



The Montessori OBSERVER

*Polishing the
Environment*

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Participants at the IMS workshop in Cebu, Philippines (June 11-12, 2011)

IMS Workshop in Cebu, Philippines

On June 11-12, 2011, **Lee Havis** conducted the IMS workshop *Creating the New Education* in Cebu, Philippines. Attending this first ever IMS workshop in Philippines were teachers and educators from throughout the Philippines, as well as from Pakistan, Vietnam, Malaysia, Japan, and India. As always, this workshop presented the unique IMS technology of scientific true natural Montessori teaching.

At the workshop, Lee pointed out the limitations of measuring the authenticity of Montessori teaching by external, objective standards alone. He said, "We can only imperfectly evaluate Montessori teaching by observing the outward effects of a child's normal behavior. A child is not normalized because he is obedient and well-behaved. Rather, he is obedient and well-behaved because he is normalized. Ultimately, the truth of normal being is an internal experience which is beyond all human logic, language, or understanding. This experience, however, does arise in the spiritual plane as perfect harmony and peace with children, perhaps most noticeable in a moment of deep, penetrating eye contact."

While in Cebu, Lee met with several local political and education leaders to discuss the development of Montessori teaching in the region. Meeting with the vice-mayor of Cebu City, **Joy Augustus Young**, Lee described the *Character*

Teaching (CT) project and its purpose to overcome cultural poverty through Montessori education. He emphasized the possibility of true normal character development in poor children by applying the IMS technology to create the right conditions for that to occur. Mr. Young suggested that IMS training and consulting could be offered to the teaching staff of some 200 preschool centers that the City has operating for poor families there.

Following the meeting, Lee submitted a proposal to Mr. Young to conduct this training. The proposal includes training in the use of IMS technology through several workshops and a series of self-analysis progress reports over a 12-month period of time. In Cebu, Lee also met with the Cebu superintendent of state schools, **Rhea Mar A. Angtud**, to discuss offering IMS training to state teachers.

Lee also conducted a tutoring session with poor children in the streets of Cebu to demonstrate how the CT project works in this informal component of the project. **Michelle Wong**, IMS colleague from Malaysia, assisted to video record this session which is now viewable at the IMS website and at the IMS youtube channel, *leehavis1*. On the video, Lee describes the CT project approach, especially focusing on the novel concept of "exchange of value."

IMS Montessori in Kurdistan

In July, 2011, **Nesreen Barwari** met with Lee Havis, IMS executive director, in Silver Spring, MD USA. They spoke about the possibility of IMS Montessori education in the Kurdistan region of northern Iraq. At the meeting, Nesreen pointed out the rapid economic progress of this region under the autonomous authority of the *Kurdistan Regional Government* (KRG).

Nesreen has been a leading figure in the recent development and progress of Iraq. For example, from 2003-06, she was minister of municipalities and public works in the government of Iraq. During this turbulent time after the fall of Saddam Hussein, she was instrumental in rebuilding confidence in basic institutions of government, especially in restoration and relief efforts directed to women and children in her country. Presently, Nesreen is Education Development Director of the RANJ investment and development company based in Erbil, Kurdistan, Iraq.

At the USA July meeting, Nesreen indicated that RANJ has a great interest in helping to assure high-quality private education for the growing number of families with young children in the region. She and Lee discussed a plan of support to establish and operate IMS Montessori education programs in conjunction with development of various commercial and residential projects by RANJ in Kurdistan.

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Montessori Workshops

*Technology of Montessori Teaching
in the Scientific Approach to Normal Being*

**Manila, Philippines
September 17-18, 2011**

**Erbil, KRG, Iraq
December 3-4, 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



Polishing the Environment

by Lee Havis

"A child slowly perfects his activities. An adult can assist in shaping the environment, but it is the child that perfects his own being."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from **Secret of Childhood**, p.195

Montessori teaching supports the child's true natural development by shaping the environment around each child in accordance with infinite and eternal laws of nature. This shaping process is like polishing the environment by using variable degrees of weight, duration, and intensity in your interaction with children.

