

THE FLOURISH PROJECT

Montessori, Ecology and the Pedagogy of Love



The education of even a very small child, therefore, does not aim at preparing him for school, but for life. —Maria Montessori (1948)

*"Sustainable development has the ultimate potential of offering an holistic, transdisciplinary and transformative perspective that can support agencies in the integration of early childhood and family services. A resonance between the concerns of the SDGs and children's wellbeing is immediately apparent as soon as they are brought together. This should not surprise us too much as this emphasis on the child, the natural environment, and the local and global concerns for humanity can be seen in many of the pioneers of early childhood services, and perhaps especially in the work and writings of Friedrich Frobel, Robert Owen, and Maria Montessori."*¹ John Siraj-Blatchford AND Lynnette Brock, 1987

We are currently living in strange and fascinating times, where change is happening at a rate perhaps never before experienced in human history. This, of course, brings with it huge challenges, but it also presents us with huge possibilities related to our shared ability to choose the future that we all really want, rather than the one that might be predictable.

One of the key aspects of this phase is a raised human awareness of how we are all interconnected and how the things that go in one part of the world directly influence other parts. We are also becoming more aware of how our own values, mindsets and internal states have been profoundly influenced by the environments that we have uniquely experienced, and how these states then impact on others. According to the 2019 World Peace Index², the global economic impact of violence was \$14.1 trillion PPP in 2018, equivalent to 11.2 per cent of global GDP or \$1,853 per person. There are deep social structures at play that are constantly shaping the emergent patterns of the future, currently with three major divides - spiritual, social and ecological.³

To become more aware, we therefore need to explore both the inner and outer aspects of human societies i.e.

Understanding the world from 'Inside-out' – how our own backgrounds, experiences, values, thoughts and emotions influence our behaviour and activities

And 'outside-in' – how the external pressures and expectations of the systems that we live within (i.e., families, communities, political and religious systems and cultures) influence our thoughts, emotions, values and behaviours.

The Flourish Model promotes an understanding of the Ecological Self and is implemented as a holistic framework that shows the intimate relationship between self, others and the natural world. As a whole-systems model, the framework enables the mapping of all seventeen of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from the perspective of child developmental wellbeing.

The Pedagogy of Love

Maria Montessori's work is currently returning to the foreground as remarkably relevant to the issues that the modern world is now facing. Much of her thinking around early human development has now been endorsed by the new Science of Early Childhood⁴ and her cosmic perspective is being recognised as highly consistent with the latest thinking on spirituality, ecology and sustainability.^{5 6}

One of the key aspects that Maria Montessori highlighted was the primary importance of the energy of love

*"Love is more than the electricity which lightens our darkness, more than the etheric waves that transmit our voices across space, more than any of the energies that man has discovered and learned to use. Of all things love is the most potent."*⁷ - Montessori, The Absorbent Mind

"All that men can do with their discoveries depends on the conscience of him who uses them. But this energy of love is given us so that each shall have it in himself". (Ibid)

*"Whenever we touch the child, we touch love. It is a difficult love to define; we all feel it, but no one can describe its roots, or evaluate the immense consequences which flow from it, or gather up its potency for union between men. Despite our differences of race, religion, and of social position, we have felt, during our discussions of the child, a fraternal union growing up between us... Love, like that which we feel for the child, must exist potentially between man and man, because human unity does exist and there is no unity without love."*⁸ - Montessori, The Secret of Childhood

"It is indeed a form of love that gives them the faculty of observing in such an intense and meticulous manner the things in their environment that we, grown cold, pass by unseeing. Is it not a characteristic of love, that sensibility that enables a child to see what others do not see? That collects details that others do not perceive, and appreciates special qualities, which are, as it were, hidden, and which only love can discover? It is because the child's intelligence assimilates by loving, and not just indifferently, that he can see the invisible. This active, ardent, meticulous, constant absorption in love is characteristic of children." (Ibid)

Through revealing the interconnected nature of human development, evolution, behaviour and sustainability, the Flourish Model strongly endorses Montessori's understanding of the relational foundations of human capacities and potential and how these promote and optimise sustainable wellbeing. It also endorses the understanding that the spiritual essence of the child emerges through the lifeforce of generative creativity that is expressed as deep concentration or 'flow', and shows that, if young children are provided with optimal environments, they will naturally exhibit a tendency towards cooperation and a joyful exuberance for life.

