



The Montessori OBSERVER

Perceptual
Mistakes

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Montessori in Nepal

The *Eurokids Nepal international School* was established in 2003 by **Rajlakshmi Golchha**, a member of Golchha organisation. The school is located in Biratnagar, a major city in the eastern part of the country.

A native of India, Raj came to Nepal with a child-centered tradition of patience and love towards children, which she found very different from the traditional approach to children in Nepal. She said, "I was stunned to see that schools in Nepal (Biratnagar) were putting young 2 year olds through the trauma of rote learning and memorizing tables up to 10 by the end of age 3-4. I especially noticed that the term "Montessori" was being mis-used to lure parents into sending their 2 and 3 year old children into this type of traumatic academic schooling."

After completing a formal course in Montessori teaching, Raj established the Eurokids school with the objective of changing the minds of parents and turning them towards a more flexible and child-centered learning environment. She says, however, that "over 5 years, I have managed to achieve only partial success, running the school with focus on 'control the environment, not the child.'" Despite these efforts, she says, "As yet,

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Child working on multiplication board at the Buzan Montessori School (Chongqing, China)



Children engage in botany study project at the Buzan Montessori School (Chongqing, China)

Buzan Montessori School in Chongqing, China

The *Buzan Montessori School* was established in Chongqing, China by **Tony Buzan**, under his educational organization based in Singapore. Tony became interested in Montessori philosophy through his 40 year work of consulting and lecturing in education throughout the world. During this time, he authored and co-authored more than 90 books on the brain, learning and creativity, focusing on his "Mind-Mapping" technique, which is now known in more than 100 countries and 30 languages.

Between 2006-2008, a Buzan research team, led by **WH Pang**, conducted feasibility studies for developing the first Buzan school in China. From visiting various cities, Pang found that many local kindergartens were offering Montessori teaching as part of their curriculum, but were not following the approach in its pure, scientific manner. Based on this research, the Buzan organization decided to incorporate its first school in Chongqing, China, which soon became recognized by the International Montessori Society.

In the initial development of this school, Pang found the general public was somewhat skeptical, comparing it with the other local Montessori programs. So, he initiated an awareness campaign about Montessori teaching to address this concern.

When the school term began, Pang reports that some parents urged the school to adjust its Montessori approach to suit the "local flavor." In response, he said, "We fiercely defended the school's philosophy, so that when the first semester ended, we received very good feedback from the parents, who have since become the school's 'indirect marketing agents'. The parents have now also formed the "Buzan Montessori Parents Association" to help promote the school and its distinctive approach of true natural Montessori teaching."

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Reflections

by Esther Rupert (IMS '07)

Esther is reflecting here on her experiences using the IMS technology in a weekly parent-child preschool program she has been directing for several years.

Training New Teachers

I'm currently training two new teachers for the preschool program... While we were standing back observing, I was able to point out to them why I would do or say certain things.

Example: A 2 year old girl comes to me for help removing the lid from play-doh. "Who could help you with that?"

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Perceptual Mistakes

by Lee Havis

"The adult must find within himself the still unknown error that prevents him from seeing the child as he is. If such a preparation is not made...he can go no further."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Secret of Childhood*, p.15

Montessori teaching is a delicate psychological process that may require correcting some serious perceptual mistakes that commonly occur with children. For example, since your primary function is to control the environment, not the child, you must first properly distinguish between the "child" and its surrounding "environment." In this distinction, the child must be seen as an entirely unknown spiritual entity.

Unknown Entity

"...prejudices...are confused and strengthened by the evidence of facts because all, or nearly all, see the child as he is commonly known only, not the child as he is, still an unknown entity."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Formation of Man*, p.60-61

Montessori teaching views the child in a very spiritual way, as an unknown entity we can only see through faith and imagination. Observing such a pure spiritual being is therefore like looking at the wind and seeing only its outward effects in the movement of various objects. In a similar manner, the child's outward effects consist of its physical appearance, behavior, and personality.

