray and Margaret's to Montessori was an assurance of authenticity.

Because our centres operated as long day care centres and workshop presenters were not local, we needed to do the workshops as blocks. So we tended to do a curriculum area each year, often with a parent night to take advantage of having a visiting speaker. As we completed the cycle of all curriculum areas we started again, which serviced any new staff and other attendees and provided solid revision for continuing staff.

So between the years of 1997 and 2010 we covered a lot of territory including all 3-6 curriculum areas, 6-9 extensions, a primary cultural workshop, a couple of 0-3 workshops and numerous parent nights.

Thank you to Beth and all our other workshop presenters and to MWEI for providing a wonderful, solid base for Montessori Education in Newcastle.



## Marion O'Donnell

### Notes on a Montessori Journey

In September 1939, the early days of World War 2, I was taken from Glasgow to the Island of Bute to stay with an aunt for safety. I was enrolled at Rothesay Academy's new Primary School known locally as the Italian building. Its large white structure with a flat roof and French windows was on a hilltop and stood out in stark contrast to the grey sandstone two storey High School below with a tall clock tower. Inside the new building the classrooms were large and furnished as Dr Montessori suggested with individual tables and chairs. It was my first Montessori experience.

I attended Jordanhill Teachers' College, Glasgow from 1951-54. History of Education lectures included Montessori education with extra lectures when Dr Montessori died in 1952. Several lecturers in the college had studied under Montessori herself. Among these was Dr Anne McAllister a leader in speech training following Montessori principles and method exactly and producing a series of books for students in every grade of Primary school. Later, I found her lectures and books were being used at Sydney Teachers' College.

I was appointed to infant department of Campbellfield School in east end of Glasgow from 1954 to 1959. I attended summer schools each year completing further Early Childhood courses where presenters used many of Montessori's ideas. Studies also included: How to observe for research purposes, note taking, planning and designing lessons for individualized work

and needs of children, designing and developing materials for individual needs, experimenting and reporting results.

From 1960 to 1969 I was appointed to Boolaroo State School, Newcastle district, NSW, Infant department. Here there was still evidence of the influence of Margaret Simpson in the Infant rooms. They were very large rooms with a continuous blackboard along one side of the room for children's use, low shelves with many individual activities and small mats for working on the floor. Dual desks were at one end of the room. Montessori materials for Language and Mathematics were kept in a teacher's cupboard but no one on staff knew what they were. All materials were made by the NSW Education Department. They are now in the education museum at New England University, Armidale.

Between 1969 and 1974 taught at McIlwraith School in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, where I was invited to pilot a Kindergarten group while graduate students completed a fourth year at University in early childhood studies. I was also in charge of Reading Readiness group for children 5-10 years experiencing reading difficulties.

Between 1974 to 1978 I was appointed to Newmarket State School, Brisbane, Queensland to the infant Department and taught Year 1 and Year 2 children. I was surprised to find dual desks nailed to the floor. In 1975 I enrolled with St Nicholas, London in a Montessori Diploma Course for children 2 1/2 years to 5 1/2 years.

At the Workshop delivered by Mr Frank Parker before the written and oral examination, I met ten of the founders of

Montessori education in Brisbane and was invited to join the Montessori Association of Brisbane, which met regularly at different venues.

In 1978 the name was changed to Montessori Education Group (MEG) which still meets today. From 1979 to 1988 I taught through the Queensland Correspondence School, Primary years children aged 7 to 12 years old while continuing my Montessori studies. I was able to apply Montessori principles as all work for pupils was individualized and designed a successful reading programme on tape for students 5 to 12 years experiencing difficulties learning to read.

In 1983 MWEI was introduced to the MEG group with much interest and excitement at having Montessori Training in Australia. I was appointed Lecturer and Tutor at Queensland University of Queensland Technology (QUT) (Psychology and Learning) between 1989 and 1993. I also gave lectures in Montessori education by invitation in several courses.

