

# MERGe, Sofia, October 2018



## Montessori Research Group (MERGe) takes off

The deep understanding of Montessori Education must come from research and studies developed in the context of the contemporary world. To reach this aim, Montessori Europe has initiated the Research Working Group, MERGe. The main tasks of [MERGe](#) are to improve Montessori practice through research and to contribute to Montessori teacher's professional development by engaging in research-oriented activities.

Montessori teachers engaged in research are at the centre of MERGe. It is the intention of MERGe to act as a meeting point and a place for receiving support, a place to connect teachers and researchers and as a place of discussing possibilities of involvement in (new) research.

In order to realize our aims, members of MERGe had been quite active during the ME conference in Sofia, October 5-7<sup>th</sup>. Between March 2018 (Berlin) and October 2018 (Sofia) core members of MERGe communicated actively via e-mail and Skype in order to prepare for our activities at the ME conference.

## MERGe at the ME conference in Sofia

Before the conference started core members of MERGe organized a meeting on Friday morning, to talk about the organization of our activities during the conference. Also we discussed the need for writing a practical-oriented manual for Montessori teachers on *Action* research in the Montessori classroom.

Our first activity during the ME conference was a symposium consisting of two parts. Firstly, Montessori teachers from different European countries shortly presented their research findings and ideas followed by a dynamic and lively discussion. The second part involved a short presentation of a forthcoming study conducted by Montessori researchers. The symposium was attended by twelve attendees from New Zealand, Ireland, Germany, Bulgaria, Poland and the Netherlands. At the beginning MERGe aims were presented to underline the essence of MERGe.

The two Dutch Montessori teachers Marielle van der Heijden and Jaqueline Bentlage presented their action research focusing on the *topic Learning to self-regulate in the Montessori classroom*. Marielle presented her study, in which she observed at two Dutch Montessori schools. In different classrooms characteristics of self-regulated learning was observed using an observation list. In addition, a questionnaire was administered to nine Montessori teachers working in these schools, asking them to reflect on the importance of self-regulated learning. The Montessori schools we observed showed a variety of possibilities for self-regulated learning. Jacqueline talked about her research in which she developed and studied a course design for early readers learning to read in a self-regulated way. This intervention involved ten lessons in which students got an overview of important goals necessary for learning to read in a self-regulated way. Results showed that students who participated in our intervention were able to read on a higher level compared to a group of students that did not participate in the intervention

In turn, Dilyana Ivanova, teacher at Otets Paisy School, Zheleznitsa talked about her experiences in establishing a Montessori group. She was interested in receiving support from more experienced teachers. The last teacher, Christina Beitzel Degasper, presented a theme prepared by Clare Healy Walls - Waterpark Montessori International (WMI) Action Research. The essential nature of action research was described briefly as well as its procedure within WMI trainings. Christina presented three action research projects that had been conducted by teachers .

The second part of the meeting was devoted to the idea of engaging in a collaborative research on executive functioning in Montessori education. Thus, teachers' partnership with scientists was established. Patrick Sins and Jaap de Brouwer presented in a very clear and interactive manner the plan of conducting research that addresses the question: Does Montessori Education enhance Executive Functions? Patrick and Jaap asked whether attendees were interested in participating and contributing to this study. Each MERGe participant declared to be willing to take part in the initiative.

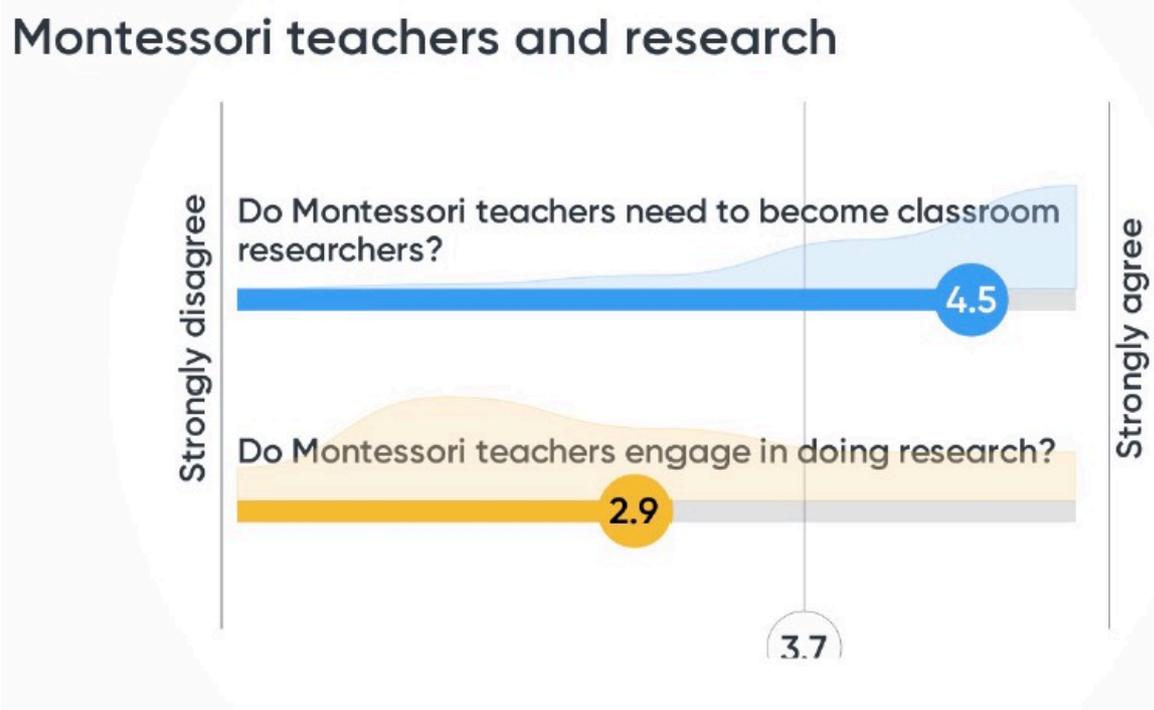
At the end of the meeting, MERGe participants valued the idea of posting research reports written by Montessori teachers on ME website, that are put under the, MERGe link: "Stories from Montessori schools". The participants of the meeting in addition stated that it would be worth taking into account that in the program of subsequent congresses of Montessori Europe workshops are organized to improve teachers' research skills

### **"Think big, start small"**

On Saturday evening, MERGe organised a panel discussion under the title: *Research behind Montessori best practices – how can ME support teachers in conducting research for their professional development?* Ginni Sackett (AMI Director of Pedagogy, trainer, lecturer, consultant), Tania Hurter (Assistant to Infancy at La Maison des Enfants), Dorota Zdybel – (Akademia Ignatianum in Kraków - MERGe member) Jarosław Jendza – (University of Gdansk - MERGe member), Jaap de



The audience highly agreed with the panelists that Montessori teachers need to become classroom teachers. However, they also indicated that at present they are not engaged in doing researchers as shown below.



According to the audience different kinds of support are needed in order to bridge the gap between intentions and actions, time and resources being the most important. MERGe aims to help teachers to receive training (during ME conferences) and seek collaborating with researchers. In addition we aim to entertain a positive attitude toward research-oriented activities in the Montessori classroom.



At the end every panelist had to point out his advice to teachers who are willing to explore classroom practice. Their recommendations were, among others: collaboration, sharing experiences, observing each other, cultivation of awareness, thinking about everyday practice from a wide perspective.

The panel discussion was highly appreciated by the audience and served the goals of MERGe enormously well. The results of our activities during the ME conference will be discussed among MERGe members and will definitely be presented and reflected on during the next ME conference.

Beata and Patrick