



The Montessori OBSERVER

Character
Teaching

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The Distraction Technique

“Distraction: *Technique involving teacher getting attention of child in misbehavior scenario. Usually, it involves touching or briefly holding some physical object in the scenario.”*

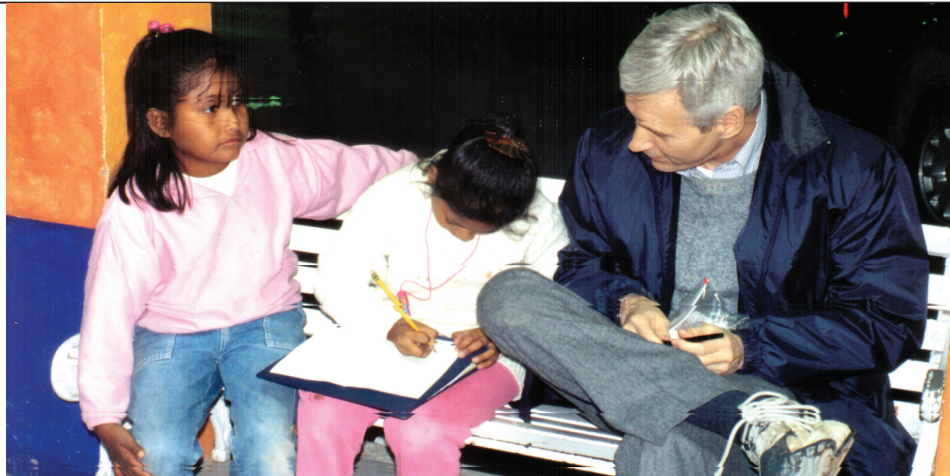
Lee Havis (Glossary of Montessori Terms)

The IMS Montessori technology includes the technique *distraction* as a relatively heavy polishing tool for controlling the environment to resolve various misbehavior scenarios. It applies particularly well to dealing with children's misuse of physical objects.

The main feature of this technique is getting the child's attention, which you can usually accomplish by touching or holding the misused object in the child's hand until there is eye contact between you and the child. Following the protocol *least amount of adult involvement*, you must quickly release your hold of the object as soon as you have the child's attention to avoid a “tug of war” power struggle with the child over the object.

After using the *distraction* technique, it is customary to apply the *clear direction* technique to show some piece of work, using a safe word phrase, such as, “Come over here. Let me show you something”. Showing work is an important final step

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Lee Havis (right) conducting informal tutoring component of “Character Teaching” with children on the streets of Las Flores, Mexico

IMS Consultation at New Way Montessori School

In September and October, 2007, Lee Havis, IMS executive director, conducted two 10-day consultation visits at the *New Way Montessori School* in Meridian, ID. Sponsored by *Idaho Montessori Trust* (Lee Havis, Wendy Lieberman, trustees), the *New Way School* is serving as an important laboratory for studying the practical use and effect of the IMS Montessori technology with children. Thus far, these visits have addressed issues relating to the basic order of the environment, including such topics as: disobedience, transition procedures for outside time, naptime and lunch, abandonment to fantasy, dependency in the adult-child relationship, social disharmony, physical aggression, and lack of work with materials.

Lee points out that the *New Way School* is still in its initial development stage, dealing with misbehavior and disorder issues that are common to many new experimental programs for children. He noted that “The primary advantage of this particular experiment is the high level of commitment of the teaching staff to learn and use the IMS technology, and their very positive attitude and approach towards the children. Problems arise, however, from their limited practical experience with the technology and the challenging circumstances of misbehavior in beginning conditions.”

Lee's consultation involves a combination of directly interacting with children, observing staff, and conducting follow-up discussion to analyze the various problems

that arise each day. Progress and results of this research are being reported to the IMS discussion list, *intmontsoc*, to include some 400 educators throughout the world in this learning experience as well. Lee is also incorporating this research into his new text, *Technology of Montessori Teaching*.

So far, the consultation has made some important findings to deal with a number of issues, such as: **Disobedience**— obtain child's attention before giving *clear direction*, using full-body contact if necessary; however, be brief and use *patient waiting* and *repetition* as well, in the nature of “planting seeds”; **Transition procedures**— fully

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Reflections

By Robbyn German

Robbyn German (IMS 07) is director of Robbyn's Nest Montessori School in Sherman, CT. Her comments here are taken from a message she sent to the IMS discussion list, intmontsoc.

The Technology Works

All I know is that the technology works. Sometimes honestly I find myself reverting back to my traditional ways. Then I hear bells go off and Lee's voice saying you are breaking a protocol. The hardest thing for me is standing back and letting the children pick what they want to do from the environment.