I was also a researcher in Education Studies (Secondary Schools) at University of Queensland University of Queensland and received a Doctorate in Education from Deakin University. I have had two books published: Maria Montessori. A Critical Introduction to Key Themes and Debates, published by Bloomsbury 2013 and a volume on Maria Montessori in the Continuum Library of Education Thought series, 2007.

In 2010 I was delighted to be awarded an HONORARY LIFE MEMBER certificate from MWEI.

## Anne Curtis

### Personal Story

Eleven years ago I decided to pursue a career in early childhood education. The choice to become a Montessori teacher was easy; it made sense, it was thorough, it was exciting. Fortunately, after I commenced my studies, I was able to secure some part time work in a local long day care centre here in Byron Bay, that had a Cycle1 programme running in the Pre-school room.

I was fortunate to share my formal Montessori study journey with two other friends also working at the centre at that time and have had the privilege of guidance from great mentors such as Beth Alcorn, Jean Newman and Marion O'Donnell, with Lesley Payne as my theory assessor. An on going friendship/mentorship with Beth has been invaluable.

In the early days, Jean Newman's Coffs Harbour Cycle 1 classroom, held within the walls of an amazing revamped recording studio was a wonderful place to do my observations and some practical work. The Children's House she had created in this environment was just delightful (I wanted to have my childhood all over again in that place). Jean's wealth of knowledge, her generosity and

encouragement in those days were so greatly appreciated by us all. She welcomed all our questions, Workshops were inspiring and very interactive and lots of fun. We had many enjoyable nights at Jean's house recapping and sharing experiences.

Workshops, conversations and advice with Beth and Marion are deeply imbedded in my thoughts, and helped form my own personal educational philosophy. I was able to enrol my daughter (the last of my 4 children) at the centre where I work part time, so we both were discovering this rich and exciting early childhood experience together. While, last year I had my grandson in the room - such a wonderful experience.

Since those early days much has changed. There was a change in management while I was still studying and the Montessori Directress left. For a small period of time after that, we thought it was all over but, fortunately the owner of the business asked us to see if we could keep things going. This provided many challenges such as loss of Montessori materials, restricted budget, changes in staff and all sorts of apprehension about how we could keep it going. But we pulled through and have managed to stay as true to our objectives as possible, given the dynamics of our area and lack of trained Montessori staff.

I am the only MWEI staff member currently in our centre. I enjoy the challenge this brings of continuing to encourage and train new and old staff and making Dr Montessori's incredible approach visible in our small community. I often get positive feed back about our Cycle environment and programme, which is so encouraging. Parent's evenings are always a success and it's a great feeling when I see the children thriving and parents seeing/sharing the fruits of their child's progress. It makes the harder times all worth while.

I Thank God for Dr Maria Montessori!





## Andrea Mahiepala

### Personal Journey

My journey as a Montessori teacher began with a simple idea of wanting to teach and educate my own kids in the Montessori way. Being first educators of our own kids, I feel now that it was the most rewarding path taken especially not knowing that it would help me in my career along the way.

On arriving in Australia with my young family in 1995, I realized I had little opportunity to work in Montessori so my love for working with young children took me into the Child Care Industry.

Armed with my Diploma in Montessori and Education in 3-6 years, I was employed as a Group Leader and in 1996 enrolled in a Diploma in Child Care and Education. My family moved to Port Headland and it was there that I first encountered our own Indigenous students. On completing my Diploma and having been promoted to Centre Manager, I enrolled in a Bachelor of Education K-7 with Notre Dame, Broome.

Nearing completion of my degree with a Minor in Aboriginal studies in 2007, I first walked into a little Montessori Classroom in Perth. I still remember my first meeting with Rachel Walker who offered me part-time work in her classroom of 20 students. I felt at home looking around the classroom and all the familiar pieces of equipment and then knew it was where I belonged.

On finishing my final teaching practicum, Rachel offered me a full time position as a Montessori Teacher at Southbank

Montessori in East Victoria Park. I did not look back for nearly the next 6 years. Since 2007, I attended all the refresher courses offered by Montessori World Educational Institute (MWEI) and enjoyed teaching. I was Head Teacher for Southbank Montessori Child Care Centre, managing two 3-6 year old Montessori classrooms of 60 students and around 10 staff members.