Ideally, we see the child's outward expression as reflecting its true nature, showing such behavior as spontaneous self-discipline, order and peaceful harmony with others. If there is disorder and disharmony instead, we are not seeing the outward effects of the child at all, but rather a reflection of our own defective personality.

The most practical way to maintain a proper perception of children is by thinking of their brains as if they were full of cotton wadding. Then, when a child seems especially stupid or stubborn, we recognize this more clearly as only an optical illusion caused by projecting our own faulty personality.

In Montessori teaching, distinguishing the 'child' from its 'environment' is most critical in resolving the typical misbehavior scenario. Here, we must first identify a single individual child as the "hub" of the scenario, so that around this hub child, the "environment" appears as everything else.

The Individual Child

"There is only one real biological manifestation, that of the living individual; and education... should be directed towards these individuals as they are observed one by one."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Discovery of the Child*, p.61

Montessori teaching views a group of children as a collection of single individuals, each one having its own unique "environment" consisting of three distinct elements: (1) physical objects, (2) other children, and (3) adult personality. Controlling the environment, therefore, means to remove whatever obstacles there are associated with these elements.

Remove the Obstacles

"...we must therefore create a favorable environment...all that is needed is to remove the obstacles."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Secret of Childhood*, p.136

Removing obstacles in the environment is a scientific, experimental process of analyzing and controlling whatever detrimental influences there may be interfering with the hub child's true natural development. For example, you must stop any disorder in the physical objects or negative influences from other children. Montessori teaching, however, did not always have this type of clear analytical framework for its effective conduct with children. Instead, the first Children's House presented only a mysterious and elusive phenomenon, which, over the years, has become considerably distorted and misunderstood by many.

First Children's House

"The environment in which the first Children's House had their origins must have been extremely favorable, since the surprising results obtained during those first years have never again been equaled."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Discovery of the Child*, p.37

At the first Children's House, Dr. Montessori discovered the child's true nature by observing young children in their free activity with certain self-teaching materials. However, this general idea doesn't precisely instruct how to accurately practice it in a completely effective manner. Dr. Montessori's approach therefore soon incorporated certain serious perceptual mistakes that still remain active today among many self-styled Montessori practitioners. Happily, there now exists a new field of perception to correct these various hidden errors of conventional "personality" or "culture" types of Montessori teaching.

Field of Perception

"The training and sharpening of the senses has the obvious advantage of enlarging the field of perception and of offering an ever more solid foundation for intellectual growth..."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Discovery of the Child*, p.99

In 1979, true natural Montessori teaching emerged to accurately explain how Dr. Montessori's original Children's House phenomenon occurred. In 2003, this new field of perception was further expanded by the discovery of a comprehensive technology for its practice in a reliable, objective manner that was never possible before. Using this technology, perceptual mistakes now arise as one of three basic types: (1) child-adult personality, (2) child-physical objects, and (3) child-other children. Each one of these touches on some fundamental unknown error within the adult personality.

Adult Personality

"...adults are also a part of a child's environment...They should not be an obstacle to a child's activities..."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Secret of Childhood*, p.110

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**Look for the
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Moment of Peril

by Lee Haviv

Confronting Authority

In this *moment of peril*, the teacher is surrounded by strong controlling personalities who generally oppose her efforts at Montessori teaching. (See *Observer, September, 2010*) Due to inexperience and youth, she often yeilds to the ill-conceived advice of these controlling personalities, even against her own better judgment in the matter.

Confronting any adverse authority is always difficult, requiring great prudence, patience and care. You certainly owe a duty to listen carefully to those in authority, and to comply with their instructions as much as possible. For example, when criticized, don't argue back, but rather assume an objective, non-defensive attitude. Either remain completely silent, or respectfully ask questions to clarify the issues in a calm, rational manner.

