



## **Beehive Montessori School Inc Response to The Australian Government Early Years Strategy Discussion Paper (Feb 2023)**

*“For many years we have been proclaiming that it is necessary to educate the child from the moment of birth. We have traced, through study and practical experience, the ideal path leading to the world of children, of these beings whose social status has as yet not been determined, whose rights have not been recognised and who nevertheless represent the men [sic] of tomorrow.”*

*Dr. Maria Montessori | The San Remo Lectures, 1949*

Dr Montessori recognised the importance of early education when she opened her first classroom, ‘La Casa dei Bambini’ or ‘Children’s House’ in 1906. Here she educated underprivileged children from the age of 2 and a half to 7 years old.

Montessori had a wide vision of the role of education, as a vehicle for societal change. She envisioned an education whereby children are nurtured towards independence in order that they may find their place in and contribute to a better world. Her original training in medicine meant that she viewed child development holistically, and in developing curriculum and appropriate learning environments for young children, incorporated their physiological and psychological, as well as intellectual needs.

The importance of early education is brought to the fore in the Australian Government Early Years Strategy Discussion Paper. Australia continues to struggle with issues such as the inaccessibility of childcare, staff shortages in this sector, and the quality of training for adults working with our youngest children. As discussed in the paper, there is also a disproportionate disadvantage for children in remote and low socio-economic areas.

*We believe that using Montessori pedagogy and methodologies to inform The Early Years Strategy would be an impactful way of helping our youngest generations.*

*"To aid life ... that is the basic task of the educator."*

*Dr Maria Montessori | The Absorbent Mind, 1949*

Montessori education is based on the premise that children have an innate ability to learn and that when supported by an appropriate environment and educator, they are guided through their developmental needs to reach their full potential.

There is now considerable research which points to the efficacy of the Montessori method of education, and the superior outcomes which it provides, especially in lifting children out of disadvantage.<sup>i ii</sup>

Dr Montessori's understanding of the developmental needs of children and the curriculum she created to meet these needs spans the ages 0 (birth) -18years. Of most interest to this submission belong in what Montessori called 'The first plane of development' or 0-6 yrs.

*"The first phase of the child's development goes from birth to, let us say, six years of age. At this stage the child is partly at home, partly in school. The plane of education should take both the situations into consideration."*

*Dr. Maria Montessori | Four Planes of Education*

### **Assistance to Infancy (0-3)**

The first three years of life are the most fundamental in the development of human beings and their potential. It is a period when the core of personality, social skills, and human values are developed. An understanding of the child's development allows Montessori environments to meet the needs of the infant and foster a sense of belonging, independence, and language acquisition enabling children to feel able and capable.

Montessori infant-toddler programmes from birth to 3, are provided in several different formats:

- Ante-natal: Classes for expectant mothers and their partners.
- Nido: Environments for children between the ages of approximately two and fourteen months specially designed for children who are not yet walking.

- Infant Communities: Environments provided for children from approximately fourteen months to three years that focus on developing movement, language, and independence within a social context.
- Parent/Caregiver and Toddler: Classes for parents/caregivers to learn with their child and gain an understanding of creating supportive environments for children of this age. The class focuses on how to observe the child and how to offer appropriate activities.

### **Casa dei Bambini/Children's House (3-6 years)**

Between the ages of 3 and 6, Maria Montessori called this environment 'Casa dei Bambini' (Children's House). Having created the foundations of their personality, three-year-old children arrive in the prepared environment ready to develop and perfect their abilities. They learn best through real-life activities that support independence and self-efficacy; manipulation of objects to provide concrete sensorial experience; and open-ended exploration leading to the refinement of their movements, sensory perceptions, language and the development of their intellect. All members of this expanded community of 3 to 6-year-olds thrive through opportunities to follow their own interest, freely choose their own activities, develop their capacity for concentration, and engage at their own pace their emerging powers of reason, imagination, and sociability.

Materials and activities are designed to support self-directed discovery and learning, or play based learning, and so are a perfect match for this developmental stage. They are organized around Practical Life activities that develop both independence and social skills; Sensorial activities that refine sensory perception; the development of Spoken Language, Writing and Reading skills; and Mathematical activities that develop fundamental mathematical concepts; as well as activities that reflect upon our human understanding of geography, history, biology, science, music, and the arts. The trained adult guides the children along this journey, helping them become well-adapted individuals, ready to take a positive, pro-social place in their world.

