

## Suggestions for Talking with the Non-Montessori World

As we engage in education, advocacy and action, there will be many, many times that we will be sharing conversation with people from state agencies, and offices, environmental raters, licensing specialists, legislators, and the general public.

Our attitude, our tone, and the way we choose to communicate our ideas, our knowledge, our concerns and our questions can have a significant outcome on our interactions and our relationships.

Most state agency and state office people are pleased to hear from the Montessori community. Like many, they have the idea that Montessori is great but don't understand specifics and most have never seen a high quality Montessori classroom and how it functions. Realizing that at least 60% of our work is to educate these people and help them understand why we have concerns can go a long way to eliminating feelings of defensiveness.

The people that we are usually speaking with are the implementers of policy, not the policy makers. These are the people charged with creating the systems and choosing the tools to measure accountability for licensure, or program standards, rules, and regulations, designing the concrete aspects of QRIS, or the Professional Registry levels. They work with tight time frames, not enough staff, and not enough time. Sound familiar?

When we express our concerns then, it is important to be as articulate, clear and to the point as we can. It is important to use language that our "audience" will understand. Using terms, and Montessori language that we are comfortable with can just cause discomfort for others. It is important that we present possible solutions to our concerns. Expecting these people to add to their already too busy schedules to solve problems of the Montessori community is just not realistic and it is up to us to find solutions that, as Montessorians, we know will work while still complying with the mandates the state agency is responsible for.

Listening is every bit as important as talking- maybe more. If our approach is one of collaboration and team work, we will be much more likely to have a positive response to our requests. Of course, practicing grace and courtesy is a concrete

demonstration of our respect for this person we are asking to help solve our problem.

The bottom line is that successful advocacy is about forming and maintaining positive relationships. Like any relationship, patience, understanding, listening, empathy, and the ability to see things from another's perspective are the foundation for positive interactions.

Working together with those who can assist us in protecting, defending and supporting high quality Montessori will benefit us all.

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