The IMS technology of Montessori teaching provides an elegant means for conducting this polishing process in a precise, scientific manner. The specific tools in this technology consist of ten techniques and twenty protocols. The techniques are specific actions to take and the protocols serve to moderate, control, and guide these actions to closely follow laws of nature.

Like polishing in any context, Montessori teaching begins this process first with heavy actions. This heavy polishing is to remove the most serious types of misbehavior which are typical with children when they first enter the Montessori environment. Gradually, polishing becomes lighter until you approach the final state of true natural development. Young children respond especially well to this Montessori polishing since the environment has such a strong effect on them during the basic formative period of life.

Effect of Environment

"The environment acts more strongly upon the individual life the less fixed and strong the individual life may be."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from **Montessori Method**, p.106

Before the age of six, children have a highly pliable mental state that instinctively absorbs whatever they experience in the surrounding environment. Montessori teaching offers an environment which is a close approximation to the perfect order and harmony of nature. In this environment, children will therefore internalize these same qualities to bring about an outward expression of their true natural being.

The effect of the Montessori environment on children, however, is not instantaneous. Rather, you must polish the environment to reduce and finally overcome the effect of prior negative conditioning from home. Montessori polishing confronts the child's superficial personality as it outwardly expresses various forms

of misbehavior.

Superficial Personality

"The child of three...is a fighter on the verge of being vanquished; he has already adopted a defensive attitude that masks his deeper nature...All that remains active is a superficial personality which exhausts itself in clumsy movements, vague ideas, and the effort to resist or avoid adult restraint."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from **Absorbent Mind**, p.264

By the age of three, children enter the Montessori environment with a warped superficial personality due to prior negative conditioning at home. Montessori teaching therefore begins a polishing process by using first such heavy techniques as *distraction*, *clear direction*, and *cooperative touching*. In practice, this process involves resolving the children's misbehavior.

Resolving Misbehavior

During the first days when a new school is opened, we may consider a certain initial disorder as characteristic...If, indeed, the pupils...are well-to-do children...they are very rarely attracted at first by the stimuli presented to them."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from **Spont. Act. In Ed.**, p.87

Resolving misbehavior is most difficult with new children in the environment. So, in the beginning, you can expect serious, unpredictable misbehavior to arise just at the time you are least prepared to handle it well with skill and ease. The polishing process is even more difficult when there are many different misbehavior scenarios taking place at the same time.

Facing multiple misbehavior scenarios, you must first set priorities for addressing each one in logical, sequential order. The protocol *well-being of the total environment* teaches you to always begin by resolving the one misbehavior scenario that most threatens harm to children or physical objects. Only later can you safely address the low-priority "fantasy" misbehavior scenarios. During beginning conditions, you will be facing your greatest misbehavior problems of all.

Beginning Conditions

"The teacher, in this first period...must be like the flame which heartens all by its warmth, enlivens and invites...She can tell stories, have some games and singing, use nursery rhymes and poetry...encouraging and praising them all in a bright and pleasant manner."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from **Absorbent Mind** p.253

In stage 1 *beginning conditions*, you must establish the basic routines of proper social order, such as folding hands in lap, sitting with legs crossed, walking in a line with hands to side, and exchanging objects by using such polite language as "May I have that please?" This initial period lasts for about two weeks, and requires very heavy polishing to orient children for

free, self-directed activity. With each misbehavior scenario, your polishing aims to remove the obstacles in the environment around the particular hub child you are focusing on at that time.

