



# Oregon Deafblind Project



## Building Effective Programs

Lyn Ayer, Ph.D., Grant Project Director • December 2016



Hello everyone — almost that time of year. And wow — there is actually snow on the ground as I write this. I even made a snowball to be sure I wasn't seeing things!

Be safe — and See you in 2017!

Lyn



### CONTENTS

Director's Greeting	1
Article: Old, But Gold: Gifts from the Past	2
Facebook share	6
Holiday Greetings	7
Oregon Deafblind Workgroup	8
Oregon Deafblind Project info	8

"Try to be a rainbow in someone's cloud."  
Maya Angelou

## OLD, BUT GOLD: GIFTS FROM THE PAST

I often think of the fact that we “throw the baby out with the bathwater” when it comes to great educators and what they taught us. We concentrate so hard on what is new, “researched”, or exciting, or what we think “required” – and forget that what we need is “what works”. Also, even though we don’t look closely enough at this, much of the “new” information is not all “new”, and is information from an older source that has been tweaked or added to – like repackaged gifts! So, from time to time, I look back at past educators for their wisdom.



is

This article is not a thesis on Maria Montessori, but reflections on some aspects of what she taught the world – and, of course, how we might and do apply some of this information to a child who is deafblind. Even though this has been long disproved, we sometimes automatically look at a baby and think this little being knows very little, that this little mind is a blank slate. This assumption, when applied to children who are deafblind, is multiplied many times over – most often, to their detriment.

So this article is part book-review, and part reflection. The book I have been reading is titled ***The Absorbent Mind***. You can download a 1949 archive copy from the following site – and donate a few \$\$ to support the persons who make this available: <https://archive.org/details/absorbentmind031961mbp> . The book is based on a series of lectures delivered many years ago in India – and the book itself was first published in 1949. Newer editions, including ones published in the U.S., are also available. For example, Barnes and Noble has a copy for \$13.99: <http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/absorbent-mind-maria-montessori/1001888891> and so do Amazon and other sellers. I hope that you will download, buy or borrow a copy to peruse! Remember that what I can give you here is only a very few thoughts from a store of valuable information this great educator had to offer. So – here are a few selected thoughts:

- ◆ Dr. Montessori believed that every child is born with an “inner teacher”, one that is “painstaking” in the process of animating a child. She says, “...it is as if nature has safeguarded each child from the influence of adult reasoning” so that the child has an opportunity to build himself up from inwards out.
  - The question is – do we give each child the opportunities he/she needs so that they can allow their “inner teacher” to work? We have to build those opportunities every chance we get so we can have the child’s inner teacher provide direction. We may also have to create situations which provide these opportunities to the child. It does not matter if the child is deafblind or deafblind with other severe disabilities/challenges. We must assume that ALL children have this inner teacher – and that it is our job to seek it out.
  - It is the underlying premise of Lilli Nielsen’s philosophy of Active Learning. She encourages us to provide the opportunities and then not intervene or attempt to teach –but allow the child to learn from his own experiences. If there is any intervention, it is gentle and unobtrusive so as not to interrupt the child’s inner teacher.
  - And then there is our field’s mantra of “Take your lead from the child”. As Sr. Bernadette Wynne once said at one of her training sessions – we have to learn to provide the opportunity, and then put our hands in our pockets and step back – and let the child learn. A child who is using this inner directed teacher does not need a squad of cheer leaders. They would only be a distraction.
  - “The box of deafblindness” in the Open Hands Open Access (OHOA) modules is another view of this same idea. (e.g., see module 2). Go to <https://nationaldb.org/> to find the modules.

- ◆ Education is a “natural process which develops spontaneously in a human being” and not what a teacher (or others) “do” to a child. When we allow this “natural” process to unfold, we do not have to look for motivators or external factors to entice a child to learn.



- For our children who are deafblind, this is intrinsic to why we say “Do with, not to or for”. OHOA module 11 has a whole section on ideas and techniques to use. In order to do this, and knowing that many of children need to use touch to learn, we practice what we call “hand UNDER hand” – a technique where the child is still directing the activity and we are only a conduit.
- We also do not need to look for external “rewards” since intrinsic learning is the reward in itself. When we create a list of “likes and dislikes” or “preferences and aversions”, we are referring to a child’s inner direction as to what feels good and what does not. This is why, when we make use of what we have learned from the child (about himself/herself), that we find success in providing a “reward” or a situation that is “preferred”. We did not create the reward or preference. The child does this, based on his inner directed teacher.