I like this famous quote from Maria Montessori where she says, "You yourselves must be filled with wonder; and when you've acquired that, you are prepared." And so my interest to work with Indigenous students reignited since carrying the thought secretly with me for a while. Rachel and I often spoke about the needs of our Aboriginal students in schools and how Montessori would be ideal in the learning journey of young Aboriginal kids. Before too long we heard of the Pilot Montessori classroom in Kiwirrkurra.

In 2012, I made the decision to take on a teaching position in a Remote Aboriginal community in the Kimberley. The school consisted of 100% Aboriginal students. Although it was not a Montessori Classroom, I adapted a few of the Practical and Sensorial life activities for the students. My thoughts were then confirmed that these students would benefit from the program immensely. The attendance rates grew and I enjoyed my teaching in Balgo, at Luurnpa Catholic School.

During this time I met Catherine, an Early Childhood teacher in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands Schools, who took the initiative to research Montessori and convert her classroom

in Kiwirrkurra with the support of the Ngaanyatjarra Leadership group.

I was later invited to teach in the Montessori Pilot Classroom in Kiwirrkurra Remote Community School. I felt quite excited at the thought to be teaching with not only one but two of my first loves being fulfilled on the job: Montessori and teaching Aboriginal students at the same time. I currently teach Kindergarten to year twos.

The students and community have absorbed the Montessori way of education. Kiwirrkurra is the most remote Aboriginal school located in the Gibson Desert. It is one of the nine Ngaanyatjarra Lands Schools with around 35 students. The nearest major town is Alice Springs, located 666 km East of Kiwirrkurra.

My drive to teach the next phase of students 6-12 year old's in Montessori has lead me back to the MWEI classroom. I am currently enrolled in a Diploma of Early Childhood and Primary Education (Montessori) (6-12yrs). I find the course is flexible for me and the workshops are run during the school holidays, and the lecturers are helpful and friendly.

Please feel free to make contact with me at anytime if you are keen to find out more about my work in Kiwirrkurra or would simply like to have your name added to my termly news list.

Best form of contact is via email: [andym66@telstra.com](mailto:andym66@telstra.com)

## Steven Wallis

### The Learning Journey Continues

Although a relative newcomer to the Montessori community, my work at Southern Montessori School, South Australia and the study that I have done through MWEI, have both left me feeling like my association with the philosophy has been a long one.

I have recently completed a Diploma of Montessori Leadership and Practice and one of the assignments, on the 'Normalised Child', caused me to reflect on my early teaching experience. My introduction to that assignment (below) best summarises my feelings about the Montessori philosophy.

In 1985 I was in my fourth and final year teaching in a rural school in the Flinders Ranges, South Australia. There were 25 children (about 15 families) in my class that year, ranging in grades from Reception to Year 7. My role over the 4 years had evolved into being facilitator, mentor, collaborator and guide within the classroom. Much of my work time was in preparation (of materials and the learning environment) and in promoting a culture of shared decision making and responsibility.

Following the children's interests, within a framework of general expectations and negotiated outcomes had become my 'modus operandi'. With the occasional interruptions (brought about by 'challenging' families moving into

the area for cheap farm house rentals), we generally had a wonderful, family-like learning environment.

Now, even when I take off my 'rose coloured glasses', I can see that there were long periods of time that we, as a whole school, were experiencing a degree of 'flow'. I had never heard of Maria Montessori, I knew nothing about the concept of a 'normalised child'. Yet I believe that throughout my career, I have tried to recreate the kind of learning environment I experienced at Murray Town Rural School. Now I find myself Principal of a Montessori School and I am learning the language and the rationale that helps to explain my personal philosophy and purpose as a teacher.

As I continue my work as part of the wonderful community at Southern Montessori, and with my MWEI Diploma behind me, I feel I have grown much clearer in my own thinking about education and the role we adults play in it. Perhaps there is a little more to my close affinity with the philosophy than I realised when my mother, Stella Wallis, (indicated by an 'x' in the photo) sent me this photo from Lefevre Primary School taken around 1931.



