

THE VIEW



Thoughts and reflections from Preeti Patel, Director of Education and Community Montessori Global Education

On the 1st of October 1946, Maria Montessori in her lectures said,

“

If education is to prepare man and for the present and the immediate future, he will need a new orientation.....”

Maria Montessori, The 1946 Lectures, pg. 93.

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Nearly 80 years on, I wonder if we are any closer to that new orientation.

The reason I question this is simple – I am sure that like me whenever you read the news, articles, switch on the Television or carry out a search on the internet you hear about how rapidly change is happening, how many of today's jobs will soon be automated and won't exist, how many of the jobs for the future do not exist as yet but that our education needs to be future focussed so that the children of today are prepared for the world of tomorrow.

Educationalists have recognised and talked about future focussed education for many decades. Some perhaps used different words – “orientation” in the case of Maria Montessori but realistically little has changed in our educational systems.

For me the quote from an American development psychologist, Howard Gardner encapsulates our current educational system.

“

The biggest mistake of past centuries in teaching has been to treat all children as if they were variants of the same individual and thus to feel justified in teaching them all the same subjects in the same ways.

Howard Gardner–Phi Delta Kappan–March, 1994 – pg. 564

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This was really amplified when we recently met with some of the young ambassadors who are part of **hundrED**'s Youth Advisory Board. Montessori Global Education and **hundrED** recently partnered in a Spotlight to gain deeper insight into impactful and scalable innovations in the area of child-centred learning. The Spotlight drew over 200 submissions from 53 countries and these young people have been reviewing some of the 38 shortlisted innovations submitted for this Spotlight.

Whilst we only spoke to a representative group of the Youth Advisory Board, colleagues and I were deeply impressed with their engagement and their passion relating to their advocacy to education BUT not in its current guise.

Though they all shared varied accounts of their educational experiences and journeys; they were united in expressing that our current educational models are not "dynamic or flexible". Based in different countries round the world – Kenya, Peru, Bangladesh and Peru, the four young ambassadors were all asked, "Do you feel that your school fully understands the value and impact of child-centred learning?". The responses were varied – "some understanding but fail in implementation" to "no do not fully comprehend".

Today access to information/knowledge has become altogether easier with the advancement of the internet. Our children (and us) can find information on any topic with a few clicks on their/our phones or laptops, so they no longer need or desire an educational experience where acquiring knowledge is still all about delivered wisdom, with its standardised tests and indoor teaching.

Sadly this "mistake" – delivered wisdom – is still the norm in our schooling systems and instead we should be supporting user generated wisdom, which will place child centred learning at its heart. User generated wisdom places the learner at the heart of their learning experience – there is active participation in content generation, deep engagement with the material leading to better understanding and retention rather than passive consumption of information delivered by the educator; collaborative learning processes with peers build a shared sense of community whilst the sharing of unique viewpoints and experiences leads to better understanding of the subject matter all with a supportive and flexible learning environment.



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Whilst the young people we spoke to recognise the value and importance of academic learning their desire to have something more dynamic and flexible was palpable. The desire to be future ready – **their future** – with the skills that they will need simply cannot be left to chance. We need to give agency to these young people; we need to really listen to what they need and ensure that their learning is not simply about content knowledge.



The recognition that we cannot keep perpetuating the one size fits all model of education needs to be at the forefront of every discussion/conversation about education. We need to embrace innovative strategies and solutions that support and promote inclusion, differentiation and quality learning experiences for **every** child.

Though there are many individual educators who are already embracing child/learner centred learning models this change cannot happen in isolation or on the shoulders of a few. To make this move a more collaborative process/model needs to be embraced. Moving away from the conservation teaching model that we all recognise – teach in the way we have been teaching for decades – using the hierarchical model where the learner is the recipient and the educator is font of all knowledge; teach what we have taught for decades (I don't think content/texts have changed much since I was at school), educate children in batches of age – with no consideration to their interests, passions or capacities; assess using standardised testing of knowledge – which generally test rote learning etc we need to embrace a more collaborative and co-created future. The learners' passions, interests and capacities not only being at the centre of the learning process but also at the centre of the assessment model in a way that fosters engagement, collaboration and develops talents and skills that their future demands.

As educators, parents, policymakers other stakeholders we must recognise that there is work to be done and this work need to be done **NOW!**. There are many educators and schools that are ready for the change that is required however they are restricted by bureaucratic systems and prescriptive delivery and subject matters – this is where the change need to start. The focus needs to shift to a more integrated, collaborative and holistic model of engagement and delivery – **YES, this will mean change.**



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Change is difficult to achieve or implement in isolation and without understanding so it is absolutely vital that the focus of every educator is the development of better practice NOT individually but collectively and collaboratively. Creating a culture of collaboration and networks of innovation come from professional development that lead to better practice is a great starting point.

The future of education is about innovative partnerships, practice and engagement. Let us stop educating learners for our past and let's start preparing them for their future. Let us start feeling uncomfortable because we simply need to get out of our comfort zones as these do not support our children and our future needs. We can no longer be complacent, hope for the best or leave it to chance – we need to take action.

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The real purpose of education is to prepare the orientation for future generations, who will progress to a new plane. pg 93, The 1946 Lectures

Maria Montessori, Montessori Speaks to Parents, pg. 30.

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We would love to hear from you:

Do you agree that change is required? What change do you envision? How would you like to part of this change?

Share you thoughts: [**connect@montessori.org.uk**](mailto:connect@montessori.org.uk)



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