



AMI/USA Administrators Session 4/7/2021

To share strategies, questions, and concerns facing AMI/USA administrators. Initial discussions started in March 2020 surrounding the COVID-19 outbreak, school closings and reopening, and remote learning, and continue to evolve to support evolving needs of the administrator community.

AGENDA

1. Ayize Sabater, AMI/USA Executive Director, introduces the session.
2. Panel discussion around environmental education resources and Earth Day celebration ideas with a Montessori focus that will support each student's individual learning journey and enrich their relationship with the natural world.
 - Valerie Olson ~ St. Croix Montessori School
 - Sarah Kozicki ~ AMI/USA
 - Sarah Fondriest ~ The Del Ray Montessori School
 - Sheena Foster ~ Sustainability Consultant
 - Kristi McAlister ~ Centennial Montessori School
 - Dallas Nelson ~ Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation
 - Annie Breitenstein ~ Keystone Montessori School

MEETING NOTES

Peace to each of you, no matter where you may be! Thank you for thinking it not robbery to carve out some time in your day to join us for this really exciting session! We begin by giving thanks for life, for strength, and for health. Ayize gives thanks for his ancestors and gives thanks to our Indigenous Brothers and Sisters.

We acknowledge the land that was stewarded by Indigenous Ancestors, with the reminder that it is even more important to engage your students and families with Indigenous people that are still living in your local community today. Participants are invited to recognize the indigenous stewards of the land where they reside in the chat.

We also give thanks for the children, with the hope that our work may bring a better and brighter day. We are gathered to discuss the important environmental work that we can do day in and day out, for the benefit of the children. Ayize references a recent environmental report that stated we are past 350 carbon parts per million. It was Bill

McKibben that helped start 350.org. The effort was not to hit 350 which is the safe concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, but now to hear that we are at 420 is very concerning. For the environmental work that needs to happen, it is critical to get everyone engaged.

Thank you to Ayize for highlighting the importance of this critical environmental work that needs to happen. We really appreciate each of the panelists who have joined us today to share some resources and environmental education tips with everyone. Each panelist is invited to share a bit about themselves and their work.

Valerie Olson ~ St. Croix Montessori School

Valerie lives in Minnesota where the indigenous ancestors are Ojibwe and Dakota. In Minnesota they like to say: “There is no bad weather, just bad clothing” because the weather is so extreme. The St. Croix Montessori School is located on 15 acres in the St. Croix River Valley. Valerie shares pictures of the school. They have alpacas, mini-donkeys, a myriad of chickens on the farm. She discusses the daily farm chores for the 1 toddler, 2 children’s house, and 2 elementary classrooms. All of the children share the work on the farm. Every two weeks the chores are done by a different classroom. There is a farm manager that takes care of the day to day operations, the animals, and assists the children with their work. The children feed the animals, clean the fields and barns, adds new bedding, hangs hat to eat and gives water. The children also gather the chicken eggs from the nesting boxes. The children really enjoy discovering eggs! The alpacas are easy, efficient animals to have on the farm, they are easy to clean up after; the donkeys not so much. Families sign up for farm chores on the weekends, and can take any eggs that show up. The weekend farm chores fill up quickly each year. Other outdoor activities are ice skating, boiling down and bottling maple syrup, the children go on nature walks, and elementary students love to have read-aloud by a fire. Valerie shared an endearing video that shows the children working on the farm, feeding the animals and doing the farm chores.