However, in Montessori teaching, your ultimate authority is the "teacher within" the child. You must therefore never violate the infinite and eternal laws of nature in any of your actions with children. When in doubt or conflict with the advice of others, resolve the matter by calm and rational discussion, as well as personal meditation and reflection, using such means as the IP technique.

Hopefully, your firm, calm response in conflict situations will gain the respect of those in authority, especially as they see the successful results of your Montessori teaching with children. If not, your inner strength and confidence will still increase through this process of confronting authority. Then, any future criticism will become less problematic over time.

Resolving the bully-victim conflict

The teacher is very upset by a continuing "bully-victim" drama that is taking place between two children in her elementary classroom. The "victim" child doesn't come and ask her for help, but rather cries and becomes sad and withdrawn due to the derogatory remarks of an especially strong-willed bully. The teacher wants to help the victim child with language to assert himself more strongly, but, at the same time, doesn't want to intervene too quickly, perhaps creating a dependency on her position of authority in the environment. What to do?

Answer in *Observer*, March, 2011

Perceptual Mistakes

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The child-adult personality mistake is perhaps the most difficult and common one to recognize and control. It involves the teacher substituting her own personality for the child.

Here, the teacher confuses children with their outward behavior, so that children are deemed "normalized" when their outward behavior conforms to the teacher's own understanding and expectations of what is normal. In extreme cases, this "personality" type Montessori teaching leads to children acting like mechanical robots to conform to the demands and needs of the particular controlling adult authority.

Another perceptual mistake involves confusing the hub child with other children in the environment. This child-other children mistake involves a failure to accurately recognize significant differences in the behavior of children in some social conflict situation.

Recognizing Differences

"...recognize the difference between pure impulse, and the spontaneous energies which spring to life in a tranquillized spirit...the teacher's efficiency consists in being able to distinguish between two kinds of activities, each of which has the appearance of spontaneity..."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Montessori Method*, p.296

In any fast-moving social conflict situation, our first reaction is to control the misbehaving "hub" child instead of the other children in the environment. The best way to resolve this child-other children confusion is to approach ALL children in the misbehavior scenario as if they were "hub." Then, using only light, non-verbal techniques, such as *patient waiting*, *eye contact*, and *proximity*, look for differences in each child's behavior that point to those other children who are most receptive to your friendly, non-threatening interaction.

Another type of perceptual mistake involves child-physical objects. Here, the child's physical body is the central issue to consider.

Child's Physical Body

"We do not serve the child's body..he should not be served in this sense...We have to help the child to act, will, and think for himself. This is the art of serving the spirit..."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Absorbent Mind*, p.281

Confusing the child with its physical body can lead to abandoning children by not touching them firmly enough to get their attention in some serious misbehavior scenario. This child-physical objects mistake can also lead to psychologically controlling the child in a negative way as well.

Using *distraction*, for example, you touch and hold an object in the child's hand to get his attention. However, if you continue holding the object after you have the child's attention, you are

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Reflections

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She points to me. "I could. Who else could help you with that?" At that point a 4 year old girl was already there eagerly offering her services. The 2 year old happily let her do it.

A couple of minutes later, she gave up trying to get the play-doh out of the container and came up to me. Before she could really ask, the older girl was there helping. She took it back to the table and they both sat down while the older girl tried to get it out.

The little girl watched her new friend intently. After a few failed minutes of trying with her hands, the bigger girl looked around the room and saw a plastic knife. She jumped up to get it, brought it back, and managed to get the play-doh out of the container.

It was so satisfying to be able to explain to the new teachers how we just enhanced their independence, cooperation, and problem solving skills through our observation and limited influence on the situation. And to hear, "this is great, I'm going to try it at home" was gratifying!

Buzan Montessori School

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Currently, the school's curriculum is divided into 6 main areas, i.e. Practical Life, Sensorial, Mathematics, Language (English & Mandarin – both are taught through the phonics method), Cultural Studies and Science, Art & Creativity. Children are exposed to two main languages, i.e. the lead teachers speak to them in English whereas the assistant teachers converse with them in Mandarin.

