

Part VIII

Researcher Assumptions: Defining Creativity and its Purposes

Three “Montessori” researchers, Angeline Lillard, Jacqueline Cossentino (and Katie Brown), and Kevin Rathunde offer contrasting discussions seeking to clarify Montessori research and why it is important. The researcher’s perspective is geared to scientific analysis for Montessori audiences and for those outside Montessori needing objective validation through documentation of the creative process inside Montessori.

Lillard explores Montessori on its own terms using a variety of research to define creativity qualitatively and quantitatively. For parents of Montessori students this information is valuable because it validates their choice of a school. Lillard cites three studies on using children’s drawings as a measure of creativity wherein ‘Montessori children’s drawings were rated as less creative’. Refreshingly, Dr Lillard points out that drawing creative pictures is not a paramount goal in Montessori schools, which instead emphasize giving ‘children the keys to understanding the world’. She enlarges the definition of creativity to include, in addition to the aesthetic sense, problem solving and divergent, open-ended challenges in which ‘Montessori children performed better than the other groups’. Lillard concludes with research on executive functions.

Cossentino and Brown’s study, which is in its early phases, is sponsored by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and carried out by the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector (NCMPS). The project is collecting data internationally to examine ‘educational interventions that promote creativity’ and assessment goals are targeted in an international context. It is noteworthy that Montessori schools are included. In the context of this study, creativity is understood to be a ‘habit of mind’ that can be identified, described and measured involving invention, problem solving, and adaptation. The present longitudinal project hopes to demonstrate the high Impact of Montessori on academic, economic, and social outcomes and how various educational interventions promote the growth of creativity.

Kevin Rathunde maintains that the success of those creating “optimal” learning environments is more likely when adults working with children understand flow as a result of experiencing it in their own lives. This perspective is consistent with Montessori’s views on normalization and deep concentration of the child.

David Kahn