Montessori Wellness Session

MAT Conference, September 17, 2022

Barbara Murphy

Dear All,

Thanks again for attending my workshop at the MAT Conference this past Saturday. It was a great experience to present for you and I truly hope I could offer valuable information to apply in your daily Montessori practice.

Following your different requests for more information and resources, I am including below notes on each topic. Hope this helps!

**Materials:**

Here are some ideas. If possible try to get elements that are made of natural materials, as these are more enticing and aligned with Montessori principles.

1. **In the classroom** (all these can be placed in a basket or shelf to create a “Movement Corner” that can be used during the work cycle when the child needs a movement activity to re-center or for active breaks on rainy days):
* **Ball-and-Spoon** (Note: you can put this together by combining two baskets, some wool dryer balls and a wooden spoon. The idea is that the child needs to move the balls from one basket to the other by holding one at a time with the spoon. The baskets are to be positioned away from each other, at the distance and locations that your classroom allows)
* **Yoga cards/dice and a mat**(Note: the dice add engagement in that the child rolls the dice and then has to do the pose that comes on top!)
* **Wobble Board**(Note: this element allows for in-place balance exercises that, without taking up much space, provide a good work-out and have a built-in control of error in that the child needs to self-adjust their movements and posture so as to stay in equilibrium).
* **Hand Kites** (Note: with these students can work on eye-hand and bilateral coordination, by moving the hand kite in different directions, starting with one hand and then trying with both in tandem. The activity can also be a team one, where one child does a move with the kite that another has to mimic).

1. **Beyond the classroom** (e.g. gym or playground)
* **Jump Rope** (Note: jumping the rope helps practicing different skills, including rhythm and you can also add preparatory exercises where the child needs to rhythmically move the rope on the side with their arm before trying the more sophisticated task of jumping the rope).
* **Hula Hoops**(Note: these are very versatile elements that the child can either use as intended – i.e. for hula hooping – or as accessories for other activities, like the “Hula Caterpillar” exercise described below)
* **Stilts**(Note: this is a nice material to experience walking with the feet above the ground, thereby practicing coordination among other skills. Also, they incorporate control-of-error in that the child needs to adjust their posture and movements to be able to move around successfully on the stilts. You can use handheld cup stilts for younger children and the taller “stick” stilts for older and/or more physically skillful students).
* **Rocker/Crescent Board**(Note: this material offers a variety of exercise options – including variations by placing the board with the concave side up or down – for the practice of multiple skills like balance and coordination, and it also has a broad age range, often being suitable from 18 months all the way to adults and seniors!)

**Resources on P.E./Physical Literacy:**

Here are some resources where you can find information on physical education and physical literacy, including some ideas for activities. What you would be missing in these cases is the alignment with Montessori pedagogy, which is actually what has inspired my work! I am currently developing with a team of experts two online courses especially designed for Montessori educators on Montessori Movement and Physical Literacy that I hope to launch by early 2023. I will add your emails to the mailing list so that you can be notified when they are released, but if you are interested in staying tuned in general on news about Montessori training on movement and other wellness-related topics, please visit [www.montessoriwellness.com](http://www.montessoriwellness.com/) or follow @montessoriwellness on FB/IG/LinkedIn 

* Shape America ([shapeamerica.org](http://shapeamerica.org/))
* The National Association of Physical Literacy ([napl.org](http://napl.org/))
* Active for Life Canada ([activeforlife.com](http://activeforlife.com/))

**Toddlers:**

* On movement for toddlers, check out the work of **Emmi Pikler** (a Hungarian pediatrician who discussed movement for the young child). For more information, you can check the website of the organization Pikler USA: <https://pikler.org/> In the same line, there are related materials that some incorporate to their practice, like the “Pikler triangle” or the “Pikler cubes”.
* The **Body Awareness Lesson** I mentioned during the workshop is also a nice activity that you can do with toddlers. This lesson is organized as a mirror game, where the teacher, as a guide, goes through the different natural stages of physical development from birth until about age two, performing different foundational movements that the children mimic. In this line, the Educator will show how a baby initially lies on their back while touching their feet, and then starts to roll-over. At about 6-8 months, the baby starts to crawl, moving around on their hands and knees, and after their first birthday they begin to cruise and walk.
* **Dancing** is also a great alternative to incorporate movement in a toddler classroom!
* Creating a **balance path** with stepping stones, wooden logs (also yoga blocks can work!) and/or a low balance beam can also be a nice activity for toddlers to practice balance and coordination. In this line, the exercise “Crossing the river” adds an engaging story setting and connection with nature. The idea here is that the child needs to go from one end of the river to the other by stepping on the stones and logs and without touching the water (in this case the floor).