- ◆ Language, Montessori says, “is an instrument of collective thought”. It is a wall “which encloses a human company and separates it from all others”.
  - This may sound “restrictive” and “separatist”, but we all need a way to communicate with people around us in order to feel secure. We all need this sense of community. In order to be a part of this community, we need to learn to communicate in a way that will allow us to understand the community, and for them to know what we mean. For many of our children who are deafblind and have additional challenges, we teach them to use alternatives to symbolic language of spoken English or ASL – e.g., concrete symbols, photographs and pictures, modified signs/gestures. However, even those “alternatives” fit into our more sophisticated language system of spoken English and/or ASL. They almost one-to-one match the concepts of our sophisticated systems. This is why these alternatives may not be easy or sensible to transfer to another culture – such as that found in our projects in the Pacific Islands or Alaska (Thank you Mellanie and Michelle and your teams for your work on this!).
  - Nor can we bring children from another country into the US and expect them to fit in. I experienced this first hand with a 2-year old girl whose parents thought she should be registered with us as “deafblind”. She was adopted from a very different culture and language group. She made no eye-contact with anyone or anything, and barely responded to anything said, no matter how kind and gentle the voice. It took her more than a year, and a lot of parental patience to get her to feel included and secure in this new community, with a new language and habits. I cannot begin to imagine what a strong inner teacher this child must have had to finally allow her to make eye contact with her parents without the fear of offending them; and to begin to speak English. It turned out she was neither deaf, nor visually impaired, but a smart toddler who just needed time to redirect herself, with wonderful parents who provided the opportunities – and love – needed to achieve this.
  - Language, says Montessori, is not given to us by nature but is “superimposed on nature, an intelligent product of the mass mind”. She notes that even “illiterate” people who have never really received any schooling, learn their language. Also, there is continuity from one generation to the next. A mother does not “teach” her language to her child. If the mother and child lack a strong bond, this transfer will not happen. This is also reflected in trainings for persons who become interveners for our children who are deafblind. The child’s inner teacher must want and need to reach out to grab the mode of communication that is most meaningful. And the mother and/or intervener should be ready to present the opportunity that will ensure this will actually happen. Even though the modes of communication are external, the child who is given the opportunity, will search and find what is most meaningful and appropriate.

- ◆ Language production is complex and has many written as well as unwritten “laws”. It is produced by a symphony of mechanics and neurological connections that are specific to the “mother tongue”. Think about it -- Young children do not get tired learning their mother tongue. Think of how exhausting it can be for an adult trying to absorb a new language. We struggle with a foreign language because we try to use the mechanics of our mother tongue – and this does not work so well for most of us.



- SO –it is critical that opportunities be presented from the start, and not somewhere en route when someone thinks it might be a good idea. This will ensure that he/she develops the communications as a “mother tongue” rather than a superimposed new language.
  - Keep in mind that the unrolling of communication for each of us has a beginning somewhere and it continues to change and expand as time goes by – and does not stop until we die. Again, it would be good to develop this communication and language system by taking a lead from the child. For example, if we develop a set of concrete symbols for a child just because we think each symbol is appropriate or “cute”, we are probably going to struggle to use this. On the other hand, a child may hand us something – say, a shoelace – meaning “I want my shoes”. This will have strength of meaning because it came from the child. This is a good beginning. If you start with the shoelace, you could end up with the spoken word or the sign that matches.
  - We need to think of this as the beginning of a child’s mother-tongue – the only way in which it makes sense to the child. We usually don’t think of concrete symbols as part of a child’s mother tongue – but just as a route to get there. I think perhaps we need to. If we think more closely, even if a child learns to sign “shoes” over time, that shoelace will also always be “shoes” to him as well. I believe part of the problem is that we think concrete symbols are “less than” words or signs. It is also the reason why we often want to move “forward” faster than we should! Remember, this is the child’s mother-tongue – and it may not be the same as yours, nor does it have to be.
- ◆ Dr. Montessori sees movement as the phenomenon which puts us in relationship with our surroundings...with both non-living and living – or people. She says, “Without its help a man could have no contact with his surroundings or his fellows.” It helps to give our lives PURPOSE. It helps us to allow our powers and gifts (which are internal to each of us) to be “circulated” so that others can enjoy them. She cautions that movement is often thought of in isolation, by itself, as “something apart from higher functions”, but that it should be thought of as continuous with mental processes.
  - It is critical that our children who are deafblind, particularly those who are bed- or wheelchair-bound have movement incorporated into their learning. Reaching out to touch or feel something, tracing by following someone’s fingers tracing on the other side of a glass pane, grabbing, pushing – all of these have consequences in the brain that actually teach the child something.
  - Children in wheelchairs are moved around – often without cuing them as to what the movement means, where they are going, whom they might see at that location. I love watching wheelchair dancing and often go to YouTube to remind myself how important and how joyful movement can be. Here are a few simple examples of this. What do you think the person in the wheelchair as well as the partner(s) learned?
  - <https://video.search.yahoo.com/yhs/search?fr=yhs-mozilla-002&hsimp=yhs-002&hspart=mozilla&p=wheelchair+dancing#id=2&vid=2338fc0efea6ec91189388d5d408c56a&action=click>
  - And what about this one from Britain’s Got Talent: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m2BjOa6ducg&feature=player\\_embedded](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m2BjOa6ducg&feature=player_embedded)

