



The Montessori OBSERVER

Resolving
Misbehavior

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Phyllis Wallbank Speaks in Washington, DC

On October 21, 2006, **Phyllis Wallbank**, prominent Montessori educator from London, England, spoke in Washington, DC to several hundred teachers and parents interested in Montessori education. She recounted her personal experiences working closely with Dr. Montessori in the last few years before her death in 1952.

Ms. Wallbank, founder and director of the famous Gatehouse school in England, organized the last public lecture by Dr. Montessori and was designated by her to conduct teacher education as well. She also worked closely with **E.M. Standing**, author of *Maria Montessori: Her Life and Work*. Standing was a close associate of Ms. Wallbank as he was employed as a teacher at her school.

In her lecture, Ms. Wallbank emphasized that Dr. Montessori was foremost a scientist who was "driven" by her vision of normal being in children. She emphasized that Dr. Montessori "was not gentle and sentimental herself" and that "she was sometimes angry at misrepresentation" of her work. Wallbank also pointed out that "of all the things that I heard her say and that I think is so very, very profound was this: Spotlight the good and the good will grow."

Speaking privately with Ms. Wallbank after the lecture, **Lee Havis**, IMS executive director, learned that Dr. Montessori spoke only rudimentary English and that her son Mario was constantly available to make suitable clarifying translations when needed. Wallbank also indicated that she thought Dr. Montessori would be quite interested to know about the new IMS technology now available to implement her scientific approach to normal being.

Holding Hands

The IMS technology of Montessori teaching provides techniques, such as *cooperative touching*, which require physical contact with children. Using this technique properly, you must, therefore, be careful to avoid controlling the child in the process. Any physical touching must

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Dane McCullough (left) and Michael Springer (right) engage in nomenclature lesson presentation exercise on beginning reading at the IMS workshop in Utica, NY (Sept. 30-Oct. 1, 2006)

IMS Workshop in Utica, NY

On Sept.30-Oct. 1, 2006, **Lee Havis** conducted a workshop to present the IMS technology in Utica, NY. Sponsored by **Marcia Burrows**, it included the participation of local area teachers as well as persons from the state of Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Colorado and Indiana.

Marcia sponsored this workshop to help share knowledge of the IMS technology with teachers in the local region. She especially used this occasion to improve the operation of her own home-based Montessori environment for her two young children.

The workshop included many practical examples and demonstrations in using the technology to resolve common misbehavior patterns, such as power struggles, social conflicts, fantasy, and dependency in the adult-child relationship. It also included routines and protocols to effectively present sensorial materials and beginning reading.

At the workshop, participants used the Danbury workshop "study guide" as an outline for following the specific presentation of technology. Havis said, "the Danbury workshop audio cd will be especially helpful to reinforce prior learning of the technology because you can listen to it as often as you

like. This repeating reinforcement will help overcome the natural tendency to forget or conform to the surrounding influences of conventional society."

After the workshop, Havis consulted with Marcia, observing her elaborate home-based Montessori environment. He noted the spontaneous energy of her children, pointing out, however, the additional benefit of social learning that would occur in a school program involving more children of different ages.

Reflections

by Wendy Lieberman

Patterns of Abandonment

I think I am getting a lot better at remembering my mistakes...Now, I think I am looking at things in a more objective way which will help me improve.

I saw a pattern in my mistakes during IP (*Imagination-Previsioning*, a meditative technique in IMS technology). I saw that all of the mistakes started with abandonment.

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Resolving Misbehavior

by Lee Havis

"A teacher of experience never has grave disorder in her class because, before she draws aside to leave the children free...she watches and directs them for some time...eliminating their uncontrolled movements."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.245

Resolving misbehavior remains a serious continuing problem for many due to a long-standing lack of knowledge and understanding of the fundamental nature and practice of Montessori teaching. Happily, the 2003 IMS technology overcomes this obstacle by providing the practical knowledge you need to effectively implement Dr. Montessori's scientific approach to normal being. Indeed, resolving misbehavior is one of the technology's three main categories of lesson presentation you conduct with children. This type of interaction is especially important during beginning conditions, when you must deal with the ordinary child who is like a fighter conditioned to resist all normal adult interaction.

