



## A CONVERSATION WITH JAYDE DAVIES, MONTESSORI EARLY YEARS EDUCATOR AND RESEARCHER ON HER CAREER PATH, RESEARCH AND LEARNING JOURNEY

**1. Montessori Global Education: Jayde here tell us a little about your journey – where you started; where you are and where you see yourself going.**

Jayde Davies: My Montessori journey started in 2009/2010. I was looking for a school for my eldest child. I spoke to one of my friends about the school I chose, and her sister was a teacher and she said, "This is a Montessori school". And I said, well, what's Montessori? And she said to me that it's a type of education and spoke to me a little bit about Montessori. And out of curiosity, I got a book about it, and I started learning about the Montessori approach. At the time, my child had special educational needs and in his nursery setting, he was labelled as a 'challenging child'. When I read this book, it was all about following the child and observing the child and treating the child as an individual. I really started to understand his behavior and the things that he was doing and supported him in his own journey. I feel like this not only helped him with his behavior within school, he also just really flourished child.

One of the main things that I got from reading this book and implementing the Montessori approach within my parenting was the connection that I then had with my child. He is now off to university in September and we're still really close. And I do put this down to being a Montessori parent, following the child and not comparing him to others within his nursery or school or social surroundings.

I also have three other children, and they've all been brought up with the Montessori approach and are all just amazing children. When I was pregnant with my fourth child, I decided that I wanted to get into education.

**2. MGE: You describe yourself as a passionate and dedicated educator, a deep believer in the Montessori approach; you started in Primary education then you established your own child-care setting; you recently graduated from Leeds Beckett University with a bachelor's Degree in Montessori Education, you are currently a master's Degree student, working as a STAR Accreditation Assessor – what are your reflections on your career journey so far?**

When I decided that I wanted into education, in 2015, I was working within my local primary school in year 2 and then I worked my way down to reception class. I really loved working with children, but I felt that having a Montessori approach within this school would really benefit the children. It was just a small village school, and they said to me that I can implement some different things within the reception class of that school.

I started doing things like practical life skills, preparing the environment a little bit differently, but it was very difficult when I was a teaching assistant to be able to implement things that maybe others didn't want within their classroom. And then it made me think: "maybe I'll become a Montessori teacher". So, I started my Montessori bachelor's Degree. I learned so much while I was doing this degree and I've really enjoyed it. I did the accelerated degree at Leeds Beckett University and when I was coming to the end of it, I thought to myself, I don't actually think I want to be a teacher.

I think I want to make changes: the Montessori approach can bring so much to children around the country, around the world. I want to be somebody that can help influence this within the education system. Therefore, decided to do my master's Degree and I started in September 2023. It was really interesting because even though it was a Montessori course, we had lots of speakers from other educational backgrounds, and it really opened up my eyes to lots of things that I didn't actually know.

I thought the education system is so vast and I feel like I've only just scratched the surface. I've decided in September that I'm going to do a PhD because I feel like my learning journey hasn't actually finished.

### **3. Why did you decide to further your studies? What sparked your interest in research and what motivates you in pursuing this particular path?**

When I look back, I feel like I've done a lot, but I still have so much more that I want to learn, so much more that I want to do, and I feel really excited for what's to come next.

I did my dissertation on "The slow movement in education", inspired by Alison Clark. This idea came from when it was the pandemic, and I was teaching my children from home. Obviously, we didn't have all the time restrictions and, one of my children who really struggled academically since she started school, she was doing so well – a lot of things that she really struggled with, it was just coming to her easily. When I reflected on it, I realised it was because there was no pressure on her. She was allowed to slow down, she was allowed to take things at her own pace, and she was really flourishing from it. This obviously comes from the Montessori approach as well. Following the child, letting children learn at their own rate and having that child autonomy, really supports the child.

I did my dissertation on "The slow movement in education", and I was fortunate that Dr Nathan Archer asked me if I wanted it to be published in the Montessori working papers now. I was so excited that something that I had done was going to be available to other people to be able to read.

Since this is a topic that is close to my heart, this is something that I don't want to stop researching. This was a really good opportunity to see what people thought and which directions I can take my research into next.

