

Further Thoughts on FCS and Montessori Collaboration

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In 2022, this journal published our paper titled Where Visions Meet: Ellen Swallow Richards and Maria Montessori (McGregor & Ryan-Longo, 2022). As a follow up, we want to share further thoughts on the notion of collaboration between the family and consumer sciences (FCS) profession (also home economics, human ecology, family studies, consumer sciences, and home sciences) and Montessori schools (<https://www.mmlcc.org/>)

We remain driven by the query *How do we revitalize the powers that were born in the times of these great women scientists who faced problems that remain with us today?* What reasoning and argumentation would entice contemporary Montessori schools and FCS practitioners (educators) to collaborate?

Powerful, visionary women came together in the early 1900s to create home economics. They imagined a powerful discipline and profession that would address many great problems having an impact on individuals, family, and home. Ellen Swallow Richards, a chemist and scientist, led this

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initiative. Maria Montessori, also a scientist and educator, worked alone at the turn of the century to develop a novel approach to teaching children in specially designed learning environments using specially designed curricula and pedagogy. Both women focused on human development, one at the home and family level and the other at the childhood level.

In our first article, we made the case for FCS and Montessori educators working together given their parallel interests. We shared a working example of a highly successful 7-year collaboration in the Seattle, Washington, area. It involved high-school FCS students interning in a Montessori school and working with children using the Montessori method while learning the FCS curriculum (McGregor & Ryan-Longo, 2022). But nothing similar has happened since then, and we wondered what else we could say that might change this fact. The world needs both FCS and the Montessori method. The former values and advocates home and family and their optimal well-being, and the latter values and advocates for children and their development and potential. Children grow up and create families of their own, and the cycle continues.

Collaboration between FCS and Montessori education makes sense. Combined imagination and vision help form new relationships and connect ideas. FCS has always been open to making new and necessary connections and is receptive to

new possibilities and eventualities that favor home and family. Forging partnerships between Montessori early learning centers and FCS in public schools and on university and college campuses is a timely and innovative way forward. High-school students (adolescents) and university youth (young adults) would work with certified Montessori educators and mentors while meeting their public school or university FCS curricular requirements. This is a win-win situation.

It is also a feasible situation because FCS curricula include childhood and human development, and Montessori educators know that most children grow up in a home environment within some sort of familial arrangement. Both FCS and Montessori educators are concerned with early childhood education and believe it is paramount. Indeed, the national standards for FCS education (taught in junior and senior high) include *Standard 4: Education and Early Childhood* (National Association of State Administrators of Family and Consumer Sciences [NASAFACS], 2018).

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If Standard 4 is taught as intended, FCS students would learn about (a) child development theories; (b) tools for observing and assessing children's growth and development; (c) cultural and environmental influences on children's development; (d) children's developmental needs and strategies to promote healthy growth and development; (e) creating a safe and healthy learning environment; and (f) building and maintaining healthy and positive relationships so children can effectively engage with adolescents, youth, adults, and community members (NASAFACS, 2018).

But more than that, depending on the scope of a school's integrated, interdisciplinary, and holistic

FCS curricula, the students also might be learning about foods and nutrition, clothing and textiles, consumption and personal finances, resource management, housing/shelter and household management, family dynamics, and parenting. Ideally, FCS students will hone their problem-solving, decision-making, planning, critical and creative thinking, communication, management, leadership, personal reflection, and interpersonal relationship skills. These higher order skills and thought processes are intended to serve them in all life endeavors (NASAFACS, 2018).

Regardless of age level, the integrated and interdisciplinary Montessori curriculum is divided into five core subjects: language, practical life, sensorial, cultural, and mathematics. *Language* (literacy skills, grammar, oral and written language) runs through the entire curriculum. *Practical life* concerns independence (self-control, self-discipline, self-awareness, and self-confidence); social skills; and environmental stewardship. *Sensorial* activities also thread through the entire curriculum and help children refine all senses as they engage with color, texture, shape, weight, and dimension. *Cultural* content helps them explore their world and includes the sciences, history, art, and music. More than numbers (addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division), mathematics helps students move from concrete to abstract ideas (Global Montessori Network, 2022; Montessori Academy, 2023).

Pedagogically, children progress at their own pace based on their stage of development and their interests. The intent is to enhance self-worth, foster self-confidence, gain independence, and learn through experimentation without fear of failing. Students gain critical-thinking, creative-thinking, and problem-solving skills, which are considered generic abilities they can take into life. Educators strive to not overwhelm learners with too much information and instead tailor everything to meet each child's learning needs (Global Montessori Network, 2022; Montessori Academy, 2023).

Implementing a collaborative educational experience between FCS and Montessori training is a powerful opportunity for (a) FCS students to encounter the unique learning environment that is created in a Montessori learning center and (b) the children to encounter the unique collection

of knowledge and the integrative, interdisciplinary, and holistic philosophy that underpins FCS learning. Through a *Labschool* (as it was called in Seattle), high-school students can give their attention to the little ones as they observe critical periods of a child's life. They concurrently have opportunities to bring what they are learning in their FCS classrooms into the children's lives and learning experiences and vice versa (McGregor & Ryan-Longo, 2022).

The children are interested in everything about the world. High-school students should be, but they can be sidetracked, jaded, and skeptical about life. Both children's and teenagers' brains are still developing. Fortunately, these collaborative learning experiences and life encounters benefit everyone. In some manner, shape, or form, all students involved (the very young and the slightly older) have the chance to learn about themselves, and they learn about and from each other. High-school students learn about human growth and development both in hindsight and firsthand in their encounters with children engaged with the Montessori curriculum (McGregor & Ryan-Longo, 2022).

In addition to separate but aligned curricula as described above, these collaborations would be scaffolded with orientations: (a) Montessori educators would be oriented to FCS; (b) FCS educators and high-school students would be oriented to the Montessori approach; and (c) invited, third-party professionals would teach respective content as relevant to the situation (e.g., brain development, child-centered pedagogy, child psychology, and teen psychology).

If the Labschool served as an internship or service-learning experience for the high-school students, FCS teachers could design a stand-alone course, or the learning experience could be project-based and part of an FCS course (e.g., a child development course, or a foods and nutrition course). The FCS teacher, Montessori learning center educator, the high-school students and, yes, even the children, could all be involved in the course or project assessment and evaluation should the FCS student need a grade to meet school, school board, or state curriculum requirements.

We live in a new era—different from the turn of the century when these two powerful women conceived FCS and the Montessori approach—but we can benefit and learn from traditions that offer structure to our understanding. Traditions help transmit beliefs from one generation to another. They provide a source of identity, tell us where we came from, and remind us of what shaped our lives thus far. They connect generations into the future (Watts, 2017). More than 100 years ago, Richards and Montessori ardently believed in home and the development of family and children, respectively, and their beliefs have stood the test of time.

The world needs creativity and imagination to address the myriad problems facing humanity. And Ellen Swallow Richards and Maria Montessori drew on both faculties when they created their innovative approaches to children, family, and the home. Nothing is stopping us from following in their footsteps—from learning from tradition—except perhaps small-*p* political will. We must locate nonprofit Montessori early learning centers that are interested in connecting with FCS high-school or college campuses to create new Labschools and vice versa. Montessori schools can serve public school or university students, and the latter can serve Montessori school students.

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Students (children, adolescents, and young adults) will benefit. The FCS profession and Montessori educators will benefit. FCS schools and campuses and Montessori learning centers will benefit. Families, communities, and society will benefit. With so many winners, it is time to make this happen.

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