I was so used to being in charge for so long. Now, I prepare the environment and try to stand back unless there are any scenarios. Having three siblings in one class can be difficult. The biggest problem I have is sharing. Two of the girls want the same item. *Proximity*, and *eye contact* work most of the time. One time I had to touch the object when things became heated.

Montessori Workshops

Technology of Montessori Teaching for the Scientific Approach to Normal Being

The IMS workshop is a two-day weekend learning experience, featuring Lee Havis, IMS executive director, presenting the unique 2003 technology of Montessori teaching. This technology is precise practical knowledge for conducting the scientific approach with children that leads to true normal being as discovered by Dr. Montessori in 1907.

Workshops are scheduled according to local interest. Contact: IMS, tel. 301-589-1127; havis@imsmontessori.org



Character Teaching

"By character, we mean the behavior of men driven (though often unconsciously) to make progress."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.213

Montessori teaching follows laws of nature with children to bring about true normal character qualities, such as independence, self-discipline, patience, and integrity in the human personality. In this sense, it is a type of *character teaching*, which can be adapted to overcome many fundamental obstacles to progress in society. Unfortunately, conventional Montessori teaching has largely abandoned this noble purpose for character development, focusing instead on improving academic performance and polite manners to conform to the surrounding culture.

The International Montessori Society (IMS), however, follows Dr. Montessori's original character development approach to normal being, which is capable of resolving the culture of poverty and abusive child labor that is so widespread and problematic throughout the world. In this spirit, IMS began developing a character teaching (CT) project in 2001 to specifically address these serious social problems, recognizing that Montessori teaching is uniquely suited to function in conditions of extreme poverty.

Extreme Poverty

"The circumstances which favored the first experiment were mainly three: (1) Extreme poverty and a social condition of much difficulty...(2) parents of these children were illiterate...(3) The teachers were not professional teachers."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Ed. for a New World*, p.51-52

Dr. Montessori discovered the child's true nature in 1907 by observing poor young children living in very difficult social conditions. In this first Children's House experiment in Rome, Italy, she found the combination of extreme poverty, parental ignorance and untrained teachers to be ideal for neutralizing the negative effects of detrimental influences in the surrounding society. Of course, the special circumstances for the success of this experiment are lacking in wealthy communities where Montessori teaching is now most widely sought to function.

Special Circumstances

"...facts...in Rome many years ago would not have happened but for special circumstances. If a House for Children had been organized in a rich quarter of New York, nothing of note would have happened, just as nothing happens in many schools which are richly endowed."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Ed. for a New World*, p.51

Since 1907, Montessori teaching has largely been attempted only outside the

special poverty circumstances that so favored its original great success. In wealthy conditions, however, parents and government agencies tend to hold back Montessori teaching by imposing limitations, expectations, and pressure for superficial results of academic performance and culturally-approved behavior. In all organized cultures, therefore, public opinion tends to discourage any Montessori teaching that is completely committed to true normal being in children.

Public Opinion

"...defects of character...are not always regarded as bad by public opinion. Some are even valued. Passive children are thought to be good. Noisy and exuberant children with vivid imaginations are thought to be spiritually brilliant."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.201

Public opinion has now largely made Montessori teaching into a form of conventional education, viewing children as limited, empty, and dependent on external control. This conventional Montessori teaching, however, cannot effectively address the fundamental cause of cultural poverty, which is so deeply-rooted as an accepted truth in many parts of the world. At most, it offers only short-term superficial results, such as moving poor working children from the streets or factory to a classroom of teacher-directed curriculum.

Since conventional schooling only builds up character defects, such as dependency on external authority and the illusion of benefit without effort, the basic problems of long-term poverty remain. By contrast, IMS offers an expansive type of Montessori teaching that follows natural laws of the universe.

Natural Laws

"There are natural laws which guide growth and formation, and the individual must follow these laws if he is to build up his character..."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.218

Following personality or culture, Montessori teaching can only treat the symptoms of poverty and basic human depravation. However, Montessori teaching that is committed to natural laws allows children to follow their own perfect inner guidance to return to their true normal state of peace, order, and harmony with others. This approach aims only to normalize the conditions, enabling children to bring out their own inherent qualities of normal character development.

Normalize the Conditions

"Lack of character, or defects of character disappear of themselves, without any need for preaching by grownups or for grown-up examples. One does not need to threaten or cajole, but only to 'normalize the conditions' under which the child lives."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.299

Montessori teaching normalizes the conditions for children by removing detrimental influences of the adult personality, other children and physical objects in the environment around each individual child. Since 2003, this process has been greatly simplified with the advent of IMS Montessori technology.

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Lee Havis, Executive Director

The Montessori Observer is mailed four times each year, in March, May, September and November, to Society members throughout the world. The purpose is to provide news and information about the Society's work in Montessori education, and to extend awareness of Montessori principles throughout the world.