A Fighter

"...the child of three...is a fighter on the verge of being vanquished...All that remains active is a superficial personality which exhausts itself in clumsy movements, vague ideas and the effort to resist or avoid adult constraint."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.264

From infancy, children ordinarily develop various personality patterns of fantasy, fear, conflict and disorder as a reaction to negative home life conditioning. The average young child, therefore, enters the Montessori environment as a fighter poised to defend against any interaction with others. Montessori teaching must, therefore, initially challenge this superficial personality by hard polishing the environment to overcome the resistance caused by wrong treatment in the past.

Wrong Treatment

"...every defect of character is due to some wrong treatment sustained by the child during his early years...defects in character; disappear of themselves...One does not need to threaten or cajole, but only to 'normalize the conditions' under which the child lives."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Discovery of the Child*, p.241

Misbehavior is any behavior that is not consistent with normal being. It always reflects some type of outward reaction to wrong treatment from a hostile environment of negativity and abandonment. Only hard polishing, using heavy techniques, such as *distraction* and *cooperative touching*, can usually remove the substantial environmental obstacles at cause.

Removing the Obstacles

"The teacher's happy task is...removing the obstacles, beginning first with those which she herself is likely to present (for the teacher can be the greatest obstacle of all)."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Discovery of the Child*, p.241

In a group, misbehavior materializes in scenarios that focus interest around a central "hub" child. Resolving these misbehavior scenarios is a process of removing the obstacles from the child's environment, which is made up of three specific components: (1) physical objects (2) other children and (3) adult personality. Your basic action then is to apply techniques to control the environment according to certain protocols that closely approximate laws of nature. This process begins with your being a quiet spectator of the total environment, objectively analyzing what is best to do from one moment to the next.

Quiet Spectator

"...it is the environment itself which helps to make the children continuously better...the teacher...can remain a quiet spectator of all the little mistakes that occur around her."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *The Child*, p.12-13

Following the protocol *well-being of the total environment*, you always begin by scanning the environment to determine what is most important for you to do at that time. As a quiet spectator, you must initially set priorities for your involvement, starting first with the scenario that has the greatest danger and potential for harm to children. Guided by your prudent observations, you then conduct experiments to remove the detrimental influences from around the "hub" child in question.

Prudent Observations

"The teacher must be able to make prudent observations, to assist a child by going up to, or withdrawing from, him and by speaking or keeping silent in accordance with his needs."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Discovery of the Child*, p.72

Using prudent observations, you will logically choose to resolve the most serious misbehavior scenario first. For example, noticing a child threatening to harm another child with a physical object, you approach this high priority scenario, using the technique *proximity*. Then, hold the object in the child's hands to get the child's attention, using the technique *distraction*. Following the protocol *eye contact before talking*, you may then offer some earnest words, inviting the child to do something positive away from the misbehavior scenario.

Earnest Words

"If a teacher sees that material is being used in a way that will not attain its goal... she should prevent him from continuing...if he shows a tendency to misbehave, she will check him with earnest words..."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Discovery of the Child*, p.153

At times, you may need to use physical control to resolve misbehavior in handling materials. However, the protocol *least amount of adult involvement* directs you to release any physical control you may employ as soon as possible, relying more on lighter polishing tools, such as the verbal techniques of *clear direction* and *reflective language*. Using earnest safe words, you

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Look for the March 2007 Observer featuring Social Conflict

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Lee Havis, Executive Director

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Moment of Peril

by Wendy Lieberman

Kicking the Teacher

Six-year-old Scott often blocks the path of the teacher when she is walking between his seat and the shelves. See *Observer*, September 2006. Scott puts his legs in her way and looks at her with a playful smile. The teacher smiles back and says, "Excuse me." Scott leaves his legs where they are. After *patient waiting* and *eye contact* the teacher uses *cooperative touching* to move his legs out of the way and says, "Excuse me" again as she passes by. Scott kicks her when she has passed him and if there are other children around, they kick her too. What to do?