Most global wellbeing frameworks currently focus on measuring and improving the specific individual outcomes and outputs of their interventions, whereas the Flourish Model is currently unique, in that it also explores the assets and inputs of the whole system i.e. what has *shaped* people's values, beliefs and mindsets, the promotion of self-awareness, identifying a person's own

physical, emotional, mental and spiritual assets, identifying and isolating deficits and liabilities and stimulating thoughts, conversations and learning about what makes a good and meaningful life. It introduces the essential, and currently almost universally neglected, element of 'developing well' to the current global discussions on wellbeing and promotes the understanding that we are all shaped by our genetic inheritance and the worlds that we experience as children, but that underneath this we share a common humanity, underpinned by the spiritual energy of love.

Planetary Wellbeing (Living Well Sustainably)

Societal Wellbeing (Living Well Together)

Community Wellbeing (Living Well Locally)

Personal Wellbeing (Living Well)

[FLOURISH PROJECT : Early Wellbeing \(Developing Well\)](#)

The Child as the Centre

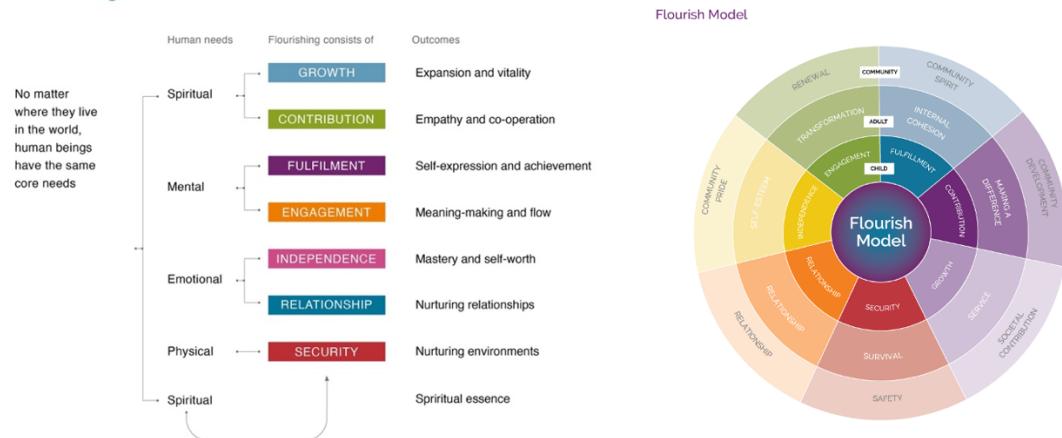
The model puts the child firmly at the centre of the system and further expands Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, that recognised child development as a complex system of relationships affected by multiple aspects of the surrounding environment, from immediate settings of family and school to broader social, cultural and political influences.⁹ To optimise children's wellbeing and development, we must always appreciate the complex web of relationships that are shaping their emergent values, beliefs and worldviews.

"Times have changed, and science has made great progress, and so has our work; but our principles have only been confirmed, and along with them our conviction that mankind can hope for a solution to its problems, among which the most urgent are those of peace and unity, only by turning its attention and energies to the discovery of the child and to the development of the great potentialities of the human personality in the course of its formation." - Montessori - From the foreword to "The Discovery of the Child", Poona 1948

In accordance with the work of Abraham Maslow, which was then further developed by the contemporary thinker Richard Barrett¹⁰, the model suggests that there are seven core aspects to human flourishing that reflect the dynamics of natural systems and that need to be fully acknowledged and incorporated for us to be supported in becoming the 'best version of our selves'. These are the energetic drivers of human motivations and development that invite us to actively engage with our environments and they are then further shaped and defined by the unique experiences that we all have as individuals.

