



The Montessori OBSERVER

Clear Direction

Published by the International Montessori Society web: <http://imsmontessori.org> Tel. (301) 589-1127

Montessori in Vietnam

The *WorldKids International Preschool* in Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon, Vietnam) was established in early 2011 by **Thoi Nguyen** to offer the highest possible quality of international Montessori education in his country. Thoi and his wife, a former kindergarten administrator, initially began this project as a small local pre-school for their own children. However, as several investors joined in this effort, the concept grew into creating a larger international school.

A former English teacher, Thoi see his school as the first of many similar ones to follow. He says, "*WorldKids* desires to provide its Montessori educational program with affordable tuition fees for every child in Ho Chi Minh City. We have planned to open many schools around Vietnam in the future ... the strong point of our school is Montessori and life skills with ESL to develop full aspects of children in a natural manner."

The *WorldKids* school also offers Vietnamese language instruction and other curriculum aspects as required by the Ministry of Education. About this, Thoi says "the (government) curriculum is not a practical and natural method like Montessori...So many schools are seeking to carry out reform in new education programs to help kids be more active and creative."

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Montessori Workshops

Technology of Montessori Teaching
in the Scientific Approach to Normal Being

Cebu, Philippines
June 11-12, 2011

Manila, Philippines
September 17-18, 2011

Jakarta, Indonesia
September 24-25, 2011

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 guidance for conducting the scientific approach that leads to true natural being in children.

To register and for further information,
Contact: IMS, tel. 301-589-1127;
havis@imsmontessori.org



Infant-toddler children engage in hand-eye coordination activity at the WorldKids Preschool in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

Regulating Montessori in America

In the United States, regulating Montessori is done differently in each of the 50 separate states. In some, Montessori schools are regulated as "day care centers," requiring only basic sanitary facilities, lighting, heat, and space. Other states, however, regulate much more extensively, even to the point of censoring curriculum content and philosophy.

Some states force Montessori schools to follow their own conventional philosophy by limiting group size and composition, requiring conventional teacher training, and establishing arbitrary adult-child ratios. Other states regulate Montessori schools indirectly through certain private organizations which conduct their own licensing review and approval. These special interest organizations use the same type of government philosophy, even though they may include the term "Montessori" in their name, such as "American Montessori Society" (AMS) and "Association Montessori Internationale" (AMI).

The state of Louisiana conducts an especially aggressive form of philosophical censorship by requiring all Montessori schools to hire only teachers with certain specified conventional training. In this scheme, IMS true natural Montessori philosophy is excluded and therefore prohibited from operating in the state.

In Maryland, Montessori is regulated through private "validating organizations" which exercise control over the licensing process on behalf of their own special interests. In this system, the government requires that the validating organizations employ only AMS and AMI trained personnel to conduct the pertinent reviews and approvals. In this way, government is able to effectively suppress any expression of true natural Montessori teaching. For years, IMS has sought to resolve this problem; however, the pertinent state officials consistently oppose any such correction as being "unnecessary."

Government censorship in education is justified in various ways, such as to protect the public good from some evil, dangerous idea (like poisonous meat "unfit for human food"), or because a particular philosophy is considered non-existent or some type of insane, fraudulent illusion. Discussing Montessori philosophy with the pertinent government officials is virtually impossible due to their extremely limited context of reality and understanding on the subject.

The five Maryland "validating organizations" function like street gangs or crime families in a typical mob syndicate, each one providing protection for its own affiliated members. In effect, this is like dividing power and control in Europe among



CLEAR DIRECTION

by Lee Havis

"A teacher of experience never has grave disorder in the 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

The IMS technology of Montessori teaching includes the technique *clear direction* as one way to help you control the environment around children. In this technology, there are a total of ten such techniques, as well as twenty protocols for applying them in harmony with laws of nature.

Clear direction is telling a child to do something — an especially important part of resolving the most serious types of misbehavior scenarios. Before using any such technique, however, you must first make prudent observations of the total environment.