### **4. MGE: You have recently presented your research work at OMEP's European Conference in Kristianstad, Sweden. Could you perhaps provide a little insight on this most recent piece? What is the focus of this paper?**

In April 2024, I was able to travel to Sweden to attend the OMEP European conference, which was such an amazing opportunity. I did a research study to be able to present at this conference, and the study that I did was "The voice of the child in early childhood education for sustainable citizenship". I looked at the awards scheme that OMEP does in early years education, and I looked at the ways that it facilitated child's voice within that award scheme and the ways that partnerships with parents and the nursery supported this child's voice.

This is also another topic that's really close to my heart. Through the rights of the child, I feel like their voice should be valued and heard, which is in Articles 12 and 13 of the United Nations Conventions of The Rights of The Child and this is something that I feel like every child should know. Every child should know that their voice is valued. It needs to be heard; it needs to be respected. I am doing my dissertation this year on tools and frameworks that help support children's voice within early years education, which I feel there's a bit of a gap in the research field. We do talk about children's voice, but not so much in early years education.

**5. MGE: Going back to furthering your studies and the continuing professional development – how does this impact your career, from day-to-day activities to mid and long-term planning? Why is this important? What would your message be to others in the sector regarding CPD?**

I have spoken quite a lot about my career and my journey so far, and I would say to other people: if you want to further your education, obviously doing CPDs is a good way of getting an understanding of a topic that you're interested in. When I first started working in the primary school, I did quite a few CPD courses, and these were on my own expense. They weren't compulsory within the school. When I was in reception class, and I was asked to work with children with special educational needs, so I decided that the first thing I needed to do is study special educational needs, so I did of course on that. And then the following year, a child that was completely nonverbal joined, and I was really keen to know the best way to support this child, so the courses that I did then were speech and language and Makaton, again at my own expense.

However, if you want to study, there's so much support out there. My autistic training course, I actually did it with a university and it was a free course, this was something I did as a CPD course for free. Also, I was really fortunate when I did my degree, that I was awarded a scholarship. There are lots of avenues to be able to support you with further education.

**6. How did it feel to return to assessing and engage in fresh endeavors?**

Recently, especially within the last, let's say 6 to 8 months, I have started lots of new endeavors and one of them was starting to work as a STAR Assessor.

After I had worked in the nursery for a little while, I decided that I would like to become an assessor and assess Montessori nurseries and schools. I thought that this would be good for my professional path, as it would allow me to see into lots of different Montessori settings and how to help other settings. I also asked myself how that would help me within my professional development and my learning journey.

**7. MGE: You've also highlighted the value of role modelling and being given opportunities. How does the Montessori pedagogy and philosophy underpin this? What is the role of leadership in this context today?**

I feel like in the Montessori setting, anything that I've ever done, I've had massive support, so it's been nice for people to be able to guide me through what to do and how to do it. With research, I've also had some amazing role models and lots of support, and this has been really helpful within my journey; starting something that is new, and that was in the beginning quite challenging to do.

The way that I feel this links to leadership and to the Montessori approach is in three different ways: valuing the individual, teachers being guides, and the prepared environment. These are three things that as an adult, I have been supported with in a Montessori philosophy way.

I feel like when I first got into research, I was speaking with people that were doctors and professors in education and they really treated me as an individual, saw that I was seeing things through a different lens and I was never made to feel that I had to be a certain way, or I had to do a certain thing, it was: "what would I like to do" and "how can they best support me?" With the role model being like a guide within Montessori setting, I was really supported. The help was there when I needed the help, but my hand wasn't held. I was shown how things are done and then I was able to make my own decisions about how I wanted to do it and I was really guided within my decision making in a positive way that still gave me autonomy. The prepared environment was definitely the conference. The environment was prepared in a way that just really allowed me to learn and to develop and grow.

**8. Finally, do you have a message you want to spread across our network?**

My message to the Montessori Global Education Network out there is just give it a go. Put yourself out there, go on a conference website, look at sending out a proposal. There are so many blogs and web pages where you can submit around 750 words, which is hardly any words, but it can be a starting for you to get your name out there.

There are so many different options and it is literally just putting yourself out there and having faith that what you've got to say, people want to hear.

I would also like to support other students that want to further their education or would like to get into research or and presenting their research - I am on LinkedIn, so if anyone wanted to reach out and to discuss further, I'm more than happy to help support other students or practitioners or anyone where they feel like I could help them within their journey.