Removing 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

In any misbehavior scenario, polishing the environment means to remove the obstacles that emerge in the physical objects, other children, and adult personality around the hub child of that particular scenario. Using the IMS technology, the polishing process involves combining one

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Look for the November Observer featuring **Safe Words**

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Lee Havis, Executive Director

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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

Saying Bad Words

In this *moment of peril*, the teacher is seeking to stop her children from saying bad words (**Observer**, May, 2011). Unfortunately, the children have been using these words so much now they have established a pattern that is escalating in use at home as well. Parental alarm and anger just makes the whole situation more emotionally intense for all. The issue of using bad words is now clearly a misbehavior pattern that the teacher must resolve.

So far, the teacher has tried to stop the bad words by telling the children that they are "inappropriate." The parents also have scolded their children at home for using these words. None of these efforts, however, have stopped or reduced their use by children.

The continuing use of bad words in this moment of peril is actually caused by the negative attention and reactive expression of adults. Here, the adult personality is clearly the primary detrimental influence in a typical power struggle situation with children.

The teacher projects negative reaction to these bad words in various ways, for example in telling children they are "inappropriate." In addition, she is probably also showing disapproval in other ways, such as by giving frowns, tense body posturing, head shakes, and negative finger pointing. These behaviors all violate the protocols *don't correct child* and *no negative attention to misbehavior*. Removing this detrimental personality projection is primarily a matter of controlling its outward expression of negative judgment or feelings on children.

Beyond this affirmative outward self-control, you must also replace the bad language with some positive alternative activity. For example, when a child starts to use bad words, interrupt this language by getting the child's attention (*distraction*) and saying, "Come over here. Let me show you something." (*clear direction*) Then, show the child some work with materials to encourage concentration that leads to normalization and true natural development.

If the children are using bad words with each other in a social conflict situation, you might also intervene. However, following the protocol *basis of interest*, keep focus on the dialogue between the

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or more techniques to form precise sequences of action, called *lesson presentations*. For example, one common sequence of action involves the *distraction* technique as its central element.

The typical *distraction* lesson presentation begins by your walking to the misbehavior scenario (*proximity*). Then, get the child's attention by holding an object (*distraction*). Next, immediately let go of the object and tell the child to do something (*clear direction*), such as, "Come over here. Let me show you something." Repeating similar lesson presentations over time gradually polishes the total environment to a state of calm order as you enter stage 2, *scanning and supervision*.

Scanning and Supervision

"The children...are in a transitory phase...It is like the state of convalescences after an illness...the teacher must carry out two different functions:...General surveillance and individual teaching...In this period she must take care never to turn her back on the class while she is dealing with a single child. Her presence must be felt by all these spirits."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.247

Once children are oriented to basic order in the environment, Montessori teaching enters a new phase of variable heavy/light polishing in stage 2, scanning and supervision. During this period, your main function is to scan the total environment from a stationary position outside the children's activity area. Following the protocol *least amount of adult involvement*, you only move from that position when absolutely necessary, such as to resolve some serious misbehavior scenario.

In stage 2, your polishing activity changes gradually from heavy to light as misbehavior diminishes and the children take more interest in working with materials in a focused, thoughtful manner. Now, children sometimes ask you to show them how to use various pieces of work. Then, you may give a lesson presentation with materials. However, the activity of the teacher must still continue to be as brief and limited as possible.

Activity of Teacher

"...The more the environment corresponds to the needs of the child, the more limited becomes the activity of the teacher."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *The Child*, p.9

Following the *least amount* protocol, your initial heavy polishing with such techniques as *distraction*, *clear direction*, and *cooperative touching*, changes to lighter

polishing with such techniques as *eye contact* and *patient waiting*. Finally, your activity becomes just silently watching the children from a remote position in the environment. Here, you must allow children great latitude to make and correct little mistakes on their own as they freely experiment with materials in their self-directed activity.

Little Mistakes

"...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

In the transition stage 2 polishing, your supervision must be light enough to let children make little mistakes in using the various materials. So, don't interfere to correct these mistakes as long as they don't threaten serious physical harm to children or objects. Following the protocol *don't interrupt concentration*, you must allow children the freedom to solve problems that attract their particular interest.