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 *Formation of Man*, p.10

The key protocol *well-being of the total environment* directs you to set priorities for your activity from one moment to the next. For example, you must always resolve the most serious misbehavior problem first — the one that most threatens a child's physical safety. Also, follow the protocol *least amount of adult involvement* by trying to use only the lighter techniques first, such as *eye contact* and *patient waiting*. With new children, however, these lighter techniques will probably not be enough to overcome the negative effects of past home life conditioning.

New children especially need clear direction to orient them to the basic order of the environment. For example, saying "Sit down" "Cross your legs" and "Fold your hands" helps children gain body awareness and habits of good social behavior with others. Later, you can use other clear direction phrases, such as "Take my hand," "Watch," and "Come over here" to help children gain more independence and self-direction in their activity.

Come over Here

"...the right technique...is to break the flow of disturbing activity...The interruption may take the form of any kind of exclamation...such as...Come with me, I have something for you to do."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p. 254

In Montessori teaching, resolving misbehavior is essentially an experimental process of removing detrimental influences in the environment around a single "hub" child. In

practice, this process involves combining specific techniques together to form experimental interactions with children. In one interaction, for example, you approach the misbehavior (*proximity*), get some child's attention (*distraction*), and then say "Come over here. Let me show you something." (*clear direction*) The final step in this interaction is to introduce the child to some simple practical life exercise.

Practical Life

"The simplest exercise of practical life will lead the little wandering spirits back to the solid earth of real work, and this reclaims them."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.162

Clear direction primarily seeks to focus the child's attention on some specific aspect of the physical environment. For example, direct the child to pick up a piece of trash on the floor, or return some object to its proper place when not in use. If necessary, however, you may also introduce some easy practical life work from the shelf. In this process, use simple, earnest words that closely approximate the perfect order and harmony of nature.

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

Montessori teaching involves projecting a calm, objective presence with children — even though you may feel quite tense and angry at the time. When talking to a child, use only words that he can easily understand and follow. And, if possible, wait for the child to look at you before speaking, to follow the protocol *eye contact before talking*.

The IMS technology provides a number of specific *safe words* that are designed especially for the clear direction technique, such as "Watch" and "Take my hand." However, you must still weigh your words carefully to fit the needs of each specific situation.

Weigh your Words

"Since children are so eager to learn and so burning with love, an adult should carefully weigh all the words he speaks before them."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Discovery of the Child*, p.324

Following the protocols *basis of interest* and *present moment*, choose words that best relate to the child's true interests at that particular time. For example, if the

child is mishandling some piece of work, say, "Fold your hands" and "Watch." Then show the proper movements involved in that work.

With clear direction, you may also need to focus the child's attention on certain key words to achieve good communication. For example, "Look for the BIG one...the BIG one." By exaggerating or repeating key words in this manner, you are following the protocol, *Emphasize Main point(s) – Isolate Variable*. Using fewer words will also improve the quality and precision of your clear direction.

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Look for the
**September 2011
Observer**
featuring
*Polishing the
Environment*

ISSN 0889-5643
The Montessori Observer
Published by
INTERNATIONAL MONTESSORI SOCIETY
Tel. (301) 589-1127
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Worldwide Web:
<http://imsmontessori.org>
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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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Moment of Peril

by Lee Havis

Grabbing and Sharing

In this *moment of peril*, the teacher is struggling to resolve a pattern of grabbing objects among the children. (See *Observer*, March, 2011) The typical scenario involves one child grabbing something from another, and the teacher urging the child to “share” and “ask nicely.” Unfortunately, the teacher’s clear direction for *nice manners* does not resolve the problem, which just continues and expands to all children in the group.

The main problem here is (1) the vague nature of the teacher’s clear direction, and (2) her pattern of abandonment with children. The essential problem is therefore the children’s disobedience to the teacher’s direction to “share” and “ask.” The reason for this disobedience is that the children simply don’t know how to do what she asks because the words are not clear and specific enough. Following the protocol *simplify complexity*, the solution then is to give a more specific clear direction, showing the children exactly how to transfer an object from one person to another.

