

# VOICES OF AMI TRAINING

## From Birth to Becoming to Belonging – A Story of Adaptation

**Nancy Kodera, AMI 0–3 Auxiliary Trainer**

Montessori describes adaptation as “a mutual exchange between every living being and its environment.” It is the ability to function within the environment and the fulfilment of conditions necessary for life and happiness. Like many Montessori trainers, I have come to appreciate the importance of this concept as I have travelled to many parts of the world to live and work in different communities.

“The child must construct his adaptation to his environment from the beginning of his life. This adaptation is developed by the child taking in everything that exists in the environment by absorption, just as he takes in language. The baby has nothing, no heredity. This adaptation is made unconsciously by the absorbent mind of the child.” (Montessori, Maria, The 1946 London Lectures, p. 85)

### “Here I am, I exist”

Being born at a time and place surrounded by nature is a gift. There was no television, no screen except for a transistor radio and a lamp powered by kerosine. Evenings were filled with the sound of the ocean, waves splashing against the shore about a mile from where I was born. There were all sorts of sounds from insects and birds hovering around the trees and plants surrounding our house. Early mornings were spent in the kitchen as we prepared our breakfast. I could see the gentle fire cooking a pot of rice; the movement of the hands beating eggs, the grilling of the eggplants, and the frying of dried fish. The crackling sound of scrap wood and discarded bamboo collected from our yard made such a great impression as I watched our food being cooked.

Meanwhile, my father would teach me the Lord’s prayer, and poems: The Arrow and the Song by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow; The Little Plant by Kate L. Brown; and the hymn, All Things Bright and Beautiful, by Cecil Frances Alexander. Our backyard was filled with freely roaming dogs, cats, ducks, chickens, and pigs! The coexistence with plants and animals filled us with a sense of wonder and joy. Such was the beauty and simplicity of the life I was born into.

“The psychological play between his experiences in the family – and those he partakes of in his group – leads the child to build an adult individual adapted to any group environment he may grow up in.” (Montessori, Mario, *The Human Tendencies and Montessori Education*, p.1)

### “Becoming”

It was not until I moved from the country to the city that I learned about the disparity between the rich and the poor. In my early 20s I went to New Zealand and worked as a Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) intern at the Christian World Service (CWS). In New Zealand, I lived with the Māori people in Wellington and in Auckland. They taught me the struggles of the indigenous people not only in New Zealand but also of the first nations such as in Australia, Samoa, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and Hawaii. I also connected with women’s groups, made friends with feminists who were empowered and strong advocates of women’s rights. My experience informed me how important it was to support Filipino women back in the Philippines, especially those who were victims of domestic violence or were forced into prostitution due to their poverty or economic deprivation. My commitment towards women empowerment led me to Tokyo, Japan, where, as a missionary to the Anglican Episcopal Diocese of Tokyo (Nippon Sei Ko Kai), we provided a lifeline. With the help of Japanese student volunteers, we named the organization and the service we provided, Kapatiran (Filipino word for brothers and sisters) for foreigners working in Japan as singers, entertainers, and hostesses in bars and clubs. I was also trained as a phone volunteer for the Tokyo English Lifeline (TELL). While in Japan I was invited by PEACE Boat to join their Southeast Asia cruise as one of the presenters. I talked about the history and culture of the Philippines. My advocacy for women’s empowerment and justice brought me to the United States of America upon the invitation of the Episcopal Asian American Ministry where I met my husband, an Episcopal priest, and a Religion Professor at Wellesley College, one of the first women colleges in the USA.

### “Belonging”

Moving to the United States meant adapting to a different reality. As a full-time mom, I volunteered at the Montessori School where my two children received their early education. From my children’s experience at the Montessori school, they developed a strong sense of order, independence, ability to analyse, and to make decisions. I realized I was not only there to serve or to work, but I also gained knowledge and understanding of what Montessori education was about.

My Montessori experience put me on a path to my own journey as a Montessori educator. I started working as an assistant in a toddler program, then in a Casa or primary class. For a number of years, working as an assistant teacher was something I embraced and enjoyed. Until one day as I watched children at the playground, something hit me: I wanted to be trained as an Assistant to Infancy lead guide! It was close to the end of the school year when I made that decision. I took one of the few remaining slots at MISD.

Having a diploma and working as a lead guide for a number of years has brought me a sense of fulfilment and gratitude. I have had many opportunities to engage with people around the world as a global trainer, particularly with experiences in Fukuoka, Japan; Hanoi, Vietnam; Manila, Philippines; and most recently, Bangalore, India. I have shared what I learned and experienced back in the place where I was born. It was important to ensure that the community where I grew up knew that what we had back in the province where I was born shaped me as a human being with strong appreciation for the beauty and the wonders of nature.

Montessori gave me this knowledge and wisdom to appreciate the natural world. It also gave me a better understanding of Dr. Montessori's approach to education: aid to life. We don't stop learning and realizing what makes us better human beings and what shapes our minds to appreciate this beautiful world we live in.

"It cannot be said that the child is born with things necessary for his life, or that he came into this world with a quantity of knowledge. No matter where he is born, he achieves the same miracle. If he is born in a small fishing village the child takes in all the things that are there with the same facility as that with another child born in New York in the big buildings, the motorcars, the aeroplanes and the noise." (Montessori, Maria, What You Should Know About Your Child, p. 20).

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nancy Koderá graduated from the University of the Philippines in the Visayas (UPV) with a degree in Management. After graduation, she worked in various capacities, including office assistant, researcher, and computer programmer. Nancy worked in New Zealand as a youth intern and her experience inspired her to work with the Gabriela Commission on Violence Against Women. Her work with women in the Philippines brought her to Japan as a Missionary, where she taught the Filipino language and culture. Nancy worked in Japan for 5 years before moving to Boston, Massachusetts where her journey as a Montessori educator began.

Nancy worked as a parent volunteer at Apple Valley Montessori School in Sudbury, Massachusetts, then as an assistant teacher. After getting her 0–3 AMI Diploma at the Montessori Institute of San Diego (MISD) she became a lead teacher. She continued as lead teacher at the eBridge Montessori School from 2012 – 2019.

During the pandemic, Nancy continued to work with children. She advised families how to set up their home environment, and she worked with school administrators on how to strengthen their toddler programs. She also received her Master's of Education at the Loyola University in Maryland (2014). Her journey as an Auxiliary Trainer is ongoing. Her love and passion for Montessori education keeps on growing.

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