

One hundred years ago, Maria Montessori, a medical doctor, became an educator of young children. She approached her work as a scientist and became a curious observer of the nature of the child and the process of learning. For fifty years she honed her methods and her craft. She came to the conclusion that there is an innate spirit of peaceful cooperation within children and thus within each human life. This she believed was the true nature of humanity and she saw the potential for transforming whole societies by nurturing these innate gifts through education. Mahatma Gandhi was one of the many friends she made during her travels and he agreed, "If you want real change in the world, you have to start with the children."

In 1987, scholar, writer and social activist Rianne Eisler published her book *The Chalice and the Blade*, which explores the emergence throughout history of cultures based on partnership and contrasts them with the more prevalent cultures based on relationships of domination over other genders, ethnic groups and over nature itself. By 2000, when she published *Tomorrow's Children*, her research had lead her to the same conclusion Montessori and Gandhi had reached, that our survival depends on nurturing our partnership relationships and we must start with the children by transforming schools.

Also in the 1980's, social entrepreneur Bill Drayton founded Ashoka, a network to support changemakers who envision solving complex social problems through cultivating critical skills such as empathy, team work, and leadership. Thirty years later Drayton and Ashoka have concluded that cultivating changemaker skills must start in early childhood and they founded the Start Empathy network of schools such as Khalsa Montessori School to serve as models for developing the the academic and social-emotional skills needed in the 21st century.

Although they began their journeys in different disciplines-- medicine, sociology, business or law-- these forward thinkers each wondered what else the world could be and envisioned pathways to get there. These pathways converged in the heart and mind of the child, and recognized the role of schools during the formative years of childhood. Now the marketplace is flooded with books by researchers and scientists who cite the latest brain research to advocate for evidence-based education that supports the growth of the whole child and understands the way the brain learns. What was once the territory of visionaries and theorists is now the territory of scientific research. Psychology research suggests that evidence-based education would: involve movement aligned with cognition, be based on interest and choice, avoid extrinsic rewards and evaluations, involve peer interaction, be situated in meaningful contexts (experiential learning), involve warm, loving adults who structure the child's experience, and include an organized curriculum occurring in an orderly environment. These are all key components of Montessori education.

Maria Montessori talked of transforming the personality, "normalizing" the child through rich experiences in a learning community of meaningful hands-on work and supportive relationships. Current research in neuroplasticity confirms that indeed our brains are changeable and our brain structure and perceptions of the world are built by our experiences and relationships. Dr. Dan Siegel, in *The Whole Brain Child* explains the importance of integrating our whole brains and our whole lives. He offers practical advice for connecting, building secure attachments, de-stressing, calming reactive emotions, and teaching regulation, self-awareness (mindsight) and other-awareness (empathy). This new understanding of interpersonal neurobiology reveals how parents and teachers can provide learning experiences and communicate with children in ways that grow brains to be healthy, happy, resilient, compassionate and creative. These are the changemaker skills needed for thriving in our changing world.