



The Montessori OBSERVER

*Don't Interrupt
Concentration*

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Lower elementary (6-9) children at the Montessori School of Rome, dressed in their historical timeline character's clothing. They chose an historical character to research, write a report, prepare a speech, and present it to parents, students, and a local nursing home.

Montessori School of Rome, Georgia

In 1980, **Swarna Kumar**, a native of Sri Lanka, came to Rome, Georgia on a visit and was so impressed by the community that she founded a school there, now known as *Montessori School of Rome, Georgia*. After starting with a single class of children at the primary (2-6) level, the parents kept asking her to include other programs. So, she added two toddler classes besides. When parents approached her about adding elementary, she put them in charge of fundraising, and said if there was enough interest, she would consider it. As the parents did their part, and she did hers, a Lower Elementary program was added in 1996. From there, the school continued to grow and the Upper Elementary program was added in 1999. Today, it serves students 18 months through 8th grade, with a 9th grade being added for the 2016-17 school year.

When Ms. Kumar passed away in 2001, her daughter, **Shemi Kumar** and her husband, **Jim Penosky** were moved by the number of parents and children who cared deeply for the school and wanted it to continue. So, they decided to carry on her work, and Ms. Shemi is now the Headmistress. She has taught in each program, and is currently the Adolescent Guide and the Headmistress.

Since many Montessori schools do not have an Adolescent program, Shemi and her staff are very proud of the accomplishments of their program which focuses on advanced academics with students leaving the school with high school credit. The

upper grade students run a Lunch Box business of preparing and selling meals for other students in the school, so they are able to raise money for travel. Last year, Shemi reports they visited Mexico to go along with their World History studies. This year (2016), they are studying Native Americans and went to Williamsburg, VA and Cherokee NC for an in-depth look at Native American cultures then and now. Soon, they will go out West, including stops in New Mexico and Arizona, with a visit scheduled to the Grand Canyon.

In addition to their travels, the upper grade academics are strenuous, and the textbooks they use are also used in local high schools 10th and 11th grade courses with 9th graders taking AP courses as well. The students also have planted a vegetable garden and, with collaboration from a parent who is a farmer, they plan on having a Farmer's Market in the coming school year.

The older students also give attention to charitable work in the community. For example, in the current academic year, they have raised money through a "Pink Out Walk Out" with funds going to the Breast Cancer Research Foundation. In addition, they have hosted a Halloween party with proceeds going to St. Jude's Children's Hospital.

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Organizing for "True Natural" Politics

Organizing politics, like supervising children, usually follows the "personality" or "culture" approach. However, it can also follow the "true natural" type committed to laws of nature as well. The "personality" type has command and control that is "top-down" by the authority of some person, such as the candidate, campaign official, or elected leader. The "culture" type is limited by whatever is popular or expected by the surrounding culture. Either way, this "politics as usual" fosters the emergence of corrupt, dishonest, and incompetent elected leaders, which in turn leads to repressive, dysfunctional government. By contrast, "true natural" politics is bottom-up self-governing by the people themselves. Here, political leaders serve the people through wise guidance and reason for the benefit of all.

For many years, Lee Havis, IMS executive director, in his work of creating the "new education" in society, has been opposed by various types of government censorship and monopoly under the guise of "regulation". He therefore soon realized the need for a new true natural politics to overcome these serious obstacles of government.

Since early 2015, Lee has been conducting an experiment in this true natural political approach by organizing campaign activity for a presidential candidate who closely reflects this same philosophy. As state volunteer coordinator, he has brought together a team of some 400 volunteers and coordinators in the state of Maryland to conduct a wide range of typical campaign activities, such as phone banking, sign installation, social media outreach, and canvassing. Reflecting on this experience, Lee says, "I've found that directing this organization is very much like Montessori teaching with a group of children. Except, however, supervising adults is much more difficult due to the many strong character flaws that have become deeply embedded in the typical adult personality from prior conditioning in childhood."