This scenario is a level one priority because it involves physical harm to a person, the worst kind of misbehavior. Scott is the hub child of this situation and other children are a secondary detrimental influence. The primary detrimental influence in the environment to control is the teacher's own personality.

The mistake the teacher is making is to use *cooperative touching* at the wrong time. She is getting overly involved in a power struggle rather than backing off. She is resorting to controlling the child as she was controlled by her parents in her own childhood, violating the protocol *least amount of adult involvement*.

She can solve the problem by using lighter techniques when this problem comes up again. She begins just fine by saying, "Excuse me." That follows the protocol *model good behavior*. Using the techniques *patient waiting* and *eye contact* are also the correct next step. But, instead of *repetition* and *cooperative touching*, a better technique to use would be *clear direction*, saying, "Put your legs right here," and then, gesturing to the space under Scott's table. If that doesn't get the desired effect she can use some more *patient waiting* and *eye contact*.

The teacher can also use *clear direction* and *questioning* to talk to Scott about his work. She can also use *patient waiting* and *repetition* if those techniques aren't successful right away. If she is in a really big hurry she can just go around a different way. She just needs to avoid the too-heavy, controlling use of *cooperative touching*.

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Resolving Misbehavior

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might then offer a clear direction phrase, such as "Come over here. Let me show you something." Finally, show the child some simple piece of work away from the scene of disorder.

Work

"Discipline is therefore attained indirectly, that is, by developing activity in spontaneous work."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Discovery of the Child*, p.305

The final step in most resolving misbehavior interactions is to invite the child to some piece of work, which is always the ultimate solution to all misbehavior. As children concentrate on work, their misbehavior tends to diminish and finally disappear in the defining event of normalization. Regrettably, busy teachers often involve themselves too much with children due to over-concern for their academic progress.

Busy Teachers

"While the teacher is busy with one child, the others misbehave."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.246

Some teachers become so busy with the academic work of individual children that they overlook the higher priority need for resolving misbehavior elsewhere in the environment. Violating important protocols, such as *don't interrupt concentration* and *enhance independence*, these busy teachers tend to bring about misbehavior by abandoning those children who most need their attention to stay focused on present-moment reality. Understanding the principles of non-intervention, you must instead use an indirect type of interaction to control the environment, not the child.

Understanding the Principles

"Even an intelligent teacher who has understood the principles finds it very difficult to put into practice...it is her duty to distinguish between acts which should be prevented and those which should be observed."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Discovery of the Child*, p.50-51

Montessori teaching is a way of being committed to laws of nature that closely correspond with such basic principles as (1) Observation (2) Individual Liberty and (3) Preparation of the Environment. Understanding these principles, however, is only possible by expanding their meaning through direct real-life experiences with children. Your experiential understanding will then guide you ultimately to a position of passively watching children in their normal self-directed activity with each other.

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Messages to IMS

Oct. 20, 2006
Rutledge, PA

Lee:

...I'd like to thank Marcia (Burrows) for setting up that opportunity (Utica workshop) for us...I enjoyed the small group we had and was able to take it all in. Thank you Lee and all of the participants...

Hiroimi Umeda

Participant in Utica, NY workshop (Sept., 2006)

Oct. 29, 2006
Martinsville, IN

IMS Listers,

I think my work in the last month can best be described as heightened consciousness about what I am doing — day in and day out, so that I can better integrate the technology into my everyday life...I am spending much more time each day in observable work and feel quite connected and alive. I am aware of and taking many opportunities in which to practice and/or communicate the technology with others.

Esther Rupert

Participant in Utica, NY workshop (Sept, 2006)

Oct. 11, 2006
Portland, OR

Hi Lee,

I took my (Montessori) training in the very early 70s when there was little available in the states and most of our teachers were coming from overseas. My internship supervisor had been trained in Sri Lanka and her trainer was probably only one degree from Maria herself. I recognize many, if not all, the techniques and protocols you list as being what she modeled in the classroom.