## Tahnee Marsden

### Some Reflections from a Student

I love the theory and the story of Montessori and have recently watched her life story played out in a mini series the BBC have on inspiring women. Although I already knew much of what they said, to see and hear it brought tears to my eyes.

I wish there was some way to make the greater population understand the true meaning and values of the Montessori theory and education. I read only last week an article in the paper titled "Peeling a banana tests school kids". It related how more children are starting school with such poor co-ordination skills they struggle with basic tasks, "

..... more children are coming to pre-primary who can't blow their own nose with a tissue, do up buttons, spread a piece of bread with butter, open their lunch boxes and peel a banana.....".

To combat the decline in motor skills, Professor Piek (developmental psychology professor from Curtin University) brought together experts to develop an exercise program that mimics animal actions. The article describes the success of the program in calming the children down. No equipment is needed and in the space of only a few minutes (i.e. walking from outside to inside) they have completed several gross motor movements.



This article left me speechless thinking, one, what is happening to the children of Australia that at age 5/6 they can't blow their own nose or button a shirt, and two, why is Montessori not recognised and more readily available to the public? I took two hours out to ask everyday people in Bunbury and Donnybrook of "What is their understanding of Montessori education". No one knew or had even heard of Montessori. My purpose was to see what understanding, if any, the community had of this approach which is 100 years old and has been embraced with great success all over the world. It is astounding only a very small percentage of the population are aware of this educational philosophy and with all its history and benefits why it isn't readily available to everyone. It is frustrating to think we have professors coming up with 30 minute 'exercise' programmes where the children are mentally learning nothing other than how to act like a chimp!!!! Somebody needs to step up and speak for us and our beliefs before it's too late. My question to you is how do we make ourselves heard?

## Esther Rich

### Montessori- way of life

After being introduced to the Montessori Approach by my beloved friend who just so happens to be my devoted boss 'Kerri Steel' who opened up "Karinya Montessori Children's House" in Cooroy, QLD Australia, the world finally makes sense. For years I worked in main stream childcare centres that just weren't satisfying my taste. As mainstream childcare educators we were taught to provide experiences and opportunities based on development of needs and interests (milestone) and given the explanation of "that's just what happens next" children develop in stages full stop. We were provided with fun and interesting experiences to offer and great ways to foster development, but with no underlying understanding of why? With no understanding of the child, it seemed that teaching was almost mechanical, one step coming after another. Of course the individual personalities were admirable; an array of strengths and weaknesses in every child and it was my relationship with these children and their joy of life that kept me in the early childhood profession.

In 2010 "I saw the light." I fell completely in love with the Montessori approach. FOR THE FIRST TIME I BEGAN TO UNDERSTAND THE CHILD. I was introduced to this amazing Approach and with the inspiration and support of my boss, I signed up for a 3-6years diploma with MWEI. Two weeks after signing up for the course, I found out I was pregnant with my first child 'Inca'. She is now nineteen months

old and has the wonderful opportunity to experience Montessori in the Home, which creates such a beautiful rhythm of life. It still has its challenges of course, after all children are children and they are driven to explore and discover and experiment... tea towel in the sink water, shoes in the toilet, water pouring on the carpet, plant out of the plant pot.

A huge thank- you to 'Kerri Steel', such an inspirational woman. Her passion shines throughout our amazing centre every day. It shines through each child, each family and extended family, each staff member and thus the whole community. She has changed so many people's lives and in undertaking a key role in educating all her staff with the help of MWEI, Kerri is supporting her staff mentally, emotionally and financially. I think I can speak for all staff at our centre to say we adore Kerri, she is our hub. Not only does she voice her opinions with such gentle care, understanding and compassion she listens whole heartedly.

Reflecting upon the MWEI course 3-6 diploma, I must say it is of a very comprehensive nature making it easier to meet goals. My Tutor 'Fran Thulborn' is very efficient in her responses and feedback. I feel secure in the fact that I will have support to achieve rather than be reprimanded for my failure. Like a child adults are students too.