- Our bodies – in association with our minds – can produce so much information for us, and information that will help us share our own experiences. Think of all that movement concepts bring to each of us: How we are a complex mixture of opposing forces – ones that are needed to balance or feel comfortable; What various movements “feel” like and how our body’s parts coordinate for this; How movement affects space, and space affects us; How this is affected by the shape, size, construction of the space; How movement helps us connect with other persons; and so we can go on and on. We have to be creative to give these experiences to children who are deafblind, but especially those who are less mobile than others.
- I cannot express this better than this powerful statement -- Dr. Montessori says: “Immobility is impossible. The world would become chaotic if all movement stopped, or even if living things moved about aimlessly, without the guidance of that useful end which all creatures have assigned to them.”

Some of the other lectures/chapters in this book that I found interesting:

- ⇒ Intelligence and the Hand
- ⇒ Development and Imitation
- ⇒ Further Elaboration Through Culture and Imagination
- ⇒ Social Development
- ⇒ Cohesion in the Social Unit
- ⇒ Mistakes and Their Correction
- ⇒ The Three Levels of Obedience
- ⇒ Discipline and the Teacher





## FACEBOOK SHARE



- ◆ Have you participated in the Active Learning Study Group webinars? If not -- you can still view past webinars and participate in upcoming ones: <http://www.pathstoliteracy.org/active-learning-study-group-...>:
- ◆ Coming in 2017 from Perkins -- five week online course on Augmentative-Alternative Communication Strategies for Students with Visual Impairments and Additional Disabilities: <http://www.pathstoliteracy.org/augmentative-alternative-com...>
- ◆ This research article makes me think of some of our kids who are DB who become good at video games.....They learn to follow what they need to follow - despite the speed! I know I couldn't keep up with them! Read info on the research: <http://www.pathstoliteracy.org/study-shows-brain-training-v...>
- ◆ I'm thinking that not just children who are visually impaired/blind/ Deafblind would appreciate this -- too cool! <http://www.pathstoliteracy.org/st.../homework-manipulative-box>

### It's the "season"!

- ◆ Use a brailier -- make some decorations! <http://www.pathstoliteracy.org/.../braille-christmas-tree-and...>
- ◆ From Paths to Literacy -- 12 days of literacy: <http://www.pathstoliteracy.org/bl.../12-days-literacy-holidays>
- ◆ Check out WonderBaby's page -- Lots of fascinating information-- including seasonal stuff!! <http://www.wonderbaby.org/>
- ◆ Thank you, Susie (NY DB project) for this link to info on toys for this festive season: <http://bit.ly/2glrgZ4>
- ◆ Looking for gifts for kids? Take a look at Leap-Frog Learn and Groove Musical Mat. I saw this on Amazon: [https://www.amazon.com/.../ref=s9\\_acsd\\_bw\\_wf\\_e\\_HTLWTFAc\\_cdi\\_2...](https://www.amazon.com/.../ref=s9_acsd_bw_wf_e_HTLWTFAc_cdi_2...)
- ◆ 'Tis the season to look for gifts! Here is info from Paths to Literacy: <http://www.pathstoliteracy.org/.../gift-ideas-kids-who-are-bl...>

- ◆ Parenting Special Needs talks about reducing holiday stress: <http://magazine.parentingspecialneeds.org/publication/...>
- ◆ From Paths to Literacy -- announcing the Early Years Symposium.... Speakers include pediatric ophthalmologists and a Vision Specialist (Ph.D.): <http://www.pathstoliteracy.org/early-years-symposium>