Ruth Taber

October 25, 2006
Ashaway, RI

IMS Listers;

...The technology is the quickest, most effective, and most efficient way possible to create environments in which children will spontaneously normalize and stay normalized. You will find that the technology ...not only matches the salient aspects of a child's true nature but also provides the context (protocols) and content (techniques) for guiding normalizing adult behaviors with children....If you fully investigate the technology and pit it against Montessori's writings, you will discover for yourself that...it guides the practitioner toward completely conscious normalizing being with children.

Paul Posillo

Participant in IMS workshop in Utica, NY (Sept. 2006)

October 29, 2006
Hyattsville, MD

IMS Listers:

...the Danbury, CT CD ...is so full of concentrated, informative, useful information that I can see hearing it several times again will be very helpful in my everyday dealings with children...Being retired with more time to be with my grandchildren and other little ones, trying to put this technology into action more, I see the positive effects and I am more aware of how many parents are so frustrated, trying to "control" their kids...The things the children say when I don't "criticize" and how they open up is very satisfying. I turn questions back to them (reflective language) so it makes them think...I encourage them to do things for themselves and the look on their faces shows the pride they feel when they accomplish some feat, with only my encouragement. I am amazed too!

Kathy Fuller

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Watching

"The children are moving about, each fulfilling his own task, whilst the teacher is in a corner watching."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Dr. Montessori's Own Hand.*, p. 59

Following laws of nature, you are creating conditions that allow children to normalize by returning to their true natural state of complete peace, order and harmony as described by Dr. Montessori. However, you can only create the right normalizing conditions in an objective scientific manner by using technology that you can actually understand and employ in practice. The IMS technology serves this purpose, leading you to ultimately remain quietly watching children who don't even notice your presence at all. However, before you can become "nobody" to children, you must learn the precise knowledge involved in resolving misbehavior, which may require a long period of trial and error, practicing the proper technology with children over a considerable period of time.

Precise Knowledge

"The teacher...has many difficult functions...She must acquire a precise knowledge of the techniques...for dealing with the child."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Discovery of the Child*, p. 150-51

Sadly, Montessori proponents often maintain self-defeating ideas that project on children to continue their patterns of misbehavior. Following these ideas, your actions will never bring about the normalized children promised by Dr. Montessori. However, using the IMS technology, you will be resolving misbehavior that ultimately leads to stable and consistent normal development in children all the time.

Moment of Peril

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Transitions

Five-year-old Greg tends to get in power struggles during transitions from one activity to another. After all the children move to the next activity, Greg appears to become more focused on his old activity, showing a false sense of concentration to avoid interaction with the teacher. Even when the teacher uses *proximity, patient waiting, clear direction, and repetition*, Greg stays focused on his activity and often doesn't give eye contact. When the teacher uses distraction through physical contact to get Greg's attention, he responds by pinching and scratching the teacher. *What to do?*

Answer in *Observer*, March, 2007

Reflections

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I noticed that there are many ways that my abandonment shows itself.

There is the abandonment (1) when I am frozen and just watch misbehavior instead of getting more involved when necessary. (2) Then there is the abandonment that happens when I am concentrating on something elsewhere and then a problem comes up and I am too slow to react. (3) Another one is when I go to do something else before the children are stable in their ability. I had all those kinds today.

In my IP, I imagined myself moving when I was frozen, which is the same problem I had yesterday. Hopefully, I won't fall into that pattern tomorrow. Also, I imagined stopping my concentration as soon as I had any hint that there was misbehavior as I have done on other occasions, as well.

Holding Hands

Cont'd. from Page 1, Col. 1

be truly "cooperative" to the child's true nature, and not "controlling".

Cooperative touching involves the child's free interaction in the physical contact. For example, when adult and child are holding hands, the child is holding the adult's hands, not vice versa. The illustration below show the pertinent distinction.



No. Don't take the hand of child in a controlling manner. This violates the principle *individual liberty*, which controls the child and violates such protocols as *enhance independence*.



Yes. Child is taking the hand of the adult. This hand-holding is usually initiated by giving the clear direction safe word phrase: "Take my hand". This show an effective application of the technique *cooperative touching*.