The World is such an amazing and beautiful place through the eyes of a child.

## Rachael Cho

### Some Reflections from a Student

My name is Rachel Cho and I am a student of the Montessori Institute enrolled in the Montessori Advanced Certificate Course. I have been working in Montessori centres for two years, in the Mosman and Manly area of NSW.

I wanted to share my story and make a contribution to the book, congratulating the 30th Anniversary, as Montessori and MWEI (Australia) have made my life so much more meaningful.

Being in a Montessori environment has been such a wonderful experience. Not only the children but I have also learnt how to live with respect and independence. The children are free to learn at their own pace, hence learning is very enjoyable! Every time I look at the Montessori environment; where there are children's own lockers, places they can read, paint and work, it gives me a smile on my face.

Every time I look at Montessori materials; the mats the children can use for their own work, different coloured towels for different purposes, and so much more, showing how thoughtfully they are made for children, it amazes me. It is wonderful to take part in the Montessori environment and in creating the ideal world for children. I am giving enormous thanks to MWEI for providing me with such a great opportunity to study Montessori!

## Julie Yujiung

### A Personal Journey

Julie Yujiung Ye immigrated from China in 2003 with her husband Stephen, and daughter, Yidan (4 years old). Her son, Cory, was born in December, 2003. Just at that time she borrowed a Chinese version of a book named "The Secret of Childhood", by Maria Montessori, from her Aunt. She was so excited and inspired by each word of the book that she practised on her new born baby. She showed great interest in Montessori education and began to look for such places that taught the method. She and her husband visited many Montessori schools and kindergartens in Brisbane and finally found out about MWEI.

In 2004, Julie began her study of 0—6 Montessori Cycle with MWEI. She studied very hard and had to spend much more time in order to conquer the difficulty of language. But she was so happy! She soon knew many classmates in the meetings held once a month at Auchenflower Montessori Kindergarten by Marion O'Donnell, the MWEI Qld Co-ordinator, and facilitator of the Brisbane Montessori Education Group. Julie attended many of the Montessori Workshops (0—3, 3-6, 6-9) held in Brisbane during 2004-2005.

At that time, she also met Beth Alcorn, the former Director and consultant of MWEI (Australia), who was to influence her so much in her future life. Beth held the Montessori Language and Culture workshop in Auchenflower Montessori Kindergarten and later at Brisbane Montessori

School during that year. Julie finished her Montessori observations at Indooroopilly Montessori, then passed all the exams with high scores at the end of 2005, which enabled her to graduate as a qualified Montessori Teacher Assistant. Julie was feeling her life was refreshed by Montessori's ideas and she had made a new start!

In February 2006, Julie and her family made a hard decision --- going back China to take care of her husband's sick father. Julie was keen to put what she had learned into practice and let more people know what the real Montessori Education was all about. With the help and support of her husband, Stephen, she set up "The Happy Heart Montessori Children's House", for 0—3 year old children, in March of 2007. She carefully set a very beautiful and rich Montessori environment for the children and spent much time training the new teachers. It seemed so new and there was a challenge to the traditional education at that time. Many young parents were attracted by "Happy Heart". There was a Montessori parent session held by Julie once a month, attended by many parents, and even the directors and teachers of the local government kindergartens. The ideas of Montessori Education began to be known by more and more people in Julie's hometown, ZhuHai City, which is close to Macau.

As Julie's efforts were more widely recognised, she was invited as a speaker in the Second International Montessori Conference of China, held by CMS (Chinese Montessori Association) in Shanghai, 2007. At the same time, they knew about MWEI (Australia) from Julie and hoped that



they would send an experienced Montessori teacher to attend the Conference. Beth, the former Director and Consultant for MWEI (Australia) was invited to attend the conference as a Montessori expert.