Sarah Kozicki ~ AMI/USA Director of Communications and Digital Strategy

Sarah shares her screen to show the [Environmental Education Resources](#) on the AMI/USA website. She has a background in Environmental Education, and this got her interested in the psychological benefits of exposure to nature. She was seeing the uptick of ADD/ADHD diagnosis in young children, and at the same time, many schools were starting to plant gardens. The book, *Last Child in the Woods* by [Richard Louv](#) came out which identified “Nature-Deficit Disorder” and the concept was gaining traction. Sarah started to research what the benefits of school gardens could be for children, especially those who do not have ready access to natural spaces. In the case of many of the urban schools she visited, many of the children were living in food deserts, didn’t have access to fresh food, and didn’t know how it was grown, the experiment of having a school garden morphed into an incredibly powerful, inter-disciplinary, multi-disciplinary, learning tool and space where many children can get their sensory needs met. Sarah shared how to locate the AMI/USA Environmental Education resource page, with a quick review

of the page. Let us know if you have any suggestions for environmental education resources and we can add them as a continuing and ongoing project.

Sarah Fondriest ~ The Del Ray Montessori School

Sarah is also in Alexandria, VA also in the DMV, a fairly urban area. Sarah does not have a background in gardening but has implemented a gardening program at the school. She will walk us through how they started their gardening program, and hopefully inspire others to do this. At the beginning, give some thought to your space, make some plans, start the conversation. Make a commitment and tell someone. What will you do? Where will you do it? Who will participate? How will you execute? When will you start? Where there is a will, there is a way. Plant a garden, do potted plants, window plants, germinate seeds. They rent space in a church, and there is small amount of grass outside which was used to create a garden area. A fence was added. Sarah shared a video of a child working on planting seeds. Seed germination can easily be done with children of all ages. Who will participate? Local business, nurseries, parents, students, teachers, assistants, parents, students, administrators, parents, students. They used a local gardening company called Loving Carrots that helped to provide the blueprints, and design for the garden. Nurseries are good to get donations from. Regarding the upkeep of the garden, they have a garden committee, and plan a couple days per year that families come out to help in the garden. The garden program would not be as successful without all of the community help for budgeting, fundraising, donations, volunteers, and commitments. When will you start? There is no time like the present! Start somewhere. Other considerations: types of plants, sensory garden, choose hardy plants. Types of flowers, so colorful in the spring. Other uses for the garden space: add a book/learning library, use as a play space, for flower arranging, picnics, and outside yoga. Types of trees: children can climb trees. Their witch hazel tree is especially good for climbing. Hooks for hanging tools, coats, water bottles, etc. Children are out there every day! It is healthy for children to be outside and to enjoy the beautiful gifts of nature.

Sheena Foster ~ Sustainability Consultant

Sheena is also in the DC area, and has a background in Urban Sustainability and Urban Agriculture. She shares a few different learning models that she has used over the years in her experience with youth. [LearnServe International](#), is a DC based organization that equips high school students from diverse backgrounds with entrepreneurial vision, tenacity, confidence, and leadership skills needed to take on social challenges at home and abroad. She served as a trip leader for one of LearnServe International trips to Jamaica, with students from DC area high schools, where they worked for almost 3 weeks on issues such as environmental sustainability, conservation, and social justice. One of the places where they took the youth was to the Source Farm, where they use a human-centered and design-centered thinking model to help solve problems around an ecosystem and an eco-village especially around composting, compost toilets, reusing food from scraps, creating rain gardens from bamboo trees. Sheena next discusses Design-Thinking. Design-Thinking is an educational approach that stress creative problem solving for students with the added value of an entrepreneurial outlook. As we think about

