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Covid-19 Creating Opportunities

Covid-19 has been an incredible moment in history to STOP and just be! Just be a partner, a spouse, a parent, a family, a chef, a gardener, a painter, a musician, a thinker, a stargazer, an athlete, yourself. It has been a time of contemplation for some, frustration for others, and unexpected blessings!

When SMTC announced they would be offering the AMI Montessori 3-6 Orientation Course online (because of Covid-19) with the approval of AMI, I was so excited.

We are halfway through, and the course has surpassed all expectations with the breadth of content and depth of understanding Amy is so generously sharing and patiently explaining to our cohort of 26. Participants from across Australia, and several from overseas, all with different backgrounds and levels of experience, yet one common goal: to know the 3-6 year old child and a deeper understanding of Montessori for this aged child. Many, like myself, would never have been able to do the course if it had not been offered online.

My heart is full of gratitude for this opportunity and I want to thank the decision makers who took a chance on this very bold move with 'online learning'. It has been a great mix of lectures, discussions, break out groups with participants, videos, reading, observation requirements and homework. *(Katherine, 3 to 6 Orientation course student)*

I was in two minds whether to pursue the 3-6 diploma course when our start date was delayed, but it has truly exceeded my expectations and I'm glad I did. The course is intense, and Covid-19 has meant that we had to learn differently during periods of self-isolation. Nevertheless, Amy has been extremely thoughtful and considered in making sure the impact is minimised and our learning maximised. My favourite part of the course is the theory, readings, discourse and reflection, as I think a Montessori course is not as simple as just the materials. I am glad I undertook the AMI training as I imagine it would have been incredibly difficult to absorb the hands on training any other way. A classmate who has a Bachelor's degree in early childhood remarked that our 3-6 training prepares an early childhood teacher to be work ready, and I would agree. *(Lisa, 3 to 6 Diploma student).*

I came from Malaysia just to take the diploma course. Because of the current situation I had to go back to Malaysia and am currently continuing the training remotely. I'm really thankful for the trainer's decision [and AMI's flexibility in approving this] of moving it online so that we can all continue the training.

During the 3 months I was in the training room, I got to communicate with the trainer and other students, have discussions and practice with materials. Doing it online, it is hard to not practice with readily available materials. I'm thankful everyone is really kind and helpful throughout the training. They send me pictures, always answer and carefully explain whatever I don't understand. I look forward to returning when I can. *(Nik, 3 to 6 Diploma student)*

The Australian 3 to 6 Community were supported with the scheduling of regular zoom meetings. The reminder to always look at the characteristics and needs of the child and find ways to connect children to their environment underpinned these discussions. Thanks to everyone who contributed ideas and strategies for how to help children, families and staff as they also transitioned into, and out of, remote learning.

Thanks to AMI who organised regular meetings across multiple time zones and countries to help Training Centres ensure that at all times the quality of courses continued. Different processes around exams, requirements for observations and teaching placements have been, and continue to be, discussed and fine tuned.

Adaptation is, as we know, a human tendency. AMI are demonstrating their practical application of adaptation by offering orientation courses via distance education during this pandemic. I am thrilled to be learning on line, as attending this course face to face was just not feasible, as it was offered in Sydney. The non face to face time allocation is generous and affords me time to process not just lectures and book excerpts but relevant papers by highly regarded Montessori academics. *(Leanne, 0 to 3 Orientation course student)*

Even with travel restrictions, the Australian Trainers (Sara, Julia, Amy and Rebecca) have continued to roam the world, albeit virtually, working on courses and beginning new ones. At present, more time is spent in front of screens versus sitting on planes; and working out time zones, sometimes weekly, has been added to the “new normal”.

Covid-19 has been a challenging time, but it has also been a time where we pulled together, found creative solutions, learnt new skills and discovered we are resilient. Perhaps it has also been a time when, despite the requirements for physical distancing, we have found ourselves closer than ever as we work together to help education truly become an aid to life. *(Amy, 3 to 6 Trainer)*

“World unity is there already; it exists! The issue, therefore, is to do everything possible to help mankind become conscious of this reality, substituting the perception of a need to create union among men by the revelation that ties of interdependence and social solidarity among the peoples of the earth already exist real and strong.” (Maria Montessori)