



The Montessori *Apathy* OBSERVER

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The Montessori “Method”

Does it exist, or not?

“My method...I feel very uncomfortable discussing...I find this the most difficult subject of any on which to deliver a public lecture, for I have not evolved a method of education.”

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Education and Peace*, p. 76

Dr. Montessori entitled her first book in Italian, “*The Method of Scientific Education applied to the Education of Children in the Children’s House*”. The English publishers shortened this to “*The Montessori Method*” which has become common today for Dr. Montessori’s work and research, even though she herself disavowed the accuracy of this term.

In her book “*Montessori Method*”, Dr. Montessori wrote about her work as an experiment in “scientific pedagogy (education)” which she viewed as “*something vague...but which does not, in reality, exist*”...(but rather based on)... “*mere intuition or suggestion*” with the hope that it would one day emerge from the mist and clouds that have surrounded it.” (*Montessori Method*, p. 1-2) [Happily, that day came in 1979 with the emergence of IMS]

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Montessori Tools and TIPS

Lee Havis answers questions raised by members of the Facebook discussion page, “Montessori Tools and Tips”.

Problem Scenario

A child that came with the parents to make enquiries on admission into the school. After a tour around the school with the parents and the child, the child fell in love with something specific in the school and refused to follow his parents, when they were ready to leave. The situation was so terrible that the admin of the school had to assist the parents and drag the child to the car and they zoomed off.

Now my question is what protocols and techniques of the IMS, would have been appropriate to use in the above scenario?

Answer:

When it’s time for a child to leave a location, it’s time to leave. However, achieving that result according to laws of nature, you have to follow the right path — and that’s what the IMS technology provides. The basic procedure is to approach the child, get attention (*distraction* — if necessary), and give a *clear direction*, such as “Take my hand” or “It’s time to go”. However, before talking to the child, there must be eye contact - protocol: “*eye contact before talking*”. If the child runs off, turns away, or otherwise

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Children working with Montessori math materials at the Montessori Academy of Virginia (Chesapeake, VA)

Montessori Academy of Virginia

The *Montessori Academy of Virginia* was founded by **Dr. Divitotawela** in 1996. Originally located in a small rental building in Virginia Beach, the school now consists of three 10,000 sq. ft. state of the art facilities with a total of 22 classrooms and an enrollment of nearly 350 students. Each campus is situated on one+ acre lot in Virginia Beach, Chesapeake, and Suffolk.

Each campus location includes spacious classrooms with private bathrooms, child friendly learning opportunities, gymnasium, large lunch room, and garden areas for children to plant and explore nature in its full form. The design of the schools and grounds was developed in detail to reflect the vision of Dr. Maria Montessori.

Just this year, the school has introduced an enhancement program that links students in the various age-level classes to a controlled outdoor environment, known as *Montessori Acres Farm*. At this facility, there are various farm animals and opportunities for the students to explore their sense of touch, smell, and taste in a natural setting that is exclusive to students at the Montessori Academy of Virginia. Weather permitting, students take periodic trips to the Montessori Acres where they first meet with the in-house Montessori trained Botany teacher, who incorporates and enhances the classroom learning experiences with practical Zoology and Botany related activities.

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Messages to IMS

Kids Hands – On

Philippines, March 2020

I have attended 2 rounds of your workshops on “*Creating New Education*” that deals with handling children’s behavior. ... I use the 10 techniques & 20 protocols based on every scenario in dealing with children’s behavior. They help me a lot in terms of classroom management for over 10 long years when I was working in a Montessori school as a main teacher. Even now that I’m no longer teaching in a pure Montessori environment, I still make use of the techniques & protocols which are very effective in my day-to-day working with the children.

Amy Meiberg (IMS ‘99)

Sioux Falls, SD

When I left the Montessori in Sioux Falls...I became an Educational Assistant for special needs students in a middle school. Some students had a mentality comparable to an age of a preschooler. From taking the (IMS) Montessori studies I gained the knowledge of how to represent the daily routine in a way that was approachable, nurturing and firm at the same time. I have much pride over the years in a profession that supports the learning process and I’m feeling very fortunate to have been able to impart what I know towards my own children as well.



Apathy

by Lee Havis

"...mentally as physically, people are lazy, wanting only to enjoy life. The more then is admiration due to those who are different."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from to **Ed. The Hum Potential** p.77

While modern computer technology has brought great ease and comfort to many, the lack of man's spiritual and character development continues to bring suffering through fear, greed, corruption, and violence in the world as well. People look to "education" as a hopeful solution to this problem. But, massive government "public education" and compulsory school attendance only seem to make matters worse.