taking on environmental issues, we also want to think about how students can be creative problem solvers or even going into a career in the environmental movement. The Design-Thinking model has 5 different learning spaces, and one of them is to empathize. Empathy is the centerpiece for the human-centered design thinking model and in order to create an innovative solution to a problem, it is essential to observe what they do, how they live, and their stories. AMI/USA shared the following article on empathy, [Empathy: A Blessing and a Cure](#). We all know to create meaningful innovations you need to know your users and care about their lives. Part two of this model is to define, so work with students to define a question or challenge, based on empathy often changes the original problem you thought you understood how to solve. The third step is to ideate, to celebrate the power of possibility. To ideate is a space to imagine without judgement, a variety of wild, and daring, practical ideas. Ideation discourages linear thinking and helps people to solve steps beyond the obvious solutions. Step four is a prototype, which can be anything from a model, to a poster, to a skit, once you have the prototype it is time to experiment with the prototype. A garden is a good prototype model. Then the final stage is testing the prototypes, the culmination of design thinking. Takes the children through the process of thinking for themselves, and creating solutions, working from a place of empathy, and to encourage children who are environmentally conscious. Sheena next discusses 4-H. 4-H development relies on a 5-step model, based on experiential learning. Step one: students will experience the activity, perform or do. Step two: students share their experience to describe what happened. Step three; students will describe their experience to determine what is most important and identify common themes. Step four: they generalize from their experience and they relate it to their daily lives. Step five: they apply their learning to a new situation. When this model is used for students to both experience and process the activity, they learn from their thoughts and ideas about the experience and each step contributes to learning. Sheena shares the [Design for Change](#) Challenge that shows a different model of tackling environmental issues. Design for Change is a fascinating model that incorporates Design-Thinking for youth development. The way they do it is through “FIDS framework”: Feel, Imagine, Do and Share. This framework helps to develop much required 21st-century skills, and social and emotional competence for children. The Design for Change website shows their global toolkit and lesson plans to help you use the FIDS model. Sheena shares a one-week lesson plan so participants can get an idea. The Rainforest Kids Challenge is one example that provides an opportunity for teachers to cultivate a group of youth to help harness their collective creativity.

Kristi McAlister ~ Centennial Montessori School, Head of School

Kristi shares that their school started in her living room about 15 years ago, and the first piece of equipment they put in the school was a garden box and that was a commitment they made from the start. Kristi does not have a background in environmental education, but she loves trees, plants and dirt. One of the things she learned in the AMI training with Lynne Lawrence was that you can do a beautiful Montessori school with just practical life, if you really know how to do practical life. That is why she started with the garden box, because you can do everything that we do with Montessori, with a garden. Children naturally have a strong connection with nature, and it is our work to maintain this connection. Kristi was fortunate to have a Mom who let her play outdoors, barefoot, every

day. She was also fortunate to attend Montessori school, and remembers the lesson where they talked about the Big Bang, and the fact that the molecules that were in the original Big Bang are the same molecules that are in our blood. Having this connection as a child, and thinking of the connection and also the philosophical connection through the cosmic curriculum, really gives children a beautiful sense of peace and grounding, and this is why it is so important to maintain the connection to nature. Kristi discussed the power of knowing trees, knowing the place deeply which is awe inspiring to the child, and creates a very firm sense of comfort in this crazy world. We so much anxiety in children these days and if they can just go back and touch nature, and learn that there is a harmony to the world (as presented in 6-9 Montessori classes) and that we need to work with nature to solve anything. This also contributes to the Centennial Montessori School's commitment to nature. The school is in the SF Bay area, which is an urban, congested area which is great for going-outs, but not so great for nature. The school is on a small property, in a converted house. Kristi shares pictures of their outdoor classrooms, and encourages everyone to think of small things you can do, add some little thing every year. This year, due to the pandemic, the classes have been totally outside since June and it was determined that they would be fully outside for the year. They set up the classrooms outside every day. Some of the challenges were with the pandemic (they were a hot-spot), smoke from fires, and some cold weather. It was important for the children to return to school in person. The children come to school with gloves and hats if it is cold, they work outside in the rain, and in all conditions. Kristi encourages everyone to use what you have and tells the story of their Blue Atlas Cedar which needed to be cut down, and the children asked to save the tree so that they could still "play with him". So the school kept the stump and converted it to a play house, and used various parts of the tree around the school as stumps and sculptures. In a typical year, they have free flow from the indoors to the outdoors, with one adult always outdoors for supervision so they already had a basis that they could hold classes outside which gave them the confidence to have a full year outdoors. They have a flower garden, a vegetable garden, an outdoor chalkboard. They have a Community participation day – every year, all families come, sign up for projects in advance, which also helps to connect families to the school. A mandala making activity using acorns was shared. There is a scent garden, a taste garden, a smelling garden, and a dig garden for the youngest children. There is a sensory path, with grass, stones, dirt, and wood. Children remove their shoes and walk along the path. There is a brush for the children to clean the wood chips off the path to take care of it. The school installed extra sinks this year, for hand washing outside. There is music outside – with bells (Indian Scale). They use every available space, they are using the parking lot for an outdoor elementary class. The children love being outdoors. The outside primary class has mostly practical life and sensorial, some early math. Children go into the class to get other materials. They have big Tupperware bins to put the materials in each day, and rolling shelves that do into small sheds. For elementary, the children go in to get materials, and the tents, tables and chairs are outside.