They reflect our physical, emotional, mental and spiritual needs as human beings and include: security, relationship, independence, engagement, fulfilment, contribution and ongoing growth.

Flourishing consists of...



Depending on our unique environmental experiences, they then become the dispositions, beliefs, values and mindsets that create our individual maps of the worlds.



The Spiritual Essence of Childhood

Spiritual development has now been recognised as a core element of children's lives within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1991)¹¹, and there is increasing global interest in understanding and exploring spiritual development in child and youth care research and practice, that respects the cultural and social diversity of both religious and nonreligious settings and the lifespan developmental processes of children. Examples of global activity in this area currently include the US-based 'Collaborative for Spirituality in Education' the UK Spirituality in Education Alliance (SIEUK) and the International Association for Children's Spirituality (IACS).

What has emerged from current research studies is global recognition of the importance of spirituality, but confusion about what the term actually means.^{12 13} Historically, spirituality has a strong association with religion. However, there has been an increasing recognition that a wider view is now appropriate, and that spirituality is related to the big, existential questions related to identity, meaning and purpose, which can be explored within or outside a framework of religious faith.¹⁴ Increasingly, therefore, 'spiritual development' is being recognised as a dynamic unfolding process, rather than a set of defined practices related to a specific belief system.

*Spirituality is increasingly understood as an innate human evolutionary process, that pre-exists cultural or religious differences, that stems from a unified reality and that is grounded in connection and love. ^{15 16} As such, it exists throughout the lifespan, both coming from and returning to, an essential unity, and is an essential element for human flourishing"*¹⁷ - Wendy Ellyatt, 2021

There is also agreement that the modern world currently lacks an appropriate language for talking about deep experiences and our inner lives, and that this lack of 'spiritual literacy' is inhibiting children's ability to share both wonder and awe and their lived experiences.¹⁸ The individual process of making sense of our worlds and making meaning of experience is essential to human wellbeing and involves the balanced integration of our inner and outer lives.

Montessori suggested that human beings developed through two successive embryonic stages – the first (physical embryo) in the prenatal period from conception to birth and the second during the period from birth to around three years. She called this second stage 'the spiritual embryo' and regarded it as the most significant phase in the life of the child, as it was during this stage that the child's natural capacities and adaptive potentialities (nebulae) could be optimised, with love as the core energetic driving force. She also understood the primary importance of family as the main influence during this embryonic period of development, for it was through the family that the child would absorb the social and cultural values and worldviews that would shape him as an adult "...not just a man, but a man of his race."¹⁹

*"The child has a different relation to his environment from ours... the child absorbs it. The things he sees are not just remembered; they form part of his soul. He incarnates in himself all in the world about him that his eyes see, and his ears hear."*²⁰ Montessori - *The Absorbent Mind*

She proposed that the physical embryo contained hereditary potentials (genes); whereas the spiritual embryo contained adaptive potentialities (nebulae) that would spontaneously adapt and develop in response to the cultural environments in which children are born. Through this adaptative process, accrued out through the absorbent mind, the potentialities would develop into the behavioural characteristics of that culture. *"Just as hormones act as inner influences on physical growth, so the nebulae, the absorbent mind and the sensitive periods direct the growth and development of the spiritual embryo."*²¹

"There is in the child a special kind of sensitivity which leads him to absorb everything about him, and it is this work of observing and absorbing that alone enables him to adapt himself to life. He does it in virtue of an unconscious power that exists in childhood....The first period of the child's life is one of adaptation. It is the child's special adaptability that makes the land into which he is born the only one in which he will ever want to live." – Montessori - *The Absorbent Mind*

*"Growth and psychic development are therefore guided by: the absorbent mind, the nebulae and the sensitive periods with their respective mechanisms. It is these that are hereditary and characteristic of the human species. But the promise they hold can only be fulfilled through free experience in the environment".*²² – Montessori - *The Absorbent Mind*

“The first formative years of the child are of exceptional importance in the formation and evolution. They embody a nucleus of energies and capacities that must be assisted to develop wholesomely, for if they deviate, the consequences are irreparable.” - Montessori, The San Remo Lectures, 1949

Montessori understood that the states of deep concentration and ‘Flow’ that were later explored by the American psychologist Mihalyi Czikzenmihalyi²³, were actually manifestations of the child’s natural life energies seeking wholeness and integration and she emphasised the importance of adults not interfering with this process.

