

MONTESSORI FOR A PRINCE

by Susan Mayclin Stephenson

It was July 24, 2013. All of us at The Montessori Institute in Denver, Colorado, were working hard to prepare students for the oral examiners soon to arrive from abroad. But we couldn't help but follow the news of the birth of the new royal baby of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge. Finally, the little boy made his appearance; the happy parents presenting him to the world.

A little voice was heard through the throng of us peeking over each other's shoulders, "oohing" and "ahhing" at the sight of the baby. "Someone should send them a copy of *The Joyful Child*." "Yes!" everyone agreed. But then we got back to our work.

Only one person persisted. Freddy Alcock, a Montessori elementary student from Amsterdam, who was in Denver because his mother, Heidi Phillappart, was in the long and intensive program to become a Montessori Assistant to Infancy (A to I) teacher trainer. He came to me and said, "I really think we should send the book."

I replied, "Have you read it?"

Freddy, "No, but I have seen the cover, and I have heard that it is important for parents of new babies."

"Well, Freddy, if you read it and still think it is a good idea, I'll help you with this project."

We all left Freddy alone for the next few hours, as he pored through the many pictures, captions, and main text in *The Joyful Child: Montessori, Global Wisdom for Birth to Three*, jotting down notes as he turned the pages. When he was finished, he said, "Okay, will you help me write the letter?"



Freddy is fluent in spoken English, but his education is in Dutch, and he was unsure of his ability to write such an important letter in this language. So the two of us seated ourselves on the floor of the storage closet, the only place in the building free from the hum of students preparing for exams—me with my laptop and Freddy with his notes. Freddy read his notes, and I typed, then we discussed, rearranged, added, deleted, and came up with a satisfying letter that I emailed to the institute secretary to print out, so Freddy could copy it out in his best cursive handwriting.

Here is Freddy's letter:

*Your Royal Highnesses of Cambridge and Baby prince,**

My name is Freddy Alcock, and I am ten years old. I go to a Montessori school just like you did, your royal Highness William. I am from Holland, but I am right now in Denver, Colorado, because my mother is learning to be a Montessori trainer for people working with babies. A friend of mine, Susan Stephenson, wrote this book. She will sign it for you. Parents don't like a lot of advice, but there are some things in the book that you might find helpful. Don't use a pacifier that stays in the mouth all day. Touching and feeling are very important. Let your child feel free to do stuff. If the sleeves are too long, roll them up; otherwise, he can't feel anything. Give him a basket of toys so he can choose for himself, give him clothing that he can move freely in. When he is sleeping, he is doing important stuff. If he is talking, don't interrupt or correct him.

Sincerely, Freddy Alcock

*This was written on the 24th of July 2013, so the baby's name wasn't announced.

As a Montessori teacher of children from 2-18, I know that it is very important to help a student complete a project during the period of interest and enthusiasm, so we searched the Institute until we had found an envelope large enough to hold the book and the letter safely wrapped in bubble wrap. A friend drove us to the post office. Freddy explained everything to the

astonished postmaster, who filled out the forms: “To the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, Buckingham Palace, London.”

A few weeks later a thank-you letter and picture of the new royal family sent from Buckingham Palace arrived at the Montessori Institute in Denver; it was immediately forwarded to Freddy in Amsterdam!

I agree with that very first comment, “Someone should send them a copy of *The Joyful Child*.” Someone should send a copy to every new parent. Most of us reading this story know the value of Montessori from age three on, but Dr. Montessori, in 1947, announced that this was too late to begin if one truly wanted to affect the future life of a person in the best possible way. She knew, even then, that those first days, weeks, months of life have a lasting effect on the child’s trust in the world; his confidence; a lasting effect on all of the physical, mental, and emotional development; and so she began the Assistants to Infancy program to help parents provide the very best support at the most important time: the first three years of life.

What might the world be like if ALL of our leaders learned early on in their lives the joy of doing real work and of caring for others and the environment? Many deep thinkers have spent years exploring the search for happiness and have found that it does not come from possessions, beauty, or fame but from being in the moment, from doing valuable work, helping each other, and contributing to the future of the world. Over and over, in the Montessori A to I work, we see that humans are born with this wisdom; if it is protected, it can change the world.

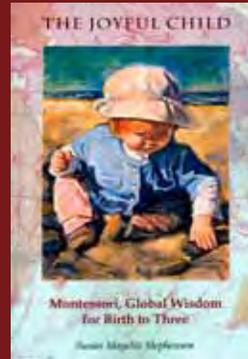
The thoughtful thank-you note from the royal family did not mention anything specific about the book or Montessori ideas, but there have been many pictures of Prince George and his parents in the media, and none of them show the infant with a pacifier! If the parents follow the other Montessori advice shared in Freddy’s letter we are in for a treat. ■

Susan Mayclin Stephenson is AMI trained at the 0-3, 3-6, and 6-12 levels. Visit her website at: www.susanart.net

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The Joyful Child: Montessori, Global Wisdom for Birth to Three, 5x8, 260 pages, 160 black & white pictures \$19.95

The human infant first experiences love and compassion through its mother, and people who receive maximum affection in these early years have less fear and distrust and are more compassionate toward others. Montessori is wonderful in this way.

