



EIGHT TIPS FOR GREAT MONTESSORI PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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ONLINE WORKSHOPS

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THE CHALLENGE



One of the challenges we have as Montessori school leaders is providing on-target professional development for our staff members.

There are moments that we find a match for subject, speaker, staff, and time.

And that feels wonderful!

Here are a few tips to help you find that elusive conjunction and be on-target.

1. ASK YOUR STAFF

Keep the question of "What do you want to learn?" in the air.

When asked for a quick answer, it can be hard for staff members to verbalize the situation where they need help.

With a few days to clarify needs, it's easier for your staff members to tell you something like...

I need to learn new songs.

I want ideas for new literature to read out loud.

I'd like to be better organized.

Ask your staff what they need, give them some time to think, and keep asking.



2. OBSERVE THE BUMPS

Look for key frustrations in the day-to-day operations of your school.

When you hit upon those moments of frustration, or you see children, staff or parents frustrated, jot it down and keep a running record.

Noting these bumps in the road can help you ascertain the true causes and effects later of the frustrations, as a pattern begins to emerge.

After noting problems for a couple of weeks you'll be able to determine the design of these frustrations. You may see that certain events are more common at a certain time of day, on specific days or with predictable people or activities.



2. OBSERVE THE BUMPS

When you can pick out common elements and themes, it becomes clear what would be a great topic for professional development.

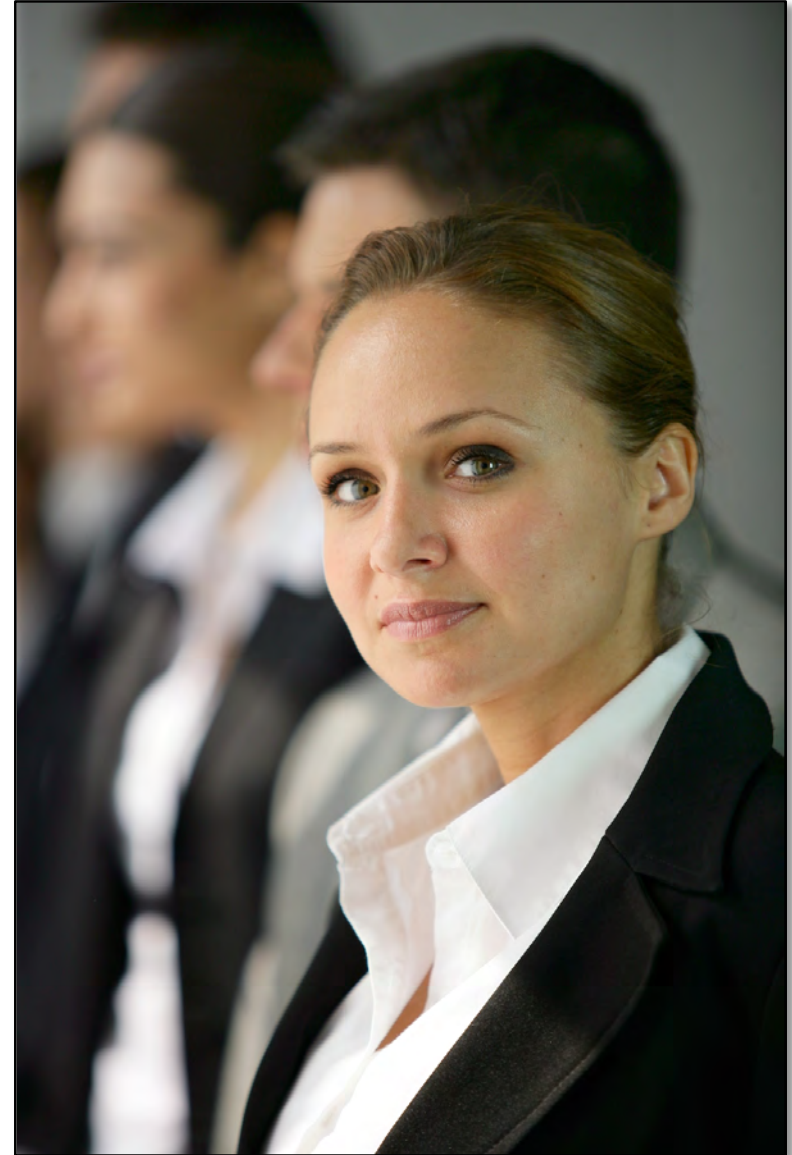
Children and parents having a hard time separating in the morning?

Children cranky in the afternoon?

Two weeks of rain or snow?

Find the frustration and you have your professional development topic.

Watch for the bumps in the road.



3. USE IT RIGHT AWAY

Research shows that thirty days after we attend a workshop we remember that, yes, we took a workshop. We can recall the topic.

But we may not be able to recall who taught the class much less the major take-aways.

What makes the difference?

Using the material we learned the next day and making a commitment to implementing the material.

Learned new songs? Sing them right away.

Came across some interesting books? Order them tomorrow.

