

Opening the Fourth Wall of the Montessori Classroom

Edward Fidellow

In the world of theater the space that separates a performer or performance from an audience is known as the “fourth wall”, an imaginary wall in front of the stage - that is where the audience sits.

A Montessori school creates the three walls of its performance with students, teachers and prepared environments. On this stage is performed the most fantastic live theater found anywhere in the world. On a daily basis you have great comedy, “tragic” tragedies, adventures, discoveries, enlightenment, passion, hope, love and almost the whole encyclopedia of human experience.

The performance, the production of the Montessori classroom is sometimes scripted, often improv and spontaneous but always directed toward the goal of the child discovering him/herself and the world in which he/she lives.

The poet, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, wrote that drama was the “Willing suspension of disbelief for the moment which constitutes poetic faith.” When you go to the theater or movies you know that these are actors just portraying a role but you put that aside to enjoy the story. However, in your Montessori classroom these are not actors but real people living out the drama of the story of their life. There is an audience for this drama – called parents.

In all story telling "You can ask an audience to believe the impossible, but not the improbable."

“Beam me up Scotty” (for now) is impossible. Godzilla having a change of heart and selling Girl Scout cookies is improbable. It is interesting that the audience for Montessori often cannot believe either the impossible or the improbable. And without help parents can become a disengaged audience because to a traditional educational society children cannot be self-controlled, self-disciplined, self-regulated, initiative driven – the impossible; nor can they be joyous learners, loving learning, well-mannered, orderly and with deep concentration – the improbable.

Disengaged parents do not know what to look for or to expect and they miss the fantastic drama unfolding before them every day. So, if you want maximum performance you need to be engaged and educated; learning what to look for, what to expect. You also need to learn the etiquette of the theater (the classroom) so you can respond accordingly and appropriately. In this drama you don’t want to be people with a “willing suspension of disbelief” but parents who have an active embracing belief in the amazing possibilities for their children. We need to become such parents because the fourth wall of the Montessori classroom opens up directly into our homes and our lives.