
AMI/USA Administrators meeting

9/16/2020

To share strategies, questions, and concerns regarding the COVID-19 outbreak, school closings and reopening, and remote learning among AMI/USA Administrators.

AGENDA

1. [Alan Preece](#), AMI/USA's Interim Executive Director, introduction and announcements.
2. [Janet McDonell](#), AMI Trainer and Consultant and AMI/USA Consultation Committee Chair joins the session. The AMI/USA Recognition program and consultation process will be discussed as well as other resources and services offered by the AMI/USA School consultants.
3. Participant Q & A and discussion.

MEETING NOTES

INFORMATION SHARED
<p>Announcements:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Montessori Leadership for Tumultuous Times: Embracing Our Cosmic Talk in Support of Universal Solidarity – October 9-11, 2020, early bird deadline ends 9/18/20202. Social Justice Webinar Series – September 21 and 27, November 2 and 15. All funds raised will go to the Black Montessori Education Fund. Led by the Human Rights and Social Justice Committee.3. Chat function is disabled for this call. <p>Introducing Janet McDonell and AMI Recognition program – process enables the Executive Director of AMI/USA to manage the manner in which schools can be recognized, largely underpinned by a stellar group of colleagues, the Consultation Committee, that is chaired by Janet. The Consultation Committee brings together a vast amount of experience, whose advice is invaluable. The committee also takes on the training of consultants, ensuring this is ensure the entire process is carried out equitable and fairly across schools.</p>
<p>Acknowledging that everyone is busy, and that she is trying to embrace it. She loves her work, so she embraces it! Regarding orderliness, expected as a trait of Montessorians. Interested to hear what participants have to say. Glad to be with Administrators - knowing the challenges and demands currently are being experienced. The online (zoom) meetings help us to stay more connected. We are forging connections that we might not have before.</p>
<p>Regarding her experience, she is the Director of Training at WMI, trains Primary guides. Always moved forward in this work, taught for about 20 years, at wonderful schools, a great fortune to find this work. Has been training teachers for about 25 years. Learned more from children than anybody. Was a board member of AMI/USA. She also has Elementary and Special Education AMI diplomas, in addition to Primary. Chaired Training of Trainers program for about 10 years (AMI Trainers Group). Janet shares that she has had the opportunity to have be in touch with and to be in touch with schools through visiting schools and visiting her trainees in the classroom</p>

when they have the opportunity to practice teach. The AMI/USA Consultation Committee is there to advise, to train consultants, and ultimately, in broad terms, to safeguard the Montessori approach which is also the ultimate mission of AMI global as well. Consider that Maria Montessori left us something wonderful and we are trying to keep it by providing support to teachers and to our community so that this vision maintains its integrity and reaches as many children as possible. We can be certain that the training offered by AMI is very extensive and very excellent, something we can put our trust in.

Regarding the consultation process, referring to her own personal experience with consultants that had visited her classroom and helped her enormously, helped to remind her about some of the most important aspects of our work. Remembers some of the erroneous things she was thinking as a new teacher out of training. Hoping that this is always the case with the consultation process. She is eternally grateful for this support. Lynne Lawrence noted that the highest practice in the world is in the United States – consultation has played a significant part in keeping the level of practice so high in the US. In our recognition process, there are some standards, not many, completed set of materials, large number of children, uninterrupted work periods, one trained adult that is guiding the group. A few other minor details. All of these AMI standards can be documented in the yearly application. The real key is that trained teacher, we know that a trained person has so many resources to depend on, we trust in the teacher's training. The consultant comes every three years to help refine and support the teacher's growth in implementing Montessori, help to get to a higher level, or one on one support to help solve problems.

Now we are in the middle of a global pandemic, so complicated and unexpected. So much to consider even if we are just focusing on schools. As a consultant, as a trainer, as a member of the Consultation Committee – especially the consultants in their work this year, we need to pause and remember that the focus is to try and imagine what teachers and parents and administrators are going through. Start by trying to feel empathy, start from this point.

