



The Montessori OBSERVER

Questioning

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Sally Korte in Kansas

by Sally Korte

For me, being around small children is a great joy. Born in Mexico and growing up in the city of Celaya in the state of Guanajuato, I always dreamed of three things: having a big family, marrying a cowboy and being a Preschool Teacher. All of them have come true since I am now married to a rancher in Kansas where we have six children, Brittny and Sadie who are twins, Michael, Solomon, Anthony, and John Paul. And, just recently, I became a preschool teacher as well.

Three years ago, I accepted a position as head preschool teacher at the school my children attended in Augusta, Kansas. Before classes began, I received a call from a friend to tell me she was donating some Montessori materials for the school. Since I had worked with the Montessori method in Mexico, I felt this was divine guidance to set up a Montessori curriculum for our preschool program.

As the first year enrollment grew, we saw a big positive change in our students. Even though I could see how much the children loved to work and learn, there was yet in us the desire to improve our program further. So, I decided it was time for me to become a certified Montessori Teacher.

Last spring I started my Montessori certification through IMS. These studies have given me the tools for applying true Montessori education in my classroom. The new technology has helped me to handle different scenarios while respecting the true nature of the child.

One of the techniques that I apply quite frequently is *Patient Waiting* which is so important in many situations. For example, when I line up the class to go home, I give the *clear direction*, "Sit down with your legs crossed and hands on your lap, and I will call your name so you can come to line up." One day, while doing this, one child, Dylan, suddenly chose to lay down. When I began calling the names of the children following my directions, she started throwing a tantrum and screaming, "Call me, call me now." When I came to her and directed her to sit up so I could call her, she didn't look up or respond, but simply continued her tantrum. So, I patiently

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Sally Korte, IMS student, presently residing and teaching near Wichita, Kansas, USA

Field Notes

Lynchburg, VA – *Patricia Brophy* (IMS student) begins practical teaching at a small school in her region of southwestern Virginia. She is also organizing interest for an IMS training workshop there. To join and help this effort, contact Patty, panbrophy@yahoo.com, tel. 434-610-3100.

Wichita, KS – *Sally Korte* (IMS student) is coordinating interest for scheduling an IMS workshop in the Wichita, Kansas area of the United States. To join in the effort, contact Sally: brittynyandsadie@hotmail.com; tel. 316-253-1254.

Stony Point, NY – *Jasmine Saini* (IMS student) is director-owner of her own school. She is also coordinating interest for an IMS workshop in the Westchester county area of New York. To support, contact Jasmine: jasminwadhwa78@gmail.com; Tel. 845-354-5253.

Richmond, BC, Canada - *Ines Woolgar* (IMS '03), native of Bolivia, begins teaching at a school in BC near her home. She is seeking to coordinate an IMS workshop in this area to expand and improve the use of Montessori teaching there. Contact Ines at 604-447-4263; inesexeni@gmail.com.

Arlington, VA - *Lee Havis*, IMS executive director, completed a course in the practical skills of principled political