*“The input, throughput and output processes of living systems are always trying to achieve a state of energetic homeostasis or optimal functioning. They spontaneously include the emergence of new forms of order at points of instability. Generative creativity is therefore the underlying nature of life, learning and evolution. Continuing learning, adaptation and development are key characteristics of the behaviour of all living systems, as we try to optimise our own development within the context of the larger system. This spontaneous emergence of new order at critical points of instability, which is nowadays often referred to just as “emergence,” is the key characteristic of dynamic self-organization, and is in fact one of the hallmarks of life. It has been recognized as the underlying dynamic of development, of learning, and of evolution. In other words, creativity — the generation of new forms of order — is a key property of all living systems. Nature always reaches out into new territory to create novelty.”*²⁴ - Fritof Capra, 2018

What Montessori saw, and that was later endorsed by modern researchers²⁵, was that within the Flow state the achievement of goals is no longer a priority. Rather, the freedom from having to focus on any specific end result allows the individual to escape the confines of boredom or anxiety and to fully enjoy the experience for itself. The experience itself becomes immensely fulfilling, but this does not necessarily equate with simple pleasure, for many flow activities are, to all intents and purposes, immensely complex, time-consuming and even frustrating. It is all about finding the energetic balance between environmental challenge and personal capacities and each individual responds to this in his or her unique way. It is about the full expression of the human spirit.

An Ecology of Wellbeing

Through her ‘Cosmic Education’, Montessori sought to tell the story of the interconnectedness of all things. She described the role of education as comprehensive, holistic and purposeful – “to encompass the development of the whole person within the context of the universe” and introduced the possibility that humanity might have a “cosmic task”, to “better the world for future generations.”²⁶

Children’s lives are embedded within the larger systems of family, community and culture and their values and views are shaped by the worlds of others.

In her 2013 NAMTA article, Camillo Grazzini talks of the Montessori vision of the having a cosmic dimension because it is ‘all-inclusive’.

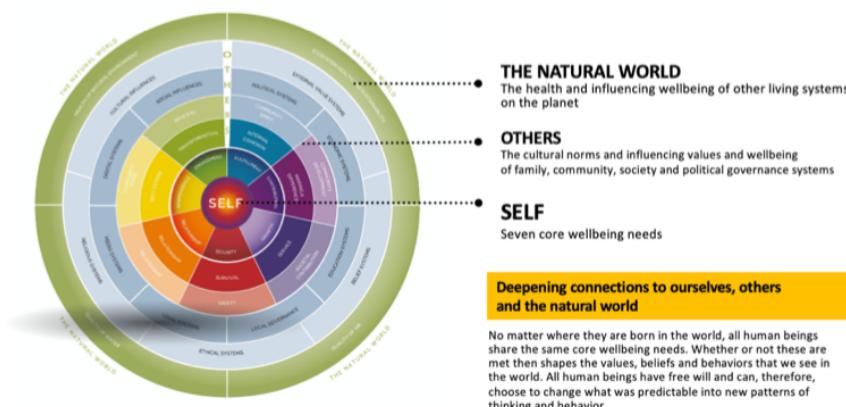
“Montessori looks at the world, sees the world on a very grand scale, that is, at the level of the universe with all of its interrelationships. There is the inorganic world which is ecologically linked in

innumerable ways with the biosphere which, in turn, is linked with human beings or the psychosphere...Montessori's vision is also cosmic because she looks at the whole of humanity throughout time: she sees human beings as being guided by finality from the time of their appearance; she sees humanity as both adult and child; she sees the individual both in his unity or oneness and in his developmental differences during the diverse stages or "seasons of life..."