Next, we need to be flexible and need to be creative. The Consultation Committee has met with Alan and trainers are meeting to discuss. We feel it is important to continue, not to bring things to a halt. Online training continues although that is not the preference. We need to adjust, which is hard because things are constantly changing, unpredictable. We don't know when or if things are going to go back to normal. We need to be fluid, look at what we have and do our best. Begin with trust, trained teachers can trust their training, trust teachers, AMI/USA can trust schools. We all need to trust one another, and what we are able to do.

The current AMI Recognition process is as much like the former program as possible, temporary adjustments. One of the ways we have been flexible and creative is offering each school the opportunity to tell us about their situation. So, some schools have decided to defer the recognition consultations. They know the situation and teachers best.

Many schools are moving forward with online consultation visits. The process consists of Zoom conferences with the consultant. What is missing is the opportunity to observe in the classroom. Additional information can be shared with the consultant, to give their observations and let us know their particular situation, their observations and needs for support. During the pandemic, the consultation will not result in any changes to the recognition status since we can't really make any generalizations about what schools are going through. Given that this year is particularly challenging, schools may really benefit from this process. Focus on the basic, or most meaningful aspects of Montessori. Acknowledging the many variations of responses to current conditions.

<p>If schools are not scheduled for a visit, or if the visit was deferred the AMI/USA Consultants are available for coaching and support this year. Perhaps this would be helpful in the fall or in the spring, maybe an individual guide or head of school would like additional support. This can be arranged individually with a consultant. Open to questions from participants.</p>
<p>A question that there will be no classroom observation, not even zoom observation? Flexible if it is helpful, it is a possibility to share photos or zoom the classroom with the consultant, if it is going to be helpful to the guide. We will not be looking at pictures to confirm that all materials are present but the school can choose to send photos if that would be helpful.</p>
<p>A question about a new program, a new trained teacher at the Assistants to Infancy level would like to receive a recognition status. New programs will be provided with a provisional status until an in-person status can be arranged. There will be clarification on the AMI/USA website regarding the Provisional status this year, as it is important to be transparent, regarding the conditions that new programs have entered the program, and that the status is assigned before the in-person consultations visit is completed and noted as provisional. This is the best balance to be found at the moment, and hoping that conditions will alter over time so that perhaps we can plan to do visits in person later in the year, but for the time being plan is for all visits to be online.</p>
<p>Thanks to AMI/USA for the compassionate and sensible way that the topic is being addressed this year. It is one of the gifts of the pandemic, that teachers can have access to trainers and consultants one on one and be supported in a way that is different from coming in to the classroom. It is marvelous – Janet as a trainer has influenced many their teachers as trainees.</p>
<p>AMI/USA is working on contacting every school by phone throughout the past few weeks. The engagement and feeling of community and working together is palpable. We appreciate everyone's continued patience and support, as well as participation on these calls. Having been given feedback, the deadline was extended to September 25 at this time. Please let us know your thoughts, everyone is encouraged to let us know if we are either doing something or not doing something that you think we should do in another way.</p>
<p>Agreement that the approach by AMI/USA is sensible. Question regarding the 21-22 academic year, the school has a recognition consultation due next year. We are going to be experiencing the effects of the pandemic still be affecting certain standards, especially regarding enrollment/class sizes. This will definitely be taken into consideration as schools will most likely be affected for years to come. We have had similar experiences with recessions for example, when schools lost enrollment in the past, these things are always taken into consideration.</p>
<p>Question on what is the best way to prepare the Guides for a consultation visit – to alleviate nervousness. Sometimes they are scared and nervous, and don't really show the classroom as well as can be. Suggestion to act normally, nervousness is expected as part of the process. Chances are good, that if you have had a consultation in the past, that you ended up finding that the consultant was very supportive and nice. Suggestion is to tell teachers to run the classroom the way you normally would. Consultants are there to help the teacher. Spills, tantrums, etc. are not a problem, the consultant will observe how these types of situations are responded to. Acknowledging that these things are a little nerve-racking, but it is still a good process.</p>
<p>Alan shares that when he first had a meeting with the Consultation Committee, he was very nervous. On the Consultation Committee are Phyllis Pottish-Lewis, Allyn Travis, Molly O'Shaughnessy, Karey Lontz and Janet McDonell. We are so fortunate to have individuals who</p>