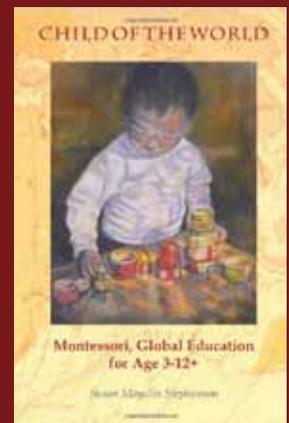
—The Dalai Lama, Dharamsala, India

Here are some things in the book (The Joyful Child) that you might find helpful. Don't use a pacifier that stays in the mouth all day . . . if the sleeves are too long roll them up otherwise he can't feel anything . . . when he is sleeping he is doing important stuff. If he is talking don't interrupt or correct him.

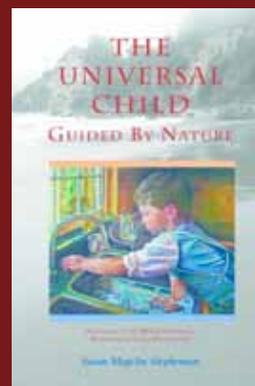
—from a letter to the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge when their son was born, written by a British-Welsh Montessori student, age 10

This book explains the meaning of life, how you are supposed to live it. It would be helpful to other people my age. If the young person does not want to read the chapter, The Young Adult, Age 12-18, then the parents should read it so they can help their son or daughter become a better person.

—Dutch Montessori student, age 13



Child of the World: Montessori, Global Education for Age 3-12+ 5x8, 170 pages, 40 black & white pictures \$14.95



The Universal Child, Guided by Nature: Adaptation of the 2013 International Montessori Congress Presentation 5x8, 56 pages, 140 colored pictures, \$16.95

Friends who do not go to a Montessori school are always asking me what the difference between their school and mine is. Or they ask me to explain what a Montessori school is.

After reading this book I think I can tell them.

—USA Montessori student, age 12

The Joyful Child

Montessori Global Wisdom for Birth to Three

The *Joyful Child: Montessori Global Wisdom for Birth to Three* (Michael Olaf, 2013) is Susan Mayclin Stephenson's latest book. Susan draws on her extensive experience working with children in different cultures and socio-economic contexts around the world, combined with deep insight into the philosophical and pedagogical underpinnings of the Montessori approach.

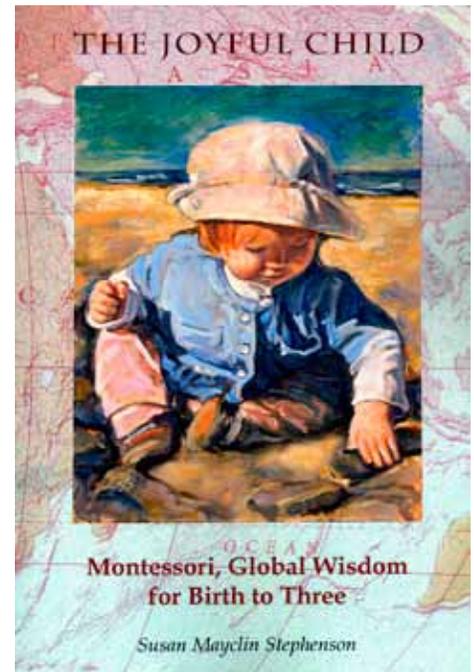
The book begins with a guide for parents of children in the first year of life, with many details on what to look for and enjoy in the first days and months. There are specific developmental steps to watch for and support, such as: the important visual and auditory experience of the child in the first days of life; the importance of language in the environment; and the development of movement stages of the whole body and the hand—reaching, grasping, sitting, crawling, pulling up, and walking.

Since we know that the first three years are vital in feeding the physical and mental development of the child in the correct way, there are many ideas for introducing the child to: the areas of practical life; sensorial toys and puzzles; music; language; art; people; plants and animals; the physical sciences; and math. These are useful not only for parents in the home but also for Montessori teachers at this level.

The appendix contains a child's perspective on the process of weaning in 15 pages, with pictures, titled, "How I Weaned Myself," which is based on the Montessori Assistants to Infancy Program that was initiated in Rome in 1947 by Maria Montessori. It also contains a reprint of an article previously published in *Communications*, the Journal of The Association Montessori International, comparing the Assistant to Infancy practices with the age-old traditions in Bhutan.

The author writes in such a way that the sometimes esoteric Montessori concepts are easily understood. As a result, this book has been used with adolescents in Montessori Human Development classes, as an overview in Montessori training courses at all levels from birth through the middle school years, and is being translated into several languages. As examples, the Japanese translation of an earlier version of *The Joyful Child* is a text for an online parenting course in that country, and is being shared, chapter by chapter, with parents of schools in Russia.

The author's first exposure to the international study of human development was as a college sophomore in 1962-1964; she took a course researching international practices of family life while traveling by ship, participating in intensive studies and in field trips in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. She



has been working in the Montessori field for almost 45 years, the last 25 in the area of the child in the first 3 years of life. She has been writing *The Joyful Child* throughout this time, constantly adapting the text to answer questions by parents, and during her work as a Montessori consultant, speaker, and examiner for Montessori 0-3 courses in many countries including Nepal, India, Bhutan, Russia, Holland, and China. Her website, if you would like to know more about this devoted Montessori mother, grandmother, and teacher, is www.susanart.net.

The book contains 260 pages with 160 black and white pictures of children. Published by Michael Olaf Montessori Company, Arcata, California.