*It is this vision of an indivisible unity made up of energy, of sky, of rocks, of water, of life, of humans as adults and humans as children, that lends a sense of the cosmic to Montessori's thinking."*²⁷

The Flourish Model confirms Montessori's call for an eco-systemic approach, that sees the world as dynamically interrelated and that seeks to understand the interaction between any individual system and its embedding environment. Through revealing the interconnected nature of human development, evolution, behaviour and sustainability, the child is recognised as always embedded within the triple framework of Self, Others and the Natural World.

The Ecological Self



"We shall walk together on this path of life, for all things are a part of the universe, and are connected with each other to form one whole unity. This idea helps the mind of the child to become fixed, to stop wandering in an aimless quest for knowledge. He is satisfied, having found the universal centre of himself with all things." - Maria Montessori, To Educate the Human Potential

"One thing still evades the intelligence of humanity and that is the consciousness of their terrestrial destiny and the fact that the whole of humanity is so intimately united that it forms but one organized energy"- Maria Montessori, 1949.

Grazzini explores the fact that, back in 1937, Montessori was already exploring the bonds of interdependence and solidarity between all the peoples of the world.

"Sixty-five years ago, when the League of Nations was still in existence and the United Nations still lay in the future, Maria Montessori had widened the limited concept of a "nation" (meaning, for example, "an ethnic unity conscious of its cultural distinctness and autonomy") and extended it to embrace the whole of humanity. Ethnic unity, then, is determined by all of Earth's human inhabit

ants belonging equally to the human species and, as for the different human groups.

Montessori says “A single interest unites them and causes them to function as a single living organism. No phenomenon can affect one human group without affecting others as a consequence”... To put it a better way, the interest of any one group is the interest of all... Universal union, she says, already exists, and therefore all that is needed is that we should become aware of this reality and “replace the idea of the necessity of bringing about union among men, by the recognition of the real and profound existence of these bonds of interdependence and social solidarity among the peoples of the whole world...”

Each agent, great and small, has its own mandate or mission to carry out. This constitutes its own particular function in the cosmic plan, its specific cosmic task that has to be carried out uninterruptedly and unceasingly. However, the possibility of doing this depends also on the work of other agents. In other words, there is a cosmic organization of work which necessarily involves specialization or division of labor, a collaboration amongst all the workers or agents, and therefore innumerable relationships of interdependency.”

Early Childhood and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The Earth is our common home and creating a sustainable world for our children and for future generations is our common task

The concept of sustainability, that has become so relevant to a world now faced with global pandemics and climate change, involves us meeting the resource needs of the present without compromising the needs of future generations. As Peter Hawken says in his book 'Blessed Unrest' "*Fundamentally, it is about stabilizing and harmonizing the relationship between earth's two most complex systems: human culture and the living world.*"²⁸

*"A sustainable society must be designed in such a way that its ways of life, businesses, economy, physical structures, technologies do not interfere with nature's inherent ability to sustain life"*²⁹ - Capra & Luisi, 2014

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is increasingly being recognised as an essential element in quality education for the twenty-first century, and, through its primary role in the shaping of positive values and worldviews, early years development is being acknowledged as fundamental to this process.

*"In this context of a beautiful and yet broken world, the early years teacher has a vital and exciting role to play in helping to prepare young citizens for caring and compassionate roles in society; equipping them to participate in creating more sustainable futures. Consequently, a growing body of work is helping to highlight the importance of sustainability education and the leading role early years practitioners can play in this area of educational reform (Davis and Elliott, 2014; Siraj-Blatchford et al, 2010)."*³⁰³¹

In their 2015 Early Education Journal article, Warwick and Warwick put love at the forefront of this process:

"We would argue that early years education has a vital role to play in laying the foundations for this educational reform agenda. The radical proposal that ESD makes is that in the twenty-first century a

new pedagogy of love is required, where children embark upon the journey of critically and creatively reading their worlds. This is in order to develop the intellectual awareness, caring dispositions and compassionate relationships that enable them to construct new futures, which support life flourishing in all its diverse forms. It represents an approach to the EYFS that places an active concern for the common good at the very centre of the purpose of education.