<p>carry the very highest standards, who share their time and input, and spend so much their time as members of the committee. The concern for the committee is for the standards, but also for the schools, and ultimately for the children. Their warmth and empathy are always obvious, as well as their commitment for doing what is right for the children. It may be right to be nervous but what comes through from all the consultants is the focus on doing what is right for the children.</p>
<p>Question that since all of the consultation will be online, and considering that a great value to schools is the presentation that is sometimes offered to parents by the consultant at the school, that allowed parents to hear another voice, another “official” perspective. Can a school have a zoom meeting with a consultant? Parent Talks can be scheduled, even if you are not having an official consultation, you can request a parent talk. You can call your local trainer or consultant, to request that they present a talk to parents, and staff meetings as well.</p>
<p>Question that if it is a consultation year, it is understood that the status will not change, is this good for three years? For currently schools, this fulfills the requirement for the three-year requirement for the consultation visit.</p>
<p>Regarding the budget, how much would it cost to have a consultant visit the teacher or the school (not as a recognition consultation)? The costs would be determined between the school and the consultant. It is not an official AMI/USA recognition visit. There is a fabulous group of people who are available. The recognition fees are the same this year, and the process includes an element of savings this year due to visits being online, no expenses are needed. Schools that want something outside of this process are encouraged to engage with the trainer or consultant in order to provide clarity regarding the support needed.</p>
<p>Question to clarify that if a school requests a visit outside of the recognition process, is this considered an official recognition visit? Confirming that this visit would be a resource, but not officially connected to the recognition program.</p>
<p>Question that if the school agrees to online consultation this year, is another visit due next year? If you are scheduled for a consultation, as a currently active school, this will fulfill the requirement. For new programs, the status will remain as provisional until the in-person visit is completed. Trying to be flexible, and to respond to current circumstances. Trying to maintain a sense of equity by offering choices to the schools.</p>
<p>The vocabulary has changed, we now have classrooms as cohorts. Cohorts are even switching between in-person and online instruction. The population changes, the experience of the class has changed dramatically. In terms of the administrative responsibility, are we applying based on the total enrollment of the class, and do the consultations address online learning? Since every situation is unique, and there are so many variations between learning formats right now, the consultant will need all of these details and information ahead of time regarding the present situation the school is experiencing. Advice will be within the realm of consultant expertise, advice given related to the current circumstances, to ensure the child’s experience is as Montessori as possible. Will be depending on the teachers to share their observations, the essence of what support is currently needed. There is no model for every circumstance, so the responses will be based on individual situations.</p>
<p>Question that if the deferral is requested, does this affect the recognition status? Confirmed as an accommodation for the 20-21 academic year. We are trusting schools to know what is best – to proceed with online consultation or to defer.</p>

Question regarding how many schools are having face to face classes, and how many are totally online by show of hands? Some are in person, some are totally online, some have a hybrid and the parent can choose (per month). Some schools are open for in-person learning only. One school is offering a combination of Zoom classes, individual classes, mindfulness class, PE, as well as joining classmates for read aloud. Many options are being offered. Class sizes are smaller in many situations, some classes are fully enrolled. Masks are worn mostly for elementary children. For another school, one out of three primary classes is online, the elementary is running the class with a concurrent online option. The feeling is that within the next few months, everyone will have found the optimal way to respond to local conditions. Montessori is based on the needs of the community, and the incredible flexibility is a foundational concept that supports that adaptation and responsiveness is possible in any situation.

Reminder that training centers are responding to the current circumstances with flexibility and creativity as well as innovation. This is a sign of a community that can adapt, faced with the current situation.

Regarding the Consultant training, there is no checklist, pleasing to see that the consultants lead with empathy. The trust, flexibility, and creativity are inspiring. It is clear that this is a process designed to provide support, and to help one another out.

Thank you to all who were able to attend and for sharing your thoughts. Please feel free to share topics and suggestions for future meetings and request for support.

Alan Preece Alan@amiusa.org

Lynne Breitenstein-Aliberti Lynne@amiusa.org