**Primary and Elementary:**

1. **Movement inside the classroom:** Please see above under “Materials” as I listed there activities you can include in a “Movement Corner” inside the classroom. Also, the “Body Awareness Lesson” I mentioned in the workshop, and recapped in the “Toddlers” section above can be engaging for children throughout Primary and Elementary!

1. **Community/Group/Team Building Activities:**

Here are a few ideas of activities to add to the ones I mentioned during my session at the MAT Conference:

* **Hula Caterpillar** – Start with a line/circle of children standing. Then the first child in line has to hold a Hula Hoop over their head and pull it down with one hand over their body, twisting and twirling to pass the whole body through the hoop without dropping it or falling. Also, the children have to hold hands and move the hoop from one child to the next without letting go the handshake.
* **Three-Legged Walk** –Using a 3-legged race band to tie their legs together, two children walk around together, coordinating their movements to successfully move without falling. To facilitate the synchronization, one child can speak-out directions. You can use a red band for this exercise and refer to the Red Thread legend I mentioned in the workshop! Also, to increase the challenge, you can add markers on the floor to create a course the children need to move or zig-zag through.
* **Mirror Image** – This exercise is to be done in pairs, with each child standing about 5 feet apart and facing each other. As one child performs different (freely chosen) statue poses, moving slowly between postures (think Tai Chi style!) and holding each stance while counting silently to 5-10, the other child has to mirror the first child’s movements. Every 3-5 poses, the children switch roles and repeat the exercise. This activity is nice to work on non-verbal communication and coordination!

**Falling Tree** – This exercise is to be done in pairs. A child stands holding the top of a long stick (e.g. a broom wood handle), placed vertically on the floor (like a pole). The second child stands on a marker about 10 feet away (the distance can be adjusted depending on the age and needs of the children participating in the activity). Then, at the unisonous chant of “1,2,3 go!”, the child holding the stick lets it go and runs to the spot where the marker is located, while the child in the marked location runs towards the stick to catch it before it falls. The goal is to keep the stick standing for as many rounds as possible.

**Yoga:**

* **Other Montessorians introducing yoga in their classrooms:** I need to ask the other teachers I know for permission to share their information. For now, our fellow educator Debe Yu from SoulSong Montessori in Tennessee (who also attended the workshop) said she is happy to connect about this topic. If you are interested, please write back to me so that I share her contact in a direct email only when applicable!
* **Resources:**Debe mentioned Kidding Around Yoga ([www.kiddingaroundyoga.com](http://www.kiddingaroundyoga.com/)) that offers kids yoga certification courses. The only caveat here, as I mentioned with P.E. above, is that these trainings are not tailored for Montessorians and therefore not necessarily aligned with the method. I also have the vision of developing a Montessori Yoga course after the ones on Movement and Physical Literacy. Please stay in touch if you would be interested! In the meantime, here are a couple of tips and resources:
	+ Try to incorporate to the extent possible props or materials as well as visual aids for the children to be able to practice the lesson independently after it is introduced. In this line, for yoga, you can use yoga cards or dice as mentioned above. Also, including connections to the real and natural world (with animal or nature inspired poses for instance) can work well with young children and the concept is in essence aligned with Montessori.
	+ Yoga books can also be a nice addition to your practice. For instance, “I am Yoga” (by Susan Verde and Peter Reynolds) is a popular choice but there are other options as well from where to pick the one that fits your needs best.

Hope all this information proves useful! Please write back if you have any further questions or if I missed your information request! I am happy to keep the conversation going and to support your incorporation of movement, yoga and other wellness activities into your Montessori practice! I do not want to crowd everyone’s inbox, so to stay in touch one-to-one, you can reply to this email or use the contact information in my signature below.

In the same line, I would also be thankful if you could help me spread the word about my work and recommend me and/or Montessori Wellness to friends and colleagues who might be interested in incorporating more wellness into Montessori and pursuing professional development in this area. We Montessorians are a great community and I really hope to serve it in the best way possible, so any feedback, suggestion and referrals are more than welcome!

Thanks again and hope you have a wonderful rest of your week!

All the best,

Barbara

P.S. To join the Montessori Wellness online community, please follow the account @montessoriwellness on Facebook, Instagram and/or LinkedIn!

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