Learn a new communication tool? Use it with the next person you can.

Offer bite-sized pieces of new information that can be easily implemented and urge your staff members to use what they've learned...right away.

4. PRACTICE



During your professional development session allow time to practice.

It's easy to want to cram in a lot of information in a session because this professional development time is so hard to set aside.

During your professional development session allow time for staff members to practice and role play with the new information.

Remember...

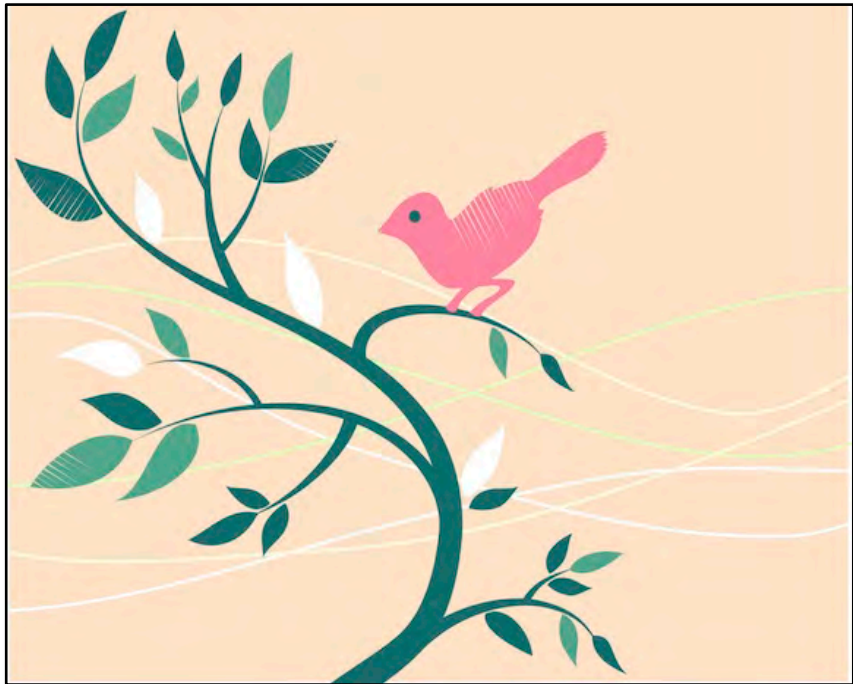
I hear and I forget.

I see and I remember.

I do and I understand.

Confucious

5. TIME TO PRACTICE



Perhaps your session is about showing new craft ideas for follow-on work in the classroom.

Make sure you have materials ready and the time set aside for staff to create a sample to take away to their classrooms.

Provide enough time to do an activity start to finish. Chances are your staff will remember in a month what they did in that session.

Big hint: Do the project yourself to know how much time to put on the agenda.

Also, create opportunities to practice after the session.

6. GET FEEDBACK



There are times that the greatest ideas fall flat. The counterpoint to that is sometimes what we see as trivial has deep meaning.

Give opportunities for your staff to share how they see using this new information, how it may have changed their perceptions, how it might have created an eagerness to do something different.

It may not be on your formal agenda, but schedule time to share feedback about ideas and opportunities for change from the new information being presented.

7. LONG-TERM FOCUS



As you observe the bumps in the road to understand key frustrations in your community and you are genuinely concerned about what your staff members are asking for personal growth, the art of the long view becomes a focal point.

As they say, Rome wasn't built in a day.

Keep a vision of what you want your school to be in a year, five years, ten years and twenty years.

Vision makes it easier to pick the topic and plan for effective professional development.

8. PEER-TO-PEER TRAINING



Another advantage of seeking your staff members' input about what they want and need for professional development is this:

You'll understand how your staff members see their professional development.

A staff member has a request?

Perhaps there is another staff member who can take a leadership role and share their experiences and resources in your professional development session.

When we use peer-to-peer training we are using a great Montessori principle of children teaching children.

We don't have to be the sage on the stage. We can be the guide on the side.

A very Montessori approach to professional development.

SUMMARY

- ✓ Ask your staff what they need and want in terms of professional development.
- ✓ Observe the bumps in the road. Be aware of key frustrations in your community.
- ✓ Offer material and information your staff can use right away.
- ✓ Give time to practice and implement new ideas.
- ✓ Build in time to practice.
- ✓ Offer time and opportunities for feedback.
- ✓ Keep a long-term focus. Practice the art of the long view.
- ✓ Try peer-to-peer training.

ABOUT MAREN SCHMIDT, M. ED.



Since 1980 I've been involved in Montessori education in some way or the other, as a parent, a board member, an AMI trained teacher, a school founder, a school administrator, as well as a national workshop leader.

I've written two books, *Understanding Montessori: A Guide For Parents* and *Building Cathedrals Not Walls*.

Since 2004 I've written the popular blog, newsletter, and newspaper column, Kids Talk. In 2012 I began doing online workshops with parents, teachers, and school administrators all over the world, work I truly love.

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