INTERNATIONAL MONTESSORI SOCIETY

The International Montessori Society is sponsored by Educational Services, Inc., a non-profit corporation organized in Maryland, USA. The Society's purpose is to support the effective application of Montessori principles throughout the world.

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Subscription to this Observer publication may be obtained by requesting Society membership, which is open to all individuals for a \$30 annual fee. Associate schools, \$35 annual fee. Society members also receive a subscription to the Montessori News and other membership benefits.

IMS ON THE INTERNET

An on-line IMS discussion group, intmonsoc (International Montessori Society) is available for anyone to join at no charge.

To subscribe to this list, send an email to - intmonsoc-subscribe@yahoogroups.com, and then follow instructions to request placement on the list.

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Moment of Peril

by Wendy Lieberman

Getting up at nap time

The teacher stays with Sarah during naptime so she doesn't get up to disturb others. (See *Observer*, September, 2007). However, when she moves away, Sarah gets up anyway.

This scenario is a level 1 priority for attention because the child's wild, disruptive behavior around the room is a physical threat to other children who are lying on their mats. In this situation, Sarah is the hub child. The primary detrimental influence is the adult personality; however, physical objects and other children are also detrimental at times as well.

The teacher's main mistake is creating a power struggle and dependency relationship with Sarah by staying with her too long. Although she believes her close physical contact is helping Sarah settle down, in fact it is fostering a dependency relationship with her, violating the protocols *least amount of adult involvement* and *enhance independence*.

Solving the problem requires the teacher to moderate her involvement with Sarah at nap time, focusing more on light polishing only, using such techniques as *eye contact*, *repetition* and *proximity*. For example, she must interact physically with Sarah only when she is disturbing others with her wiggling and loud noises. As soon as Sarah starts to calm down, the teacher must move away, allowing her to control her own body movements and noise in a more independent manner.

The teacher must also focus more attention on controlling other children around Sarah, settling them down to remove their detrimental influence in the environment. However, if Sarah does get up in a disruptive manner, the teacher may certainly approach to get her attention by using the *distraction* technique, and then giving a *clear direction* to return to her spot.

If necessary, the teacher can even get Sarah's attention by holding her whole body for a brief moment, and then giving the *clear direction* to return. She can also use the techniques *repetition*, *cooperative touching* and *patient waiting* to reinforce her polishing. Using this combination of light and heavy polishing, the teacher will gradually help Sarah come into harmony with the basic order of staying on mats during naptime.

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Character Teaching Cont'd. from Page 2, Col. 3

The *Character Teaching* (CT) project proposes to train teachers for using this new IMS technology to implement Montessori teaching in two basic components: (1) a formal model school for young children, and (2) an informal daily tutoring program for poor working children in the open air. The formal model school will be conducted in the ideal circumstances for 2-6 year old poor children, allowing them to freely engage in a sequence of activities based on their own self-directed interests.

Sequence of Activities

"...children construct their own characters, building up in themselves the qualities we admire. These do not spring from our example or admonishments, but they result solely from a long and slow sequence of activities, carried out by the child himself between the ages of three and six."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.208

The CT model school enables young children to carry out a sequence of learning activities to concentrate on work with materials that eventually leads to their complete normalization. Once normalized, children begin to express positive character qualities, such as self-reliance, integrity, and personal dignity, which can become fixed in their stable way of being for life. As adults, these same qualities will then become the fabric of a new higher level of moral and responsible behavior in society.

Although a formal classroom environment is ideal for all poor children, this may not always be possible due to disorder in the family and social structure of many poor countries. The CT project therefore offers an informal tutoring component to reach poor working children where they gather in the open air to beg, work, or sell objects for their basic physical survival.

Informal Tutoring

"If we want an easy experiment with sure success, we should go to work among poor children, offering them an environment which they don't possess."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Ed. for a New World*, p.52

The informal tutoring aspect of the CT project sets up a Montessori environment by establishing a short-term contract with poor working children based on the concept *exchange of value*. This idea involves a time-money exchange in which the CT tutor gives the child a small amount of money in exchange for a few minutes of the child's time for instruction in such basic skills of reading, writing, or math. Offering the money establishes a *basis of interest* for the lesson presentation; and, withholding its payment until after the lesson assures an effective control of the environment.

At each instructional session, the CT tutors follow the protocol *Be friendly — get acquainted*, recording the child's name, age, residence

and lesson presented. This written data helps monitor and regulate the progress of each child's learning, providing also a record to pay the tutors according to the number of session conducted. Repeating these sessions on a regular, frequent basis allows children to deeply experience the value of their time, building up such positive character qualities as self-respect, patience, integrity and persistent to task. The children then establish a more positive way of thinking about themselves and others, eventually bringing out higher character qualities in all areas of life.

