

Montessori Work Helps Elderly with Dementia: Montessori principles can help us achieve our potential at the beginning and towards the end of our life journey

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Not too long ago some friends' parents were diagnosed with Alzheimer's. And I was recently preparing a presentation on "Montessori Education-Positive Parenting-Adlerian Psychology", so I started thinking that Montessori work could be very useful for the elderly (my daughter attends a Montessori School). And the more I thought about it, the more sense it made as Montessori work increases fine motor skills, builds self-esteem in the individual with its no-fail methods and emphasis on repetition, fosters concentration and independent work, among others.

Some of the Montessori principles are:

- Learning occurs in a cooperative atmosphere marked by social interaction and peer teaching.
- A primary goal of Montessori education is to foster competent, responsible, adaptive citizens who are lifelong learners and problem solvers.
- Learning takes place through the senses. Students learn by manipulating material and interacting with others. These meaningful experiences are precursors to the abstract understanding of ideas.
- The individual is considered as a whole. The physical, emotional, social, aesthetic, spiritual, and cognitive needs and interests are inseparable and equally important.
- Respect and caring attitudes for oneself, others, the environment, and all life are necessary.

So I did a search to see whether there were any studies on this, and I came across many articles featuring Karen and Tom Brenner's - www.creativecarealternatives.com work with persons with dementia and Alzheimer's using genuine Montessori materials and principles, as well as Dr. Cameron Camp's and others' research on Montessori based approach and applications in various nursing homes across the USA with visible, immediate, positive results.

"For an older person who is experiencing memory loss, either from stroke, illness or Alzheimer's disease, the use of the Montessori Method can help preserve many skills while also stimulating the mind (...) Persons with dementia may seem to be detached both physically and emotionally from their environment and the people in it. Helping older people reconnect with their environment is an important part of the Montessori approach to activities for older people. Without this sort of reconnection, people with dementia may become frustrated and agitated, even belligerent." (Montessori and Dementia: A New Vision by Tom and Karen Brenner <http://tinyurl.com/alooq> from Montessori International Magazine, July - September, 2005, p.38-41)

One article says of this approach "So simple, It's genius" - and actually it is the same with Adlerian positive parenting: these approaches are quite similar in that they aim at

encouraging the person to feel and be part of society and to become independent and self-confident as the person's need to belong and to contribute are very important.

"The philosophy of the Montessori method is to create persons who are as independent as possible, able to make choices, while being treated with respect and dignity. It assumes that persons want to be independent, show the abilities they have, and learn new ones; so it offers meaningful activities in environments designed to accommodate their needs. The method works with adults who have mental and physical impairments and builds upon the older adult's remaining abilities.(...) As the aging population and the prevalence of dementia increase, facilities serving older adults need to provide improved quality programming to maintain or enhance the quality of life for these individuals. Montessori-based activity programs can serve to fill this growing need. Such programs not only provide meaningful activities but also enhance recognition and memory, as well as a sense of completion and success for dementia participants." (Janina C. Bognar, MS)

This is how we should all be treated if and when the day comes - with dignity, respect and fun!. How wonderful that a person's spirit can still be encouraged to shine through these diseases. Montessori principles can indeed help us achieve our potential at the beginning and towards the end of our life journey.

As families find themselves caring for their own parents/grandparents with various forms of dementia, Alzheimer's they may be too stressed to be able to provide a joyful, healthy environment for their own children. However, a Montessori-based approach to caring for the elderly has been proven to enable much better inter-generational interactions. Definitely a win-win situation.

I sure hope this creative, respectful, common sense approach will be included at The White House Conference on Aging <http://www.whcoa.gov> that will be held December 11-14, 2005 in Washington, DC. "The Conference "occurs once a decade to make aging policy recommendations to the President and Congress, and to assist the public and private sectors in promoting dignity, health, independence and economic security of current and future generations of older persons."

I wonder why this Conference on Aging is held just once a decade, considering the average human life span...