Lee sees his grassroots "bottom-up" campaign organizing as an opening to restore self-governance in America, which has always been basic to the founding principles of the country, as set forth in the US Constitution and Declaration of Independence. In modern times, however, he says, "We have largely neglected this original vision of self-governance, having transferred great power to a centralized elite cartel of career politicians and their enabling lobbyists and special interests who sustain the system through their financial campaign contributions. In such a toxic political climate, the people are like a wild, screaming mob of children who are either tightly controlled by a

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Don't Interrupt Concentration

by Lee Havis

"When the child begins to show interest...the teacher must not interrupt.. 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

Although Montessori teaching is sometimes described as the method of "non-intervention" with children, it is really more properly a type of limited intervention, based on the approach of controlling the environment, not the child. "Non-intervention" however, does apply when children are concentrating on work.

In Montessori teaching, you must therefore not interrupt a child's concentration, because this signals an important inner normalization taking place in the young child that aims to restore him to his true natural state of being. The IMS technology provides the protocol *don't interrupt concentration* precisely to support this important concept, which is so central to all Montessori teaching with young children.

The *don't interrupt* protocol helps you control the common urge to intervene with children who are concentrating on work, such as to help them overcome some difficulty or to give a brief word of praise like "good job". In fact, interrupting the child in this way impedes the child's true natural development since his interest to concentrate comes from his desire to overcome that difficulty on his own.

Interest

"Too many teachers are inclined to be continually interrupting and teaching..... the child may go from the difficult to the easy and makes great strides. A child who is interested in what he is doing goes on and on without fatigue."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Ed. For a New World*, p.67

Conventional teachers routinely interrupt children to conduct their own lessons from a predetermined curriculum they are following. With young children, their non-intervention is usually just abandonment to random fantasy play under the guise of "freedom".

By contrast, Montessori teaching follows the child's own inborn interest, even to allow them to struggle on work that seems too difficult or unimportant from the adult's point of view. Applying the *don't interrupt* protocol, however, requires some judgment in its application. For this, you must use the external facts of each situation to determine if the concentration is focused on real work rather than random fantasy that you must interrupt instead.

External Facts

"External facts which can be fully observed, offer practical guidance which is worthwhile to pursue.."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.52

In Montessori teaching, adult intervention must be based on the external facts of the situation, because you are always observing the child as an "unknown entity". If there is outward evidence of the child's interest in work, such as touching and looking at some particular object, then you must not interrupt. However, if the interest is directed to disturbing, violent behavior, you must indeed interrupt.

Disturbing Activity

"If there is some child who persistently annoys the others, the most practical thing to do is to interrupt him, to break the flow of disturbing activity."

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

Montessori teaching interrupts any harmful or fantasy activity, such as by using the *distraction* technique to get the child's attention. Then, using the *questioning* technique, ask, "What are you doing?" If the child describes what he is doing in a realistic way, and there is no physical harm or fantasy in the activity, allow him to freely continue. Applying the protocol *basis of interest*, you may also offer a brief lesson to re-direct the child's attention to the proper handling of that work. However, if the handling persists as abusive or fantasy oriented, use the *clear direction* technique to tell the child to return the materials to the shelf.

Sometimes, children concentrate on lengthy verbal interactions with you or other children. Here, the child's concentration is focused on words, not objects. So, since this is most likely fantasy in nature, interrupt and resolve it in some indirect manner. The only type of concentration that leads to normalization involves concentrating on physical objects.

Concentrating on Objects

"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

The Montessori environment provides physical objects organized into exercises and activities that reflect the perfect order of nature. Concentrating on these activities, therefore, allows the child to internalize this order through his senses by the functioning of his uniquely absorbent mind. So, when you see a child fixing his attention on one particular piece of work, apply the *don't interrupt* protocol by staying well back from him as much as possible.

Fixing Attention

"When a normal child is attracted by an object he fixes his whole attention intently upon it and continues to work without a break in a remarkable state of concentration."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Secret of Childhood*, p 114

A young child naturally fixes his attention on work that corresponds to his unique inner instincts

for mental ordering at that moment. In outward form, you can see the first signs of this attention by what he is looking at and touching at that time, which is often some practical life activity.

Practical Life

"The power to concentrate on something...occurs with the exercises of practical life."