### Music, music:

- ◆ Need the music braille code? <http://www.brailleauthority.org/music/music.html>
- ◆ Announcing a conference Jan 17th 5-6 p.m. Pacific time on Music Braille code: <http://www.pathstoliteracy.org/conference-call-focusing-mus...>
- ◆ Some cool news for anyone who uses music braille: <http://www.pathstoliteracy.org/techno.../braille-music-notator>
- ◆ AER has a new division! Read more.....<https://aerbvi.org/.../divisi.../neurological-visual-impairment/>
- ◆ Learn UEB shortforms: <http://www.pathstoliteracy.org/.../apple-shortform-braille-fi...>
- ◆ Check your own braille flash cards with a Pen-Friend! <http://www.pathstoliteracy.org/.../using-penfriend-motivate-b...>
- ◆ Go bowling! Verrrry cool! <http://www.pathstoliteracy.org/stra.../bowling-experience-book>
- ◆ The CHARGE Association is getting ready for its conference next year -- in Orlando, FL. Here is a link to their newsletter: <http://www.chargesyndrome.org/.../CHARGE-Accounts-Fall-2016.p...>

### And something from our Parent Weekend:

- ◆ The Emergency Preparedness resources that we looked at during our annual Parent Weekend (2016) is now up on our website: <http://www.oregondb.org/Family/emergency.php>  
There is also a link from our project homepage.: <http://www.oregondb.org>



Year ends are beautiful  
Signal of a new beginning  
A new day  
A new year  
New plans  
Hopes  
Dreams

Old acquaintances are  
Remembered, not forgotten  
New friends bring cheer

Spirals  
Stars of silver and gold  
Colors  
Swoop like birds  
Over homes  
And trees  
Lighting up the dark

Warming up the chill

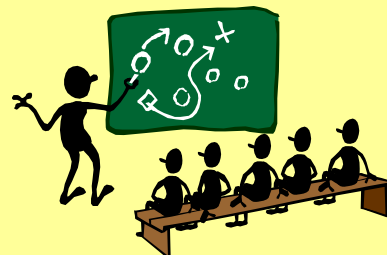
Winter can be lovely  
With the hope  
Of spring.

*Enjoy your time off,  
everyone!  
Lyn*



## THE OREGON DEAFBLIND WORK GROUP

<b>Malina Lindell:</b>	Region one, Eastern Oregon
<b>Jan Hearing:</b>	Region two, Central Oregon
<b>Lynette Kleespies:</b>	Region three, Southern Oregon
<b>Terry Cadigan:</b>	Region four, Cascade Regional
<b>Anne Olson-Murphy:</b>	Region five, Willamette Regional
<b>Darlene Daniels:</b>	Region six, Columbia Regional
<b>Trish Orr:</b>	Region seven, Lane Regional
<b>Claudia Martin:</b>	Region eight, Northwest Regional
<b>Sharla Jones:</b>	Oregon School for the Deaf/RMT representative
<b>Linda Brown:</b>	Oregon Department of Education
<b>Kathy Eckert-Mason:</b>	Department of Vocational Rehabilitation
<b>Sarah Mora:</b>	Oregon Commission for the Blind
<b>Linda McDowell:</b>	NCDB representative, The Research Institute at WOU
<b>Caitlin Shockley:</b>	FACT/PTI parent representative
<b>Lyn Ayer:</b>	Oregon Deafblind Project, The Research Institute at WOU



### WEB INFORMATION:

The Oregon Deafblind Project Website: [www.oregondb.org](http://www.oregondb.org)

The home page has our newsletters, both current and archived.

Also get frequent information from our Facebook page:

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Oregon-Deafblind-Project/132672043449117>

and our Pinterest page: [www.pinterest.com/lynbayer](http://www.pinterest.com/lynbayer)

We also have our newsletters and other information on our web-page with our partner organization, the Oregon Department of Education:

<http://www.ode.state.or.us/search/results/?id=185>



### Contact the Oregon Deafblind Project!

Lyn Ayer, Grant Project Director  
Oregon Deafblind Project  
Western Oregon University (TRI)  
345 N. Monmouth Ave  
Monmouth, OR 97361

[ayerl@wou.edu](mailto:ayerl@wou.edu)

(503) 838-8328



[www.oregondb.org](http://www.oregondb.org)





The opinions and policies expressed by this publication do not necessarily reflect those of The Research Institute at Western Oregon University or the U.S. Department of Education. You should therefore not assume endorsement of the content by either the Federal Government or The Research Institute at Western Oregon University.



The Oregon Deafblind Project is funded through grant award # H326T130008 OSEP CFDA 84.326T U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education OSEP Project Officer: Susan Weigert



Lyn Ayer, Oregon Deafblind Project  
Western Oregon University  
The Research Institute  
345 N. Monmouth Ave  
Monmouth, OR 97361  
TRI 199