Beth gave a major presentation on "Montessori's Three Languages", as well as participating in panel discussions and making a speech at the Conference Dinner. Her speeches impressed everyone so much and had a great reaction in conference. For this reason, Beth and her husband Roger were invited again to the Fourth International Montessori Conference of China by CMS as the Keynote Speaker in 2009, at GuangZhou. Beth's presentations were "Montessori Education is Peace Education", "Montessori Culture" and "Montessori Language". Julie's speech topic was "How a Montessori teacher's internal growth happens". During the conference, Julie accompanied her mentor Beth and worked as her translator. After the conference, Julie invited Beth and Roger to ZhuHai City to visit Happy Heart Montessori House to have meetings with the teachers and parents. Beth spent one afternoon giving Montessori training to the teachers in the classroom. The next day a great speech "Montessori, the best choice for your Children" was held in the "2000 Years Hotel", and there were nearly 300 listeners, including parents, teachers, and directors. Since that time Julie has maintained a close friendship with Beth and continually receives encouragement and help from her.

With the Montessori Parent Salon of Happy Heart becoming more widely known and needed by more and more people, Julie could see how an adult's learning can help the family, so that they can then help their child! The parents could use the Montessori ideas and ways to prepare the environment of the children at home, as they realised that the family was so important for the early growth and development!

In 2011, Julie stopped working in the children's classroom and focused on the Montessori training workshop for the parents and teachers. Each workshop programme would last half a year, so that the trainee could practise their learning at home, while they needed to read more Montessori books and to write their observation notes on their children. Finally, after testing, they could get the qualified certification which was authorized by CMS (China Montessori Society). Julie had run three workshops from 2011-2012, while she also ran her workroom of Sandplay Therapy which was for special mental needs.

In January of 2013, Julie's family moved back to Australia and now live in Brisbane. Julie has always said, "Meeting MWEI (Australia) and starting my Montessori learning was the great turning point in my life; I not only use Montessori education to help my children but also to help so many families. I value my experience very much, so thanks to Montessori and all who helped me!"

# Afterword

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The challenge ahead in this 21st Century, is to “keep the light burning”. As Dr Montessori said, “Our care of the child should be governed, not by the desire ‘to make him learn things’, but by the endeavour always to keep burning within him that light which is called intelligence.”

“Education should no longer be mostly imparting of knowledge, but must take a new path, seeking the release of human potentialities....” - Maria Montessori, (1994, 2007) Education for a New World (published in English 1946) Oxford Clío Press.

Not only do we continue to improve our Montessori teacher training, but we must also influence the public education system in Australia and further afield. I believe that this can only be done with high quality teacher training; we need to concentrate on providing and nurturing inspired teachers and teaching, which will result in better quality learning and developing children’s full potential.

We have to inspire people to want Montessori education. We know that “IT WORKS”!

“The mismatch between the models underlying our traditional system of education and the nature of children is at the root of the problem.” – Angeline Stoll Lillard (2005) Montessori – the Science Behind the Genius, Oxford University Press

“Education doesn’t need to be reformed – it needs to be transformed. The key to this transformation is not to standardise education but to personalise it, to build achievement on discovering the individual talents of each child, to put students in an environment where they want to learn and where they can naturally discover their true passions... The most powerful method of improving education is

to invest in the improvement of teaching... The present education system can be compared to the mechanical standardized fast-food model, and needs to be radically transformed in the 21st Century to the “Michelin” restaurant model - cultivating the real depth and dynamism of individual human abilities of every sort.”

- Ken Robinson (2009) The Element – How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything. New York Penguin

Herein lies the future... to go back to the roots, and fully understand Montessori’s philosophy. Only then can its principles and practices be demonstrated in our own conduct, and in our love and respect for children, educating them to bring about a peaceful view world. Our enthusiasm for Montessori must be inspirational and contagious, and produce changes to teacher training, parenting and community responsibility, so that all children can benefit.

I pray that MWEI will build on the past, and continue to be a leader in the field, showing the way ahead in the 21st Century.

“Be Inspired”!

**Beth Alcorn 2013**





Montessori Institute Symposium 2013

"The training of the teacher who is to help life, is something far more than the learning of ideas. It includes the training of character; it is a preparation of the spirit."

— Maria Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*.

## Holistic Education for Educators



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