Dallas Nelson ~ Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation

Dallas is the Director of Lakota Language and Education Initiative at the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. Dallas shares a slide show about the Thunder Valley CDC

and their environmental work, in addition to an overview of who they are as indigenous people. The Thunder Valley CDC is a Lakota led non-profit, aimed at creating systemic change within the community, founded through the Lakota lifeways and prayer. On the reservation, which is part of the Oglala County, one of the poorest counties in the US, there are many systemic issues they face around oppression, food scarcity, housing, and education, etc. The Thunder Valley CDC was formed to address these challenges. The organization was posed with the question, how long are we going to let other people decide the future of our children. The organization started implementing programs aimed at connecting children, families, and community to the language, land, and customs. As Lakota people, and like most indigenous people, they have a deep connection to the land and view animals, trees, plants, sky, all as are our relatives. They work toward reclaiming this connection, and are working towards liberation through lifeways and spirituality. They have 8 initiatives geared toward liberation and serves the Oglala Lakota Nation – which is suffering from a plethora of issues: federal Government policies, poverty and many other systemic issues. The organization focus on the immense work of connecting the community to the land, to sustainability and to the environment. Utilizing the environment in way that benefits us now, but does not harm future generations, is how they define sustainability. Dallas shares a drawing of the initial community plan. After the community meetings, and visioning the future, they realized they needed a community center to revitalize, restore, and reclaim who they are as indigenous people. The programs are embedded in the philosophy, all initiatives come from Lakota philosophy, in addition to the way the houses, gardens and pathways are designed. The vision is to bring back the Lakota language and lifeways. They created a Lakota Immersion Montessori for immersion in the Lakota language. The way they connect the children and families to the land through Montessori is directly related to the yearly calendar, the land, environment, ceremonies and the star maps that their Ancestors had developed that are connected to sacred sites on the land. There are different activities throughout the year, in response to the calendar, different landmarks and different medicines are based on the calendar. Dallas also discusses the Regenerative Community Development, a community designed to fit their needs and directly connected to the Lakota Lifeways. All buildings face the east. There is a circle in the middle, represents the traditional way of setting up the camp, and provides a space for families to gather. The Regenerative Community does everything from building homes, the community center, and apartments. Homes are available for purchase by community members. They also have a chicken coop, an underground garden and fruit forest. The idea was to create a learning space to connect children to the farm, to the environment and to the community. They have over 400 chickens that the children maintain and care for. Their Food Sovereignty Initiative is geared toward creating food systems on the reservation. The reservation is in a food desert and they are aiming to create systems to empower the children to grow and harvest their own food and to live off the land. They have a community garden, an effort that the Montessori children use, the children of the community can also have a garden plot and gardens are overseen by the Food Sovereignty Initiative.

Other initiatives:

Youth Leadership

Housing and Homeownership

Workforce Development

Social Enterprise
Regional Equity
Lakota Lifeways

It is a community level approach to utilizing Montessori and the Lakota thought and workforce to develop a place that connects them to the land. The Montessori program is working toward reclaiming the Lakota Language and Lifeways. Everything they do is connected to the land.