A practical life “sharing” lesson will be proper to give when there is a clear *basis of interest*, for example, the next time you see a child grab an object from another. Go over to the scenario (*proximity*), get eye contact with the child who just grabbed the object and say, “May I have that please?” While saying this, place your hand, palm up, in front of the child. When the child places the object in your hand, say ‘Thank you,’ and turn your attention to the other child who had the object first.

To that first child, say, “Would you like to have this (object)?” When the child says “yes”, tell the child (*clear direction*) “Put your hand out and say “May I have that, please?” When the child does this, you hand the object to the child. Now, turn to the other child and say, “Would you like to have this (object)?” When the child says “yes”, you say, “Put out your hand out and say, “May I have that please?” When the child gives it to him, the lesson presentation is complete.

Since many children have acquired the grabbing habit, you will probably need to repeat this lesson quite often with different children. As more children use the new grace and courtesy procedure for “asking,” the old way of “grabbing” will diminish and finally disappear altogether.

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Fewer Words

“The best instruction is that which uses the least words sufficient to the task. The fewer the words, the more perfect will be the lesson.”

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Discovery of the Child*, p.161

The *well-being* and *least amount* protocols teach you to keep your verbal communication with children as brief and simple as possible. With fewer words, children are more likely to pay attention and understand what you are saying. In fact, many times you can give a clear direction without any spoken words at all, just by making a simple gesture with your hands.

Spoken Words

“Children find it very hard to concentrate on spoken words, but they have no difficulty concentrating on objects”

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Education and Peace*, p.80

Montessori teaching with young children always aims to help them normalize by concentrating on some piece of work with physical objects. Clear direction, therefore, must focus on a specific physical activity, rather than on having a prolonged discussion with you. In doing this, your aim is not necessarily that the child obeys your direction, but rather that he returns to reality in the present moment.

Obedience

“...obedience really means...teachers and parents tell children what to do, and the children respond by carrying out their orders.”

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.235

Young children instinctively obey any clear direction, since this obedience is a foremost aspect of their absorbent mind. However, if they don’t, this is not a problem as long as they choose some other suitable activity instead. If they “choose” some type of misbehavior, however, then their disobedience to your direction signals some obstacle or mistake you are making in your communication.

Disobedience

“Often disobedience is due to the fact that (the child) does not know how to do a certain thing, that he is not sure of an action.”

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Voice of Dr. Montessori* 8 Jan. 1942, A

Disobedience in children occurs for one of two basic reasons; either the child (1) doesn’t know how to do what you say or he (2) can’t do it. Most often, the reason is (1), the child doesn’t know how. When this occurs, you can most easily correct your mistake by rephrasing and simplifying your

direction. For example, say “Take my hand” rather than “Clean up your work.”

With reason (2), the child can’t obey your direction because to do so would threaten his spiritual or physical well-being. For example, the child can’t obey a harsh, angry demand to “Come here!!!” because this would harm the child’s spiritual life and health. To correct your mistake, just repeat the clear direction in a calmer, more friendly manner. Also, follow the protocol *no negative attention to misbehavior* by always using positive language.

Negative Attention

“Any form of violence, in speech or action, does irreparable harm to the child...beware of this tendency...to say ‘Don’t do this,’ ‘You mustn’t do that.’”

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Formation of Man*, p. 36

Following the *no negative* protocol means to replace words like “No” and “Don’t” with more positive safe words, such as “Come over here” and “Take my hand.” In time, even these positive directions won’t be necessary as the children enter into more normal self-directed activity. Eventually, you are just watching the children from a distance in a very passive, quiet manner.

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

In Montessori teaching, you must constantly adjust the intensity and duration of your interactions with children to meet their changing needs and behavior. Beginning with heavy techniques, such as *clear direction* and *distraction*, gradually move towards lighter ones, such as *eye contact* and *patient waiting*, until you are just watching the children from a stationary position outside their activity area. Now, the children are expressing their true natural way of being, which is the hopeful beginning of a new and better humanity in the world.

