

# VOICES OF AMI TRAINING

## Children who Proved Montessori's Words

**Naoko Ogawa, AMI 3–6 Trainer**

I earned Montessori diplomas from the AMI training programs but learned the best from the children. When I graduated from the training program, I thought I was ready to “teach lessons” to children and “build” the community for the children. I was wrong.

A four-year-old child showed me that she had much more influence on the children in the community than I did. In the classroom community where I was serving as a guide, a child started to dance to a piece of music we were listening to. Their movements became faster, rougher, and less safe. “What should I do?” I felt my internal emergency gauge was flashing like the lights on a police car. I immediately intervened with the children, but their movements did not change. Then, a four-year-old child single-handedly solved the problem. She moved all by herself, staying a foot away from anyone, slowly stretching her arms, torso ever slightly moving with the rhythm... Other children looked at her, and their movements slowed down. I was in awe that this community did not depend on my “classroom management skills” to explore movements freely.

Children also taught me the power of each Montessori material and activity. Shouldn't I have known this by the time I graduated from the training program? Well, I thought I did, but I did not until I noticed a three-year-old child was still sitting at a small table by the window facing South 10 minutes after my presentation. “Why is he still sitting there?” If you are an experienced Montessori practitioner, you know the answer. The child was concentrating on his work, matching and dispersing the blue, yellow, and red colour tablets over and over.

This all happened 28 years ago. Why do I still remember it?

I also remember a child who sat against a wall, deeply concentrating on the Metal Inset activity, who did not notice that everyone went outside to play. There was also a child who went straight to the Math shelf every morning and set up over sixty sheets of number cards to do subtraction for a week and a child who was wearing a mask and a blindfold while examining the 6-gram differences between Baric Tablets during the COVID year.

These children stunned me. Their behaviours moved me as mental earthquakes that shook off my traditional school mentality. These sensations are still living within me, right next to my memory of an Opera performance at the Baltimore Lyric Theater listening to a soprano singer in La Traviata, later described as a “dazzling showpiece”, and the first time I heard Billy Joel's “Piano Man”.

In her book *The Absorbent Mind*, Maria Montessori says, “And so we discovered that education is not something the teacher does, but that it is a natural process which develops spontaneously in the human beings. It is not acquired by listening to words, but in virtue of experiences in which the child acts in his environment.” (The Absorbent Mind, p. 7)

I am privileged to serve adult learners as a Primary trainer, and I owe this to all the children who embodied Maria Montessori’s words.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Naoko Ogawa is an experienced and innovative AMI primary trainer. She grew up in Tokyo, Japan and received her B.A. in childhood education from Tokyo Gakugei University and an M.Ed. from Loyola University Maryland. Since 2009, Naoko has trained adults in the Philippines, Japan, China, and the U.S. on assistant, foundation, and primary courses. Naoko is also an AMI/USA consultant.

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