This radical agenda of innovation requires that educators receive significant training and support, and early years practitioners are able to draw from organisations such as Sustainability and Environmental Education (SEEd) specifically set up for this task (www.se-ed.co.uk/edu/). But we would also wish to argue that early years practitioners already have much to offer the field of ESD, due to their familiarity with and expertise in the creative, interdisciplinary and student-centred pedagogies. ESD promotes as apt for engaging learners of all ages. Therefore, practitioners in the early years have a vital role to play as agents of change for sustainability in education today.”³²(Warwick and Warwick, 2015)

In his own article ‘*Wellbeing and Sustainable Development: The legacy of Maria Montessori*’³³John Siraj-Blatchford showed that, in 1949, Montessori was already arguing that the role of education should no longer be limited to furthering the progress of material civilisation, which she considered might, even at that time ‘become too highly developed’ - Montessori (1949, p100).

“Schools do not prepare young people for social life but rather for earning a living. They train young people for a trade or a profession. And all of them exercise their trade or practise their profession like slaves. This really means that we replace true social life with a degrading caricature of it. We cannot keep a society that is threatening to fall to pieces intact with men whose only training is in a trade that will earn them a living. We need whole men” - Montessori, 1949, p109

Our principal concern must be to educate humanity the human beings of all nations—in order to guide it toward seeking common goals. We must turn back and make the child our principal concern. The efforts of science must be concentrated on [the child], because he is the source of and the key to the riddles of humanity. The child is richly endowed with powers, sensitivities, and constructive instincts that as yet have neither been recognized nor put to use. In order to develop, he needs much broader opportunities than he has been offered thus far. Might not this goal be reached by changing the entire structure of education? - Montessori, 1948

“The trees that purify the air, the herbs that capture vitamins from sunlight, the coral that filters the sea, which teems with countless creatures that would die if there were no such forms of life to keep the water pure, the animals that populate the earth are unconscious of their cosmic mission, but without them the harmony of creation would not exist, and life would cease.” - Montessori, 1949, footnote p117

He goes on to propose that sustainable development has the ultimate potential of offering an holistic, transdisciplinary and transformative perspective that can support agencies in the integration of early childhood and family services. A resonance between the concerns of the SDGs and children's wellbeing is immediately apparent as soon as they are brought together.

“Even in the early 1900s Montessori believed that humanity had become seduced by the technology it had created and that the challenges of over consumption and possessiveness were of equal importance to the environmental problems that we face:

“Each person is set apart from every other by his own private interests; everyone wants only some sort of work that will satisfy his material needs; everyone is attracted by and trapped in the

interlocking gears of a mechanised and bureaucratic world. It is obvious that mechanisms alone cannot make man progress, for progress depends on man. And eventually a time must come when humanity assumes control of progress and gives it direction. That Time has come. Either mankind as a whole will organise and master the mechanical world, or the mechanical world will destroy humanity" (Montessori, 1949, xii)

Montessori also rejected the idea that life could be understood simply in terms of adaptation and a struggle for survival against an often hostile environment. She argued that such a view ignored the complex nature of ecological interdependence and the ways in which the survival of every species is ultimately dependent upon the survival of others. She aligned herself with biologists who; 'consider life to be intimately related to the existence of the earth as a whole', and argued that:

"Living creatures create a universal balance. Animals and plants are not forms of life that are separate from their environment and merely adapt to it mechanically. One might say that life is the force that creates the world" (Montessori, 1949, p94).

She aimed to create a; "universal syllabus that can unite the mind and consciousness of all men in one harmony" (Montessori, 1979, p111).