Annie Breitenstein ~ Keystone Montessori School

Annie is a Toddler Directress and Level Coordinator in the suburbs of Chicago, in a building that was repurposed, where they are working to utilize what they have to the utmost advantage. Annie has a background in Environmental Education, so for everything that goes on at their school that has to do with environment education (gardening, composting, recycling) seems to fall on her due to her enthusiasm. “Enthusiasm and attitudes are caught, not taught.” Your attitudes really mean a lot to the children. The children look towards the example set by the adults. Annie shares information about the [No-Waste Lunch Guidelines](#), something everyone can do at their school. Recycling, composting, and [waste](#) are big issues across the board – rural, suburban and urban areas - all face these challenges. The waste audit is a surprise, go through the waste with the children to see what is there. The intention is to show that there are things everyone can do to decrease the waste that occurs every day and that everyone can participate from the youngest to the oldest. If you have an environmental team, or an expert have them lead it, but get everyone involved as much as possible. We all have local organizations that we need to tap into. Local garden centers, solid-waste agencies, and the wastewater treatment plant usually have education and outreach programs and are good places for field trips. Tap into any other local organization for donations, and help with source for ideas. Annie highly recommends [Project Learning Tree](#), [Project Wild](#), and [Project Wet](#). These are all free, professional development groups that you can find in your community to incorporate environmental education within Montessori. Annie describes how close [Environmental Education and Montessori](#) are. Just being outside, and getting children comfortable being outside, are important. Their school will continue to be outside as much as possible and they will keep this up – it has been a blessing to actually get the school outside more this year. There are so many opportunities outside; with gardening, exploring, walking, etc. Getting our children back to nature is a must!

Question and Answer

Question for Kristi – Do you take the materials down daily to put them in the bins?

Materials are put in the bins daily, and the bins slide under the tables. They also use rolling shelves which are then put into sheds that were bought just for this purpose (4 shelved in each shed). The children also pack up their tables and chairs to take inside, since they use camping tables made of bamboo. They do leave the plastic tables outdoors overnight. They did redwood and cinder block shelves that can also stay out. They also asked for donations from parents as well for additional shelving.

Will you continue with outdoor classrooms when things go back to normal?

Yes, since they have always had an outdoor classroom, they will continue with that. Some spaces are approved to be used (by the City) due to Covid. Historically one of the challenges has been the children don't always bring the materials out. As a suggestion, if you want to start small, you can order wine crates free from wineries and they make perfect individual gardens for the children.

Question for Annie – regarding the “enthusiasm and attitudes are caught, and not taught” saying; what kind of strategies have you used with your staff to get them more onboard?

Annie – It is a challenge at times! Some challenges are that even after presenting recycling for example, it is not always enforced. She makes time to talk to elementary and middle school classes, to provide presentations on composting, recycling, and gardening. She emphasizes that they try not to make people feel bad or guilty, but uses positive reinforcement and emphasizes the importance of these practices, as a long-term pursuit of trying to change minds.

Kristi – using the elementary children to present to the younger classes, can be a very effective way to encourage participation in these types of programs.

Sarah – worked with a waste-management company that actually had a classroom setup to show children products made from recycled items: such as clothing and pencils. Use positive reinforcement and make a game of it! Sarah created a sorting game as a competition between two students to identify items that could be recycled.

Samantha Levine, AMI/USA Director of Events

We would love to include your **school news** in the upcoming AMI/USA Spring Journal. Submissions of 500 words or less and photos are requested to [Sarah Kozicki](#) by April 15.

We have a free **Earth Day event on 4/22 at 7 PM EST** – hope you can all join us!

Please plan to join us for the **Administrators session with SIS Vendors** on April 28, 2021: 10 am PT / 11 am MT / 12 pm CT / 1 pm ET

And the **May 3, Administrators session on Group Health Care** – please respond to the survey for times.

Thank you to all who were able to attend and your continued support! Please feel free to share topics and suggestions for future meetings and requests for support needed.

We look forward to seeing you all soon!

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