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

From early infancy, children naturally take an interest in what they see others do every day at home, such as cleaning, dressing, and food preparation. In the Montessori environment, therefore, you promote the child's concentration by re-creating similar practical life activities,

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Look for the
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Get Acquainted**

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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.

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Moment of Peril

by Lee Havis

Social Conflict at Home

The problem here is how to help someone resolve misbehavior at a distant location from you. See *Observer*, November, 2015. This situation is complicated by the need to deal with unruly children from an extended family who live elsewhere. In addition, since the parent is not oriented to Montessori teaching, she has been making many mistakes so far, such as imposing harsh punishment, rather than using the elegant tools of IMS technology.

Analysis: In this *moment of peril*, the teacher must advise the parent in a situation that she can't directly observe or control through her physical presence. The parent's lack of basic knowledge points to the "adult personality" as the primary detrimental influence here which you must control in a remote, complex situation involving many unknown other factors in the environment.

Practical Advice: Ideally, the teacher would visit the parent's home and show by her own Montessori teaching how to establish basic order in the environment, such as by using strong techniques of *distraction*, *clear direction*, and *questioning*. However, since this direct instruction and guidance is not possible, at least initially, you must give some simple effective advice to the parent remotely, so she can at least start to restore the necessary order and harmony in her home on her own.

In this situation, look for just one or two simple things that the parent can do immediately to start achieving some basic success which will encourage her further efforts. For example, instruct her in good verbal communication, such as by using the technique *clear direction* with the protocol *eye contact before talking*. Do this by practicing some role-play scenarios that the parent can duplicate with children at home. The key idea is to WAIT for a child to look at you before giving a direction. Show her also how to use the technique *imagination-visualization (IP)* by sitting quietly alone to imagine the problem, and then applying the solution and see the children change to a calm and harmonious state of being.

Since new habits are hard to establish, reinforce your guidance with the parent every few days, to see how she is applying the new knowledge you gave her. In each new conversation, point out and praise every small effort she makes to follow your guidance; and gently clarify further how to use the technology to correct any mistakes she is still making.

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Don't Interrupt Concentration

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such as dressing frames, food handling devices, and table washing exercises. Before concentrating on these materials, however, the children must understand how to handle objects with care, and to adjust their behavior to the basic order of the environment.

Before Concentration

"Before concentration occurs, the directress may do more or less what she thinks best; she can interfere with the children's activities as much as she deems necessary."

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

Typically, young children enter the Montessori environment with well-established habits of disorder and inattention from home. In the beginning, therefore, before concentration is possible, show them how to sit without touching others, stand and walk in an orderly manner, and carefully handle the various materials. Once the children are oriented in this way, gradually release them to free activity with the materials on their own. Now you are watching the children from a distance, looking for signs of that single type of normalized child that emerges in a moment of concentration on some particular piece of work.

Single Normalized Type

"The teacher...sees that single normalized type, which lies in a world of the spirit...So what must she look out for? That one child or another will begin to concentrate."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.252

Montessori teaching requires a considerable period of time for observing and supervising children before they begin to deeply concentrate on work. During this scanning and supervision period, therefore, you can interrupt them occasionally when necessary, such as to resolve some misbehavior or disorder or to give a brief lesson in a particular piece of work. At the same time, however, you are also observing their outward behavior to find evidence of their normalization.

Normalization

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

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.186

Before normalization emerges, young children work with materials for a long period of time before getting into serious concentration. So, the child's initial concentration is quite brief, and easily broken by a word or sound from others. Only later will the child deeply focus his attention for an hour or more to one activity, repeating the same simple movement over and over again until he naturally finishes in a state of great peace and calm. Montessori teaching supports this normalization by applying the great principle *don't interrupt concentration*.

The Great Principle

"The great principle which brings success to the teacher is this: as soon as concentration has begun, act as if the child does not exist."

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

Montessori teaching must especially protect the first emergence of concentration in children. So, for example, don't ring a bell or call the whole class to attention at any time. When you must end the work period, do this in gradual steps that don't interrupt children who are concentrating at that time. For example, wait for eye contact before telling a child to put work away and come to sit down in the closing group meeting.

Ideally, children who are deeply concentrating on work will eventually see what the other children are doing, and finish their work in a natural way on their own. Knowing how and when to interact with children in these various situations comes through practice and experience, which is now greatly aided by the IMS technology.