### **How could this be implemented?**

**Assistance to Infancy Community Hubs** - Provide wrap around services in a community hub, for expectant and new mothers, offering parenting workshops, playgroup opportunities with their children and a childcare option with 0-3 Montessori trained staff. Other professionals onsite could include midwives, health nurses, and psychologists/counsellors.

**Increased capacity in public primary schools to include 3 and 4 year olds** - Train early childhood educators in 3-6 Montessori and introducing multi age groupings into the traditional Kindy and Pre- primary classrooms. This would ensure younger students are under the care of highly trained adults, in a supportive and collaborative environment which meet their developmental needs, while taking pressure off the childcare sector.

## **Training, Capacity & Sustainability**

**High Fidelity training** - In recent years, the word 'Montessori' has been used by many, including the early learning and childcare sectors, sometimes to its detriment and misbranding, as low fidelity Montessori practices have become widespread. There is data to suggest that for schools to have maximum impact, maintaining high fidelity Montessori practices matters<sup>iii</sup>. The highest fidelity and most rigorous training programs are available through the international organisation, The [Association Montessori International \(AMI\)](#). AMI training centres worldwide run training courses in Assistance to Infancy (0-3) and Casa (3-6). These can be offered in a variety of different formats. Should there be the demand, the [Sydney Montessori Training Centre \(SMTC\)](#) which is affiliated with AMI undertake courses across the nation, wherever there is demand.

**Models already in action** - There is a branch of AMI - [Educatteur Sans Frontier](#) which encompasses a variety of outreach programs across the globe - including in remote indigenous communities in Australia and the Torres Strait <sup>iv</sup>, which have begun to implement Montessori pedagogy, and are working towards training local community members. Other global Montessori outreach programs have also been developed to reach children who are born in prisons<sup>v</sup> and for disadvantaged children in urban areas with ethnic and economic diversity<sup>vi</sup>.

The US, China and Thailand have recently opted for large scale roll - out of Montessori in the public schooling sector. Results from these schools are promising in their success.<sup>vii</sup> <sup>viii</sup> The United States now have a [National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector](#) . This organisation supports public schools in their transition towards authentic Montessori practice.

The Beehive Montessori School, in Mosman Park, Western Australia, is a well - established and high- fidelity Montessori School in Australia in the independent schooling sector, catering to children from 18 months to 15 years. As such, it is well placed to offer the knowledge and skills of our AMI trained Early Childhood

Educators for action research associated with this project and to act as a 'lighthouse' for developing Montessori programs in the public sector.

The Australian Government Early Years Strategy represents an opportunity for Australia to become leaders in Early Childhood Education, not only by increasing effectiveness of our current systems, but also by using our modern understanding of neuroscience and brain development to innovate in this vital and struggling sector. To adopt a strategy that utilises Montessori pedagogy and methodologies, and ensures its sustainability, would enable the vision of quality early years practice to become a reality.

#### End Notes

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<sup>i</sup> Montessori Preschool Elevates and Equalizes Child Outcomes: A Longitudinal Study <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01783/full>

<sup>ii</sup> Shunned and Admired: Montessori, Self-Determination, and a Case for Radical School Reform <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10648-019-09483-3>

<sup>iii</sup> Preschool children's development in classic Montessori, supplemented Montessori, and conventional programs. [https://www.unboundmedicine.com/medline/citation/22656079/Preschool\\_children's\\_development\\_in\\_classic\\_Montessori\\_supplemented\\_Montessori\\_and\\_conventional\\_programs](https://www.unboundmedicine.com/medline/citation/22656079/Preschool_children's_development_in_classic_Montessori_supplemented_Montessori_and_conventional_programs).

<sup>iv</sup> Indigenous Community Programmes Australia <https://montessori-esf.org/blog/update-indigenous-community-programmes-australia>

<sup>v</sup> Born Inside <https://montessori-esf.org/project/born-inside>

<sup>vi</sup> Family Star Montessori <https://montessori-esf.org/project/family-star-montessori>

<sup>vii</sup> Montessori Association Thailand <https://www.montessoriasso thailand.org/about-36483585363736563618362335853633361036263617363435883617.html>

<sup>viii</sup> A Public School Makes the Case for 'Montessori for All' <https://www.edutopia.org/article/public-school-makes-case-montessori-all>

