

# VOICES OF AMI TRAINING

## Montessori Through the Lens of School Administration and Leadership

**Christine Harrison, AMI Administrator Trainer**

“We can imagine an adult society organized as a constructive society on the same lines as the children’s – that is, along the lines of this naturally cohesive society. Attachment to other people is the first stage, bringing men to work together towards a common goal. It would be good for everyone if society could be constructed like this. But we cannot demand it; it must come from nature, if nature is the base, the construction will be superior, but without this base there can only be an artificial construction, one that breaks down easily” (Maria Montessori, London Lectures, 1946).

Almost 12 years ago two intrepid heads of Montessori schools in Australia travelled to Thailand on a mission. The mission was to work with hundreds of Thai heads of school who were beginning their leadership journey running Montessori schools in the public system, who had no Montessori training and who had to work with AMI trained guides. It turned out to be the beginning of the development of the AMI Administrators Certificate Course which is now delivered around the globe by AMI Administrator Trainers. We know that effective administration of Montessori schools is a vital component, along with teacher training, to support the implementation of Montessori globally and therefore fulfil the mission of AMI.

This first visit to Thailand was to be one of many. It led to a pilot course being offered in pre-pandemic China, again to hundreds of students. After some modifications to the content, AMI listed the course as a new offering. It has gone from strength to strength and now with online and blended offerings since the need to implement remote training when the pandemic began. We now have 12 Administrator Trainers with 3 trainers in training and demand is growing across all continents.

Courses have been delivered in Australia, Canada, China, the Czech Republic, France, Mexico, Norway, South Africa, Switzerland, Thailand, and the USA with courses planned to take place for the first time in Argentina, Chile and India in the near future. AMI connects Montessori to the world and one of the most exciting things is that administrator course trainers can capture the very best practices and thinking from all cultures. Different perspectives, techniques and views have meant that the course brings global insights to the complex task of school management.

The course covers the core considerations of Montessori philosophy which are similar to the AMI Orientation Course. However, we look at all these areas with a leadership lens. The administrators prepared environment, for example, is the whole school. We must allow our community to have freedom but with limits and we must ensure that the environment serves the adults in our community – guides, assistants, parents, grandparents, administration, boards, owners, volunteers etc.

In that respect, the transformation of the adult is part of the work of administrators as they rethink and reimagine their valuable contribution to education and the Montessori community as it is for guides and trainers. None of us are born as administrators and we know that the changing world is constantly challenging our norms and expectations. All too often we find that school leaders and administrators become becalmed by process management or immobilised by fear of error and the course offers new ways of overcoming those understandable but damaging perspectives.

We look at Montessori around the world, how our schools evolve and how we can work to remove obstacles to growth. We include presentations and discussions on working with guides, building a healthy school community and, importantly, effective and positive ways of communicating. A classroom observation is included in the training as well as assignments on strategic planning and designing a map of the Montessori continuum looking at all aspects of the school community and the needs of all stakeholders. There is some flexibility depending on the country to look at governance from either a board or owner perspective and some effective ways of marketing.

Trainers on the course are no longer surprised to find schools don't have strategic plans or that where they exist, they are gathering dust and not informing daily decision making. A strategic plan is a compass that tells schools where the true north of delivering authentic and accessible Montessori lies. The administrator course helps students develop a strategic plan but offers practical advice on how to scale the mountains, navigate the rivers and escape the hazards that might prevent them from achieving their ambitions.

The course content is delivered using a mixture of interactive presentations, small and large group work, observations in schools, discussion and videos and is contextualised for the country and interests and needs of the group. We also dance, sing and delight in each other's company. This is a Montessori classroom for adults – mixed ages, different skills, and individual histories – embracing each other's differences and uniqueness to build a learning community.

My experience in every course I have been involved in has been the sense of camaraderie and networking that has developed as well as a legacy of a deeper understanding of AMI, the Montessori community as a whole and how everyone in a leadership role can contribute to the success of an authentic Montessori school. Our research tells us that participants go back to their skills refreshed and enlightened as well as having a toolkit of practical things that make a difference to their daily lives. We are also indebted to all those who have attended the courses because we have learnt so much from them. This enables us to create ever more effective programmes that help school leadership support children as the best hope for a better world.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christine Harrison is the AMI Ambassador, South East Asia, and a former AMI Board member. Christine has been involved in Montessori education since 1985 and was Head of School at Canberra Montessori School, one of the largest Montessori schools in Australia, for over 20 years. As well as educational leadership, Christine has a background in mediation, mentoring, conflict management and adult education with an emphasis on empowering individuals and building good communication skills. She was the founding President of Montessori Australia and a senior consultant working with Montessori schools and childcare centres.

Christine co-developed the AMI Administrators Certificate Course and is an AMI Certified Trainer for this course which she has given in several cities in China, in Thailand, USA, Switzerland, Czech Republic, Mexico and France. She has presented at Montessori conferences in Europe, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Australia, China and the USA and is committed to her work with Montessori in underserved communities around the world.

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