Pang reports that the school enrollment has a good mix of local and foreign students, giving the children a valuable opportunity to learn from interaction with different nationalities and cultures. He says, "This close interaction has helped them develop an appreciation and deep respect for each other."

In November, 2010, Pang is planning to attend the IMS workshop in Malaysia. On return, he hopes to help organize a similar workshop learning event for Chongqing to further spread the ideas and technology of true natural Montessori teaching in China.

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Perceptual Mistakes

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negatively controlling the child in a psychological way, even though you are not physically touching the child's physical body at all. Correcting any of these perceptual mistakes is possible only by seeking out the ultimate truth of the matter.

The Truth

"The truth at times appears to be made up of apparent contradictions. If this apparent contradiction did not exist, the truth would be easy to grasp. Everyone must search for the truth because it is hidden, yet it exists."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Spont. Act. In Ed.*, p.188

Searching for the underlying truth of any perceptual mistake can be slow and difficult because it is so well hidden in the adult personality. Only a careful process of inner self-awareness can fully resolve these well-established mistakes, which are often reinforced through their wide-spread acceptance as truth in conventional society. For example, it is common to view a child's idle fantasies as some type of normal, creative activity.

Fantasies

"Adults...actually favor and encourage...fantasies, interpreting them as the creative tendencies of the child's mind."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Secret of Childhood*, p.155

In many cultures, a child's fantasy is so accepted as healthy and normal, that even serious Montessori practitioners can become deceived by their superficial perceptions. The "culture" type of Montessori teaching is built up by these popular prejudices, which no amount of perception of evidence to the contrary can easily overcome.

Perception of Evidence

"When an obvious truth cannot be seen, we must retire, and leave the individual to mature. A struggle to bring about perception of evidence would be bitter and exhausting."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Spont. Act. In Ed.*, p.237

Perceptual mistakes persist as part of the mass hypnotic condition of conventional reality. In this context, any appeal to rational perception of evidence is opposed by the strong prejudices of popular opinion.

Waking up from the hypnotic dream-like state of conventional reality usually involves some painful or extremely unusual experience. Then, in a moment of clarity and insight, you suddenly realize the possibility of a new reality. Now, you are ready to correct your perceptual mistakes by addressing their outward manifestations with children.

Outward Manifestations

"We can conquer our evil tendencies...by repressing the outward manifestations of our evil tendencies..."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Secret of Childhood*, p.150

The IMS technology provides excellent tools for those who are psychologically prepared for present-moment reality. In this alert state of being, even very stubborn and deeply entrenched perceptual mistakes are easily removed by following the basic direction of this technology. The process involves first noticing the outward manifestations of your mistakes, and then using the *Imagination Previsioning* (IP) technique to try out possible solutions in the real life situation with children. Gradually, new experiences with this approach become solidified into firm habits of effective Montessori teaching, which then finally leads to the spontaneous emergence of true natural behavior in children.

Montessori in Nepal

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people are still afraid to leave their routine ways of thinking from the past."

In 2009, Raj joined the IMS-sponsored "Character Teaching" (CT) project in Nepal as a member of its consultation board. In that role, she initiated contact with government officials, which finally led to obtaining a 2009 letter of support for the project from the Ministry of Education. Raj hopes her school can serve as a key element in this project to overcome poverty through Montessori teaching with children.

The Eurokids school provides bilingual English and Nepali language instruction using the phonics approach. In addition, the curriculum includes math, practical life, science and simple social and civic studies. Raj's school now has an enrollment of over 400 students, with a second site planned for those who cannot afford the ordinary tuition. In addition, planning is underway to conduct an IMS workshop in Nepal for her staff, parents and other educators in the area.

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Children in festival dress at the Eurokids Nepal International School (Biratnagar, Nepal)