Don't Interrupt Concentration

"When a child shows interest, the teacher must not interrupt, because this interest corresponds with natural laws and opens up a whole cycle of new activities...Not to interfere means not to interfere in any way. This is the moment at which the teacher most often goes wrong."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.255

Following the protocol *basis of interest*, you only give lessons with materials when the child is truly interested in this type of interaction with you. When you do show some piece of work, introduce it briefly and then move far away so the child can work in a state of concentration on his own. Eventually, this concentrated work leads to the pivotal event of normalization.

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Lee Havis shows Kim Danh (Vietnam) procedures for giving nomenclature lesson at IMS workshop in Cebu, Philippines (June 11-12, 2011)

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Normalization

"The transition from one state to the other always follows a piece of work done by the hands with real things, work accompanied by mental concentration. The psychological event...we have called by the technical term 'normalization.'"

Dr. Maria Montessori

From *Absorbent Mind.*, p.156

Normalization is the central psychological event of Montessori teaching, since it signals the beginning of true natural development. Once normalized, the children become happily focused on their own activity as if you didn't exist at all. In this final stage 3 *concentration-normalization*, you become to them a virtual 'nobody.'

Nobody

"When I am with the children I am a nobody... to forget that I even exist..."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Ed. for a New World.*, p.67

In stage 3, the children are functioning normally in a state of true natural being. So, the children see you as a non-existent 'nobody.' In this position, however, you must still continue polishing the environment to maintain the forward progress of true normal development. For example, you must add and remove materials to meet the children's changing needs and interest for academic and intellectual stimulation. In addition, you must help parents, co-workers, and others improve and develop their Montessori teaching skills along with you as well. Ultimately, this process of polishing the environment involves you in a global commitment to serve the true normal development of all children in the world.

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children, such as by using *reflective language*. With this technique, you are repeating back what one child says to the other, except, now you are omitting the bad words. For example, the child says, "You are a (bad word)", and you reflect back, "Betty thinks you are not a nice person." In this way, you indirectly show proper language, without violating such protocols as *don't correct child* and *no negative attention to misbehavior*.

Correcting your own negative reaction to bad words will serve as a good model for parents to follow with their own children at home. The idea here is to get all adults to apply a no-reaction attitude towards bad words. This self-control, coupled with other positive patterns of communication, will gently guide children towards more positive, polite and friendly language with each other.

Transitions

When the teacher announces individual work time is over, the children seem to become extremely nervous and start to frantically run around the room. They seem confused and inattentive as the teacher directs them to put work away and come to sit together for a final group meeting. Sometimes, children become so wild that they run out of the room. What to do?

Answer in *Observer*, November 2011

IMS Montessori in Kurdistan

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Based on the July meeting, Lee proposed a schedule of initial IMS Montessori teacher training activities focusing especially on local personnel who would later be employed in IMS Montessori schools operating in the KRG area of Iraq. The main initial training event is a two-day workshop seminar in Erbil, KRG in December, 2011.

Lee has scheduled an initial consultation and planning visit to Kurdistan in September, 2011. During this visit, he plans to meet with local educational and community leaders to promote enrollment of local persons into an IMS Montessori teacher education program. Through this program, Lee hopes to prepare a feasible number of teachers to be employed in the Montessori schools that will be set up for operation in the region. The training program will consist of several workshop seminars and a series of monthly observation reports. The unique IMS technology will be a central focus of this training.

The near term plan is to establish the first Montessori school in Erbil as a model for others as well as a training facility for the entire region. Lee says that this facility might provide IMS Montessori teacher education for many other nearby countries, such as Iran, Syria, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Israel, and Dubai, UAE.

Lee also sees the development of this Kurdistan Montessori project as a means for expanding the *Character Teaching* (CT) project in other countries as well. He is especially eager to network the Kurdistan project with those CT projects in countries that are suffering with long-term cultural poverty, such as India, Philippines, Pakistan, and Nepal.