I submitted this comment on the US Administration on Aging www.AOA.gov (as a search for 'Montessori' yielded 0 results):

"I was rather disappointed and surprised not to find any information about Montessori based activities and the Elderly, especially Elderly with Dementia on your web site. I was sure I would find something here: Promising Practices - 39 AoA Funded Grant Projects. I'd like to draw your attention to these conclusions:

“Studies have shown that Montessori-based activities, which focus on developing an individual's unique abilities, are effective in increasing engagement between nursing home residents with dementia and their caregivers.” (from

<http://www.clinicaltrials.gov/ct/gui/show/NCT00079651>),
and,

"(The Montessori) method focuses on an individual's personal strengths, preferences, and abilities to increase a person's participation in facility activities and/or personal self-care, improving their independence and self-esteem. The programming has increased the residents' participation in activities and gets high marks in staff satisfaction. (from <http://www.asaging.org/>)"

Here are some very interesting and useful resources on Montessori Approach to Caring for the Elderly with Alzheimer's/Dementia I've compiled from the Internet:

1.

Dr. Cameron Camp's publications: <http://www.myersresearch.org/manuals.html>

- A Different Visit: Activities for Caregivers and their Loved Ones with Memory Impairments by Adena Joltin, Cameron J. Camp, Beverly H. Noble, Vincent M. Antenucci

- Montessori-Based Activities for Persons with Dementia, Vol. 1

by Cameron Camp Ph.D., Cameron J. Camp Ph.D. (Vol. 2 scheduled for release in November 2005)

Dr. Cameron's radio shows can be heard here: <http://www.myersresearch.org/media.html>

2.

Lost & Found - By Barbara Basler, September 2005 - from <http://www.aarp.org>

Link to article: <http://tinyurl.com/8ojxm>

3.

One can download free exercises (PDF Format) to be used with the elderly, from the AARP web site: <http://www.aarp.org/bulletin/longterm/alzheimer.html>

• Treasure Hunt <http://tinyurl.com/8s7cz>

• Face Puzzle <http://tinyurl.com/a5a4c>

• Food Drive <http://tinyurl.com/duac8>

• The Birth of the Chocolate Chip Cookie <http://tinyurl.com/dqmxm>

• Tool Match <http://tinyurl.com/bjnqq>

4.

Unlocking What Remains, Activities for Dementia Care - Observing Montessori-Based Principles in Action at an Alzheimer's Unit - from Nursing Homes Magazine, Feb, 2005 by Linda Zinn

Link to article: <http://tinyurl.com/7evab>

5.

Articles and Activity Ideas from www.caregiving.com Caregiving 101

Link to articles: <http://tinyurl.com/8fb43>

a. Can Art Help Alzheimer's? by Denise M. Brown

b. A Montessori Intervention by Tom and Karen Brenner *

c. Fitness Training for the Mind by Tom and Karen Brenner

d. Reading as a Memory Tool by Tom and Karen Brenner

e. Spiritual Engagement - Montessori Activities by Tom and Karen Brenner

* Karen Brenner, with 30+ years experience as a Montessori teacher, and her husband Tom, a gerontologist, give seminars on the application of genuine Montessori methods for persons with dementia. They may be contacted at Bren04@aol.com
www.creativecarealternatives.com

6.

Montessori Philosophy Enhances Quality Of Life For Persons With Dementia

Link to article: <http://tinyurl.com/atxfj> from www.kahsa.org/ Focus, Vol 6, Issue 4, 4th Quarter 2004.

7.

Montessori-Based Activities for Dementia: A Walk Down Memory Lane

Link to article: <http://tinyurl.com/ce2gt> from <http://www.vcu.edu>

Vol.18, No. 4, Fall 2003 - by Janina C. Bogner, M.S., a Geriatric Care Manager at JFS in Richmond, Virginia jbogner@jfsrichmond.org

8.

Students Help Alzheimer's Residents Retain Skills and Memories By Kathryn Podolsky

Link to article <http://tinyurl.com/8s4kd> from <http://www.cohpa.ucf.edu/>

9.

"Research to Practice" articles from <http://www.k-state.edu/>

- Montessori Techniques Piloted in Special Care Units

Link to article: <http://tinyurl.com/94zqg>

- Activities for Residents with Dementia Using Montessori Techniques

Link to article: <http://tinyurl.com/bmf2n>

Aysegul Acar-Dreyer