Positive Incentives

The CT tutoring component also contemplates special incentives for children who successfully continue in the program. For example, after 10 sessions, children receive a notebook journal and writing instrument of their own. They can also later qualify to receive clothing, text books, learning materials, and other useful items to encourage and acknowledge their commitment to progress and successful learning.

The CT project is a simple, direct application of Montessori teaching, yet still quite challenging due to its novel and unconventional nature. It is, therefore, very experimental, requiring a high level of personal integrity, commitment, and self-discipline by all supervisory staff. In operation, it must overcome a number of very practical obstacles.

Obstacles

"...all obstacles must be removed so that men, all over the surface of the globe, should be as children playing in a garden."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Peace and Education*, p.27

Until 2003, the main practical obstacle to conducting an effective CT project was the lack of suitable means to quickly and efficiently train a large number of skilled Montessori teachers. Although the new IMS Montessori technology now theoretically solves this problem, the practical challenge still remains to identify those persons sufficiently interested and able to implement this knowledge in practice. For example, many still cling to conventional ideas about character development, such as the idea that giving any amount of money to children, no matter how little or how controlled, is somehow too corrupting to have any beneficial effect.

Due to these obstacles, IMS has encountered only limited private and public interest in the project so far. Nevertheless, some persons have joined the CT consultation board and made noteworthy

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Character Teaching

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efforts in countries such as Nicaragua, Kenya, Macedonia, India and Pakistan. The project also needs support from local government officials, which is difficult to obtain due to political and philosophical obstacles encountered with any new, untried idea.

Lee Havis, IMS executive director, believes that the CT project must first validate the practical success of the IMS technology in existing model programs, such as the *New Way Montessori School* in Meridian, Idaho. In addition, Lee is still completing the final version of his basic text that presents the new Montessori technology in full detail.

Operational Steps

The CT project plans to proceed in sequential steps, beginning first with a training seminar and consultation visit to lay the ground work for its later full-scale operation. Based on the success of this initial visit, Lee believes it will be possible to form a suitable local organization and obtain the necessary funding for its operation over a period of several years.

Ultimately, the project aims to demonstrate the original character developing purpose of Montessori teaching, by implementing the IMS technology in many schools throughout the country. At this scale, Lee hopes that character teaching will become sufficiently visible to become widely accepted and institutionalized in society, leading to the ultimate eradication of poverty and abusive child labor in the world.

Consultation

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complete each activity in any orderly manner before moving on to the next; **Abandonment to fantasy**— interact with children at an early point in any fantasy scenarios, using specific *clear direction* and *questioning*; **Dependency**— stay as neutral and uninvolved with child as possible; **Social disharmony**— allow free, active movement and interaction among children, as long as it is not too aggressive or wild, even if it seems odd or unusual; **Physical aggression**— stay physically closer to hub children, using more verbal interaction, as well as gentle, *cooperative touching to model good behavior*; **Lack of work with materials**— take out materials and place on table for children who show tendency to fantasy or who are otherwise unable or unwilling to choose work from the shelf on their own.

Lee plans further consultation at the New Way School to deal with other basic issues until these are fully resolved. He states, "The success of this model school is important to assure the integrity and practical value of the IMS technology. In addition, we are using this learning experience to test out new materials and overall program design, which we hope to use on a wider scale elsewhere, such as in the operation of the *Character Teaching* (CT) project proposed to overcome poverty in various regions of the world."

Marketplace

Positions and Placements

Montessori teachers: Palm Harbor Montessori Academy (Palm Harbor, FL). 250 students, ages 1-year to 8th grade. Competitive salary with benefits. Fax or e-mail resume and letter of interest: Christine Varkas, Palm Harbor Montessori Academy, 2355 Nebraska Ave., Palm Harbor, FL 34683, (727) 786-1854; Fax. (727) 786-5160; www.floridamontessori.com, e-mail: cvarkas@gate.net

Distraction

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in the *distraction* lesson presentation because working with materials is always the ultimate answer to all misbehavior. Without this final step, children will most likely return to some type of fantasy activity.

Sometimes, you can use the *distraction* technique when there is no physical object involved, such as with children who are wildly running around in fantasy. In this situation, you get the child's attention by holding its whole body, and then, giving a *clear direction* to show some piece of work.

As with all techniques, you must carefully regulate your use of *distraction* by following such basic protocols as *least amount of adult involvement* and *well-being of the total environment*. This allows the technique *distraction* to be very useful and effective in resolving many misbehavior situations where lighter polishing techniques, such as *eye contact* and *proximity*, are ineffective or unavailable.

Moment of Peril

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Running Away

In the outdoor environment, the teacher has a problem with several children who run away when she tells them to line up to go inside. Although most of the children go right over and line up, there are four who consistently run and hide as soon as they hear it is time to go in. The teacher then goes and gets them using *cooperative touching*, however, as soon as she brings them to the line they run away again. What to do? *Answer in March, 2008 Observer.*