Montessori in Vietnam

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Thoi recognizes especially the urgent need for training Montessori teachers in his country. He is therefore assisting IMS to conduct its two-day training workshop in Vietnam in the near future. For further information, contact: Thoi Nguyen; and Nong Thi Nguyet, principal, WorldKids International Preschool; 10/3 Nguyen Thi Minh Khai St., Dakao Ward, Dist. 1, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Tel. 84-8-39103646; Fax 84-8-391119888. www.worldkids.com.vn info@worldkids.com.vn

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Regulating Montessori in America

Con't. from Page 1, Col. 3

the dictators, Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini and Franco. IMS cannot participate in this type of mob syndicate since to do so would force it to abandon its essential Montessori philosophy.

Unfortunately, public outrage against this educational censorship is muted because so many are uninformed and not directly affected by it. Timid, self-interested politicians also avoid making any effort to address this issue because they are so dependent on the political support of government officials and the special interests they protect. Despite these obstacles, however, people are gradually recognizing and addressing the problem in various ways.

For example, many parents are now choosing to “home school” their children, instead of sending them to the “free” government system. Enlightened taxpayers and voters are also getting more involved to correct this problem of abusive government regulation.

In the state of Wisconsin, for example, voters have recently elected a new governor and state legislature to curb the excessive power of government teachers’ unions in that state. In other states, this same process of limiting government control is also taking place. In time, these various efforts for freedom and limited government will hopefully bring about more fair and rational regulation of Montessori education as well.

What is our True Nature?

We all have a true nature, which is separate from the role we play in life and society as “personality.” Our true nature, is, in fact, entirely spiritual — the context (“space”) of our personality and physical body. With infants and young children, you can experience this spiritual truth most directly through non-judgmental, objective eye contact.

Our true natural being emerges in outward form as an experience of perfect peace, harmony, and unity with others in the present moment. Any deviation from this experience is due to unconscious flaws and defects fixed into our personality from negative childhood conditioning.

Whatever differences there may be between one true nature and another is only a distinction of time, awareness, and location. Like a vapor of wind, or a wave on the ocean, the essence of our true nature is the same for all. On the spiritual plane, we experience this essential being as peaceful harmony and unity with others.

Being aware and conscious of our true nature is an essential aspect of Montessori teaching. By being committed to laws of nature, we are allowing the child’s true nature to materialize in the outward form of a fixed and stable personality by about the age of six. Dr. Montessori envisioned that, in time, this new normal personality would eventually lead to a similar form of true normal adult society as well.

Moment of Peril

Cont'd. from Page 3, Col. 1

Saying Bad words

The teacher is concerned that children are saying bad words. While this bad language started with just a few, it has now become common with all the children. Some parents have expressed concern and alarm that their children have learned these bad words at school, and are now repeating them at home. The teacher has already pointed out to children that these words are “inappropriate.” However, they still keep using them anyway. What to do?

Answer in *Observer*, September, 2011

IMS Seminar in New Jersey

On Saturday May 7, 2011, Lee Havis conducted a seminar in New Jersey, USA to present the IMS technology of Montessori teaching. Attending were teachers and educators from throughout eastern United States. This seminar was sponsored by **Sally McGeehan**, director of “*Hinder them not*” Montessori school in Kenilworth, New Jersey.

In the seminar, Lee focused special attention on resolving social conflicts through detached, non-judgemental observation. He said, “Although you might need to stand close to a social conflict situation to prevent any physical violence, you must still let the children work out their differences through free and vigorous verbal communication. This passive non-intervention, however, will be most difficult for those who strongly react to loud, passionate, or rude language which is common in these situations; or, if you feel compelled to project on children your own deeply held convictions about justice and fair play. To control these detrimental projections, closely follow the protocol *least amount of adult involvement* and practice one of the exercises designed for deep self-awareness.”

Lee expressed his appreciation to Sally for organizing this one-day seminar, and his hope for more such events in the future.