And argued that we need to develop a "society consciously aware of its destiny" and a new form of morality that has the overall aim of promoting harmony and balance, and a society that recognises that: "...any act that hinders the establishment of a genuine community of all mankind must be regarded as immoral and a threat to the life of society". (Montessori, 1979, pxiii)

In her 2009 Montessori Life article³⁴, Ann Sutton then says:

"Montessori education is uniquely suited to address this need because it is a whole-systems, ecological approach; Montessori is a philosophy as well as a method, a key distinguishing factor from traditional educational approaches. In Montessori education, there is one overriding set of principles, guiding all particulars: curriculum, teacher preparation, discipline, diverse student populations, and research. The processes and curriculum content in a Montessori school are rooted, defined, and described in the Montessori philosophy, are: To nurture the whole child to realize his/her full potential in a safe and prepared environment that meets his/her developmental needs, to partner with parents, and to promote respect of self, others, and the environment."

and quoted McDonough and Braungart's important question:

Why try to optimize the wrong system? We don't simply need to be "less bad." We need to start over in the way we look at things. What about designs that love all the children, of all species, for all time? (McDonough & Braungart, 2002, p. 142)

A Peaceful World

"All people and institutions, including commerce, government, schools, churches, and cities need to learn from life and reimagine the world from the bottom up, based on the principles of justice and the relationship among all living things- (Hawken, 2007, p. 189

"Peace is a goal that can be attained only through common accord, and the means to achieve this unity for peace are twofold: first, an immediate effort to resolve conflicts without recourse to

violence – in other words, to prevent war – and second, a long-term effort to establish a lasting peace amongst men. Preventing conflicts is the work of politicians; establishing peace is the work of education. We must convince the world of the need for a universal, collective effort to build the foundation for peace” - Montessori, Education and Peace p 24

World events in the past two years have resulted in an unprecedented global debate into the sustainability of our world. Climate change, pandemics and wars are no longer remote activities that only seems to happen to others. Instead, media coverage tells us the human stories that lie behind any action, and it is no longer possible for governments and peoples to disassociate themselves from the human cost of any conflict. When faced with anguished people and families we all resonate with the pain that they are feeling and the barriers and boundaries between people dissolve into mutual human empathy.

It is this empathetic understanding that Montessori believed was a natural state of childhood and one which was constantly threatened by the demands of society and culture. She felt that by freeing children from the constraints of race and culture they would demonstrate their natural harmony:

“In education we are now concerned not so much with science as with the interests of the human race and culture, which has only one nation – the world”

Montessori - Discovery of the Child p9

Montessori was nominated three times for the Nobel Peace prize, in 1949, 1950 and 1951. These nominations followed her writings and lectures that increasingly tackled social issues that she considered were the results of inappropriate educational systems.

‘Establishing a lasting peace is the work of education; all politics can do is to keep us out of war’
Montessori, (Education and Peace, p viii

In 1932 she discussed the problem of peace at the International Office of Education in Geneva, which was at that time the European centre of the peace movement. Throughout the 1930s she lectured throughout Europe. Her speeches challenged social, political, scientific, religious and educational thinking of the time. Her passionate belief in the possibilities of restructuring society united universities, organizations, associations and individuals in countries around the world who ultimately proposed her as a candidate for the Prize. She was visiting India when World War II broke out and it was while she was interned in Adyar for the following six years that she further developed her ideas on peace studies:

“Constructive education for peace must not be limited to the teaching in schools. It is a task that calls for the efforts of all mankind. It must aim to reform humanity so as to permit the inner development of human personality and to develop a more conscious vision of the mission of mankind and the present conditions of social life. These aims must be achieved not only because man is almost totally unaware of his own nature, but also because for the most part he does not understand the workings of the social mechanisms on which he has interests and his immediate salvation depend” -
Montessori- Education and Peace, p 24

In a 1950 lecture, she said:

“Every human group has a form of its own. Now we find that these groups have a tendency to unite; not because the individual members have grown to love each other—for how can one love such a

huge number of people that one does not even know but because obviously the next step in evolution is the unity of mankind. In the psychosphere there should now only be one civilization".³⁵

And Camillo Grazzini reflects:

"Sixty-five years ago, when the League of Nations was still in existence and the United Nations still lay in the future, Maria Montessori had widened the limited concept of a "nation" (meaning, for example, "an ethnic unity conscious of its cultural distinctness and autonomy") and extended it to embrace the whole of humanity. Ethnic unity, then, is determined by all of Earth's human inhabitants belonging equally to the human species and, as for the different human groups, Montessori says: "A single interest unites them and causes them to function as a single living organism. No phenomenon can affect one human group without affecting others as a consequence. To put it a better way, the interest of any one group is the interest of all."³⁶

For Montessori, therefore, children were the main hope for peace in the world and the role of education was to provide environments that would free children to develop their full empathetic potential. If met with sensitive understanding the 'spiritual embryo' within each child could be allowed to unfold naturally, gently moving for a place of profound self-awareness to one increasingly connected with others in mutual harmony. Many Montessori schools, therefore, incorporate and promote the concept of peace education within their curriculum.

"The child is capable of developing and giving us tangible proof of the possibility of a better humanity. He has shown us the true process of construction of the human being. We have seen children totally change as they acquire a love for things and as their sense of order, discipline, and self-control develops within them.... The child is both a hope and a promise for mankind."

Montessori, Education and Peace

"Do we believe and constantly insist that cooperation among the peoples of the world is necessary in order to bring about peace? If so, what is needed first of all is collaboration with children.... All our efforts will come to nothing until we remedy the great injustice done the child, and remedy it by cooperating with him. If we are among the men of good will who yearn for peace, we must lay the foundation for peace ourselves, by working for the social world of the child."

Montessori, International Montessori Congress, 1937

"Education should not limit itself to seeking new methods for a mostly arid transmission of knowledge: its aim must be to give the necessary aid to human development.... If 'the formation of man' becomes the basis of education, then the coordination of all schools from infancy to maturity, from nursery to university, arises as a first necessity: for man is a unity, an individuality that passes through interdependent phases of development. Each preceding phase prepares the one that follows, forms its base, nurtures the energies that urge towards the succeeding period of life."

Montessori, From Childhood to Adolescence, p. 84

"We then become witnesses to the development of the human soul; the emergence of the New Man, who will no longer be the victim of events but, thanks to his clarity of vision, will become able to direct and to mould the future of mankind."

Montessori, The Absorbent Mind, p. 8

Summary

What the Flourish Model brings to the current global discussions of flourishing, and particularly to the resurging interest in the work of Dr Maria Montessori, is a multi-disciplinary and evidence-based framework showing that human beings do not live in isolation from the natural world and that there is an ecological self that is always shaping, and being shaped by, the wider system. In this respect, there is always a triple aspect to human wellbeing and the model suggests that it is this disconnect between how we experience our separate 'selves' and the larger system that is the root cause of human suffering and dysfunction. It also reinforces the understanding that wellbeing is a fluid and dynamic state that includes the need for personal agency and that is grounded in connection and love.

The model fully endorses Montessori's belief that the child lies at the centre of the system and that it is only by understanding and optimising the early shaping of values, beliefs and worldviews that we can move towards the creation of a more compassionate and sustainable world. It shows that the same core principles can be applied to any human system, that there is a natural evolutionary intelligence that is always trying to bring us into integration and wholeness, and that the spirit of the child is the source of the emergent, generative creativity that we need to flourish as a species, in touch with ourselves, each other and this beautiful planet that we live on.

Personal note from the author



Writing this paper has reminded me just how profoundly Maria Montessori's words affected me twenty years ago. She was the first person that I had heard talking about young children as strong, competent and powerful citizens of the world. She also, nearly a hundred years ago, had recognised the importance of ecological-thinking, and was proposing that traditional education systems were inhibiting young children's capacities and potential and interfering with the organic and generative processes of life itself. Her thinking is now achieving multi-disciplinary endorsement, as we seek global solutions for the survival of our One Human Family. At essence she was a courageous and visionary futurist, and I am delighted that the Flourish Project is now able to support the ongoing work of the global Montessori community.

Wendy Ellyatt. August 2021

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