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Messages to IMS

January 2016
Queensland, Aus

Hi Lee. I have absolutely been studying the IMS technology - I love the techniques, protocols and safe words - for me, it makes perfect sense. I agree, too, that Montessori is a spiritual way of life that supports the development of the child - academic skills will naturally follow. I've read a lot of your work - it is very inspiring!

Christine O'Leary

November 2015
Augusta, KS

To IMS

After more than two years, today finally I finish my Montessori certification through IMS. This has been the most rewarding experience of my teaching career. Thank you to Lee Havis for designing the Montessori Technology, I can't tell you enough of all the benefits of this in our program here in Augusta, Ks. Our children are normalized, they are highly academically prepared and our enrollment keeps rising (we now have a two year waiting list!) Thank you so much.

Sally Korte (IMS 2015)

February 2016
Cebu, Philippines

Lee

Oh, thank you very much, Lee Havis! We continue to apply all the techniques in respecting the nature of the child and effectively managing their behavior that you've shared with us years ago. They really work! Thank you for having been a source of inspiration to us!

Marivec Bathan, Director
Children's Paradise Montessori School

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Forum conducted by Free State Patriots for candidates for US congress in district 1 in the state of Maryland. l to r, Michael Smigiel, Sean Jackson, Jonathan Goff, and Matt Beers

Liberty Politics in Maryland

On March 12, 2016, the *Free State Patriots* (Lee Havis, organizer) conducted a forum in Centreville, MD to evaluate candidates for US Congress in Maryland Congressional District 1 (eastern shore). At the forum, Lee asked the candidates questions to draw out their position on liberty and limited constitutional government as related to such issues as the economy, federal spending, education, and foreign affairs.

Lee organized the Free State Patriots as a non-partisan, community group to help raise awareness among voters and candidates about the value and importance of liberty, which is vital for the effective expression of Montessori education in society. He has published the candidates' applications and questionnaires at the Maryland page of the website for "Patriot Vetting Committee" (<http://patriotvoting.com>). In addition, he has posted a public audio recording of the forum: <https://soundcloud.com/patriotlee/candidate-forum-us-congress-md-cd1-march-12-2016>.

The Free State Patriots has over 70 members in Maryland, and is open to all citizens in the state who are committed to the principles and rights of liberty as set forth in the US constitution and Declaration of Independence. For more information, visit the FSP website: <http://meetup.com/Free-State-Patriots>. Or contact: lee@patriotvoting.com

Moment of Peril

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With each small success, there will be positive changes in the children. So, keep offering more details about the technology, until she is effectively practicing the various techniques and protocols on her own. Eventually, have the parent show her other family members how to use this technology in the same way you showed her.

Using Sandpaper Letters

In my classroom of 3-6 year old children, some of them continuously don't show interest in receiving a presentation of sandpaper letters. Learning to read is so basic to each child's success at the elementary level, I don't see how I can safely allow them to leave the sensitive period for language before the age of six without having this skill well in hand. How can I encourage them to take an interest in the sandpaper letters while they are still in the absorbent period for learning? *What to do? Answer in Observer, May 2016*

Don't Interrupt Concentration

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The Teacher's Skill

"The teacher's skill in not interfering comes with practice, like everything else, but it never comes very easily."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Absorbent Mind*, p.256

Montessori teaching involves "inner preparation" of the spirit to develop the delicate skills of "non-intervention" with children. Happily, the IMS technology provides reliable practical guidance for this approach. Using various protocols, such as *don't interrupt concentration*, you will gain the balance and skill to eventually bring about the new normalized children from your efforts, just as Dr. Montessori promised and predicted so many years ago.

"True Natural" Politics

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tyrannical teacher, or completely abandoned to fantasy and disorder. Restoring order and normal social harmony now requires great determination and firm guidance by leaders who function with the wisdom and authority of laws of nature."

In the current campaign, Lee says, "Despite resistance and conflict on all sides, I'm certain we are on the right path towards self-governance in Maryland. And, I hope our work here will also be an encouragement to similar efforts by other grassroots organizers around the country."