While Dr. Montessori envisioned a "new education" to address this issue, would-be practitioners have largely neglected and abandoned this vision in their rush to meet the superficial expectations and demands of the surrounding culture. How can we address this basic apathy towards the central purpose of Montessori teaching, to re-focus priority attention to the "normalization" of young children?

Normalization

"Now children as they are ordinarily known, unstable, lazy, disorderly, violent, stubborn, disobedient, etc. are functionally ill and can be cured...In other words, they can be normalized."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from **Formation of Man**, p.46

Dr. Montessori's great contribution to the moral uplift of man was her discovery that the young child can shift from his ordinary lazy, fanciful way of being to a state of perfect harmony, peace, and order through the event of "normalization". Efforts to achieve this true natural state of being, however, has become hard to realize due to an apathetic disregard of this new child as a genuine achievable goal.

Sadly, the history of Montessori teaching has been marked by apathy, betrayal, and distraction relating to its main purpose of "normalization." Indeed, almost from its beginning in 1907, Dr. Montessori herself met with almost immediate wide-spread opposition and disbelief in her discovery of the child's true nature. So, instead of pursuing a deeper study into scientific education, she shifted her attention towards personal fame and economic success for her work through certifying teachers and selling related books and materials.

At one point, Dr. Montessori even collaborated with the dictator **Benito Mussolini** to gain power through his government to support the operation of her schools. Today, practitioners commonly fall victim to this same apathy towards the normalization of children, adopting instead the popular view of the child as weak and lazy,

interested only in the futile idleness and escape to a world of fantasy play.

Futile Idleness

"...the normal child is one who is precociously intelligent who has learned to overcome himself and to live in peace, and who prefers a disciplined task to futile idleness."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from **Secret of Childhood**, p.148

Today, Dr. Montessori's vision of the normal child is largely seen as impractical or an ideal only. So, educators and practitioners attend primarily to the business and commerce of collecting tuition, meeting government regulations, and assuring a suitable level of superficial order in the classroom.

In fact, government strongly influences Montessori schools to operate within the play-time philosophy of "child care centers", or as rigid academic programs to implement the government's "public school" curriculum. Either way, Montessori practitioners feel little external incentive or support to serve the higher calling of service to Dr. Montessori's hopeful vision of a revolutionary "new education". So, no attention or regard is given to the possibility of a new child acting with a natural sense of prudence and order in all his spontaneous self-directed activity.

Prudence

"Normalization...does not consist in hurling oneself into the midst of dangers but in acquiring a prudence which permits one to recognize and dominate dangers..."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from **Secret of Childhood** p.172-73

The ordinary child in society is well-known for his emotional reaction to sensations of the immediate moment. Therefore, Dr. Montessori's discovery of a new child who is serious and cautious in life seems apathetic and abnormal in his behavior. Montessori practitioners can therefore only bring about such true normal qualities in children by creating conditions that closely model these same qualities as well for children to imitate. Acting in such a prudent, thoughtful manner, however, does not mean you are creating a passive or unfriendly environment for children.

Passive Environment

"Our concept of education of children thus differs not only from those who do everything for a child themselves but also from those who think they can have the child in a purely passive environment."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from **Secret of Childhood**, p.198

The Montessori environment, committed to laws of nature, is not passive at all, because it contains a variety of self-teaching materials which the children can freely use on their own. And, while the teacher's aim is strictly "observation", this doesn't mean that she doesn't become quite active at times as well. Indeed,

you must sometimes move around quite actively, such as to resolve misbehavior or conduct a lesson presentation with some specific piece of work. This activity, however, approaches the child indirectly through the environment, which is difficult for many to understand and apply due to a psychological quirk in the ordinary adult personality.

Psychological Quirk

"Because of some psychological quirk, adults are little concerned about preparing a proper environment for their children."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from **Secret of Childhood** p.2

Parents and teachers instinctively seem to disregard the "environment" because it gets confused with the "child" instead. To overcome this psychological quirk, you need to train your mind

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Lee Havis, Executive Director

The Montessori Observer is mailed four times each year, in March, May, September and November, to IMS members throughout the world. The purpose is to provide news and information about the IMS work in Montessori education, and to extend awareness of Montessori teaching that brings about the child's true nature throughout the world.

INTERNATIONAL MONTESSORI SOCIETY

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IMS ON THE INTERNET

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/imsmontessori/> An on-line IMS discussion group, "Montessori Tools and Tips" is available for anyone to join at no charge. To join this group discussion, visit <https://www.facebook.com/groups/montessoritoolsandtips/>

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Moment of Peril

by Lee Haviv

Parent Problems

The teacher wonders how to help parents learn about Montessori teaching, when they ignore her instructions to observe what she is doing with the children in the classroom (**See Observer**, November, 2019). When she confronts them, they either get angry or leave the school altogether. What to do?

Analysis: Since the problem to resolve is entirely among the adults in the environment, the primary detrimental influence to control is the “adult personality”.

Practical Advice: In psychological terms, the teacher is projecting flaws of abandonment towards the children, which is being expressed in the parents who ignore and disregard the basic function and value of observation in a silent, alert manner. The teacher creates a negative reaction to correcting the parents’ behavior by interrupting them in a rude, negative manner, without first gaining eye contact and friendly rapport. In addition, the problem is made worse by the parents talking about issues unconnected with their purpose to observe and learn how the teacher is interacting with the children.

Communicating with adults who are violating the integrity of Montessori teaching involves a four-step process: (1) friendly interruption (2) sincere complimentary comment, (3) point out error, and (4) agree to a plan of correction. For example, (1) approach the group of disrespectfully behaving adults (*proximity*), to get one parent to look up for eye contact. Then, smile and say, “Come over here. Let me show you something.” (protocol: *eye contact before talking*; technique: *clear direction*)

Once you have the parent’s attention and eye contact, say, for example, (2) “I really appreciate your taking time and interest to see how our program works to help your child.” Then, (3) “Do you see how I am interacting with the children? You can see better by sitting here very quietly and still.” Finally, (4) “Watch closely what I’m doing. Later we’ll discuss and answer questions. OK?”

After one parent in the group begins to settle into quiet, still observation, the others are likely to imitate that behavior as well in a cooperative, respectful manner. Since patterns of distraction, impatience, and disorder are common mental states with parents around children, you will probably need to practice the technique *repetition* as well. Each time you do, however, be sure there is friendly eye contact before any verbal interaction.

As always, if the problem with parents in the environment persists over time, use the technique *imagination-provisioning* (IP) to work out the situation in your quiet meditation away from the chaos and confusion of the actual real-life situation. With a calm, friendly, but persistent demeanor, your interaction with the parents will be applying the protocol *model good behavior*, to the parents directly. But, even if they don’t see and appreciate everything you are doing

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to view the child as an unknown spiritual being, rather than by its ordinary perception as a personality or physical body. Only then can you properly view the environment as everything around this “unknown” child, consisting of: (1) physical objects, (2) other children, and (3) adult personality. Once that distinction is clear in your mind, you can then properly function in the right way to remove the detrimental influence in the environment that are obstacles to the child’s true natural being.

The adult personality is especially hard to control in its detrimental projection of negativity and abandonment

The Montessori “Method”

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In Dr. Montessori’s time, however, “scientific education” was a term that she and others used in reference to the research conducted by **Eduard Seguin** in the 1850’s. And, using this basic knowledge, Dr. Montessori used this prior research to discover the child’s true nature in 1907, even though she never saw this scientific education evolve beyond “mere intuition and suggestion”. In fact, she wrote much later in her life, “*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.*” (**Discovery of the Child**, p.37)

Today, the term “Montessori Method” does exist in reference to Dr. Montessori’s vague “intuition and suggestions” on the subject of scientific education. However, in conventional practice, this “method” is limited by an ultimate attachment to personality or culture.

In 1979, all this changed when the vague concept of “scientific education” became clarified in practical terms as a commitment to laws of nature. Since then, IMS has been faithfully representing this new education in the world, providing practical tools and resources for its effective use with children to bring about their true natural being.

For example, in 2003, IMS introduced a breakthrough “technology” for conducting scientific education in a reliable, objective manner that was never possible before. Visit the IMS website to find practical resources and knowledge about this scientific education and technology. www.ims-montessori.org

on children. The challenge here is to recognize these projections as coming from a hidden drama of your own childhood past, which is made even more difficult by social customs that justify this drama as normal when it is common and shared by others as well.

Social Customs

“Parents today abandon their children to social customs as if they were inevitable...”

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Child in the Family*, p.216

Social customs emerge from common patterns of behavior that are well-accepted by most in your culture. Since these social customs typically conflict with the child’s true nature, you must recognize and control them in your own personal actions with children. For example, every culture has a social custom related to freedom, which in modern western culture is essentially an abandonment of children to idle play and fantasy.

Freedom

“Giving freedom to the child does not mean to abandon him to his own resources and perhaps to neglect him.”

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

Montessori teaching applies the principle of freedom not to ‘abandon’ the child as customary in society, but rather to allow the child’s true nature to fully emerge. However, in practice, what is fantasy and what is true natural work is not always clear. So, you need to carefully think through in advance what action to take in each situation.

Action

“To think and wish is not enough. It is action which counts.”

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Spont. Act. In Ed.*, p.171

In Montessori teaching, your action aims to follow laws of nature. However, since you can’t follow these laws directly, the IMS technology provides a very practical approximation that works well in an experimental process of scientific observation. In this technology, there are 20 protocols that keep your actions in close harmony with laws of nature and 10 techniques which are specific actions you can take to apply the protocols in each situation you encounter. One of these techniques, *patient waiting*, is especially effective for controlling your own adult personality.

Patient Waiting

“The teacher must be quiet and passive, waiting patiently and almost withdrawing herself from the scene...and thus allow plenty of room for the child’s spirit to expand.”

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.240

Applying the techniques and protocols is a variable process, such as sometimes moving closer (technique: *proximity*) to resolve a situation of physical violence, and at other times,

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more passively to just watch a child in quiet fantasy (technique: *patient waiting*). For example, if a child is engaged in quiet fantasy, follow the protocol *least amount of adult involvement* by applying the technique “*patient waiting*” to just stand still to silently watch what is happening at that time.

Another technique, *imagination-previsioning* (IP) takes place away from the children in a state of quiet, solitary meditation. Here, the action is to visualize and analyze some persistent problem you can't solve in the present-moment real-life situation. In this meditation, you can pre-vision a solution, which may also occur in your sleep as well, to bring out a good idea to later try out in the real-life actual situation.

Sleep

“...a mathematical student may ponder for hours over some problem without success, til he decides to ‘sleep on it’, and on waking finds solutions easy.”

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *To Ed. The Hum. Potential* p.15

The IMS technology is mental and psychological in nature, guiding your actions to gradually move to a state of being nothing and “nobody” in the environment. Using IP for example, you may find a solution, such as in a dream when you are not even consciously thinking about the problem with children at all. However, your sleep brings about a condition for unconscious, instinctive learning, to apply later in practice. It is therefore not an escape into a state of apathy towards your duty to follow the great principle of scientific observation with children.

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

The great principle of observation in Montessori teaching is always about creating the right conditions to bring about the child's true nature. While the IMS technology provides the tools for this work, you will still need great faith and patience at times as you wait for its effects to take hold over time.

Applying this technology also requires an inner self-discipline and commitment to face and overcome the inner obstacles of personality and culture as well. And since reaching normalization may only arise after a long time of obstacles and resistance from others, you'll need to overcome the attitude of apathy that tempts you to abandon the narrow road of commitment to laws of nature, choosing instead the wide easy way of pleasing others with more ordinary interests in what you are doing with children. Only by following the narrow committed road will you ultimately realize the promise and hope of Montessori's new education to bring about man's true nature of perfect love, peace, and harmony in the world.



Gardening work at the Montessori Academy of Virginia (Chesapeake, VA)

Montessori Tools and Tips

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disobeys, there are only two reasons this happens - the child doesn't understand what to do; or “can't”. Usually, the situation is the child doesn't understand. But in either case, the techniques “*patient waiting*” and “*repetition*” apply. If “doesn't understand”, use the protocol “*simplify complexity*”, and give the *clear direction* in a simpler, more direct manner, such as “Take my hand”.

The problem is worse if the parents have created a “can't” condition due to past patterns of force, neglect, appeasement, or control at home. This creates a complexity that you have to resolve in some way. For example, if the parents show fear or anger or impatience to the child, this will create a “can't” condition, which you have to neutralize in some way. One way to do this is to have the parents leave the immediate situation, such as “wait outside” so you can deal with the child without that interference. Or, instruct them to remain silent and still while you resolve the matter. Again, *repetition* and *patient waiting*, along with *clear direction* and *eye contact* will eventually bring order to the “leaving” situation.

Moment of Peril

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with the children, they will still have a good learning experience by your good, direct interaction with them.

Parenting in Crisis

Because of a widespread contagious disease, all schools and most businesses have been shut down for an indefinite period of time. The school owner, therefore, wants to counsel and advise the parents of her students to assure their continuing normal learning at home in such a stressful, isolated situation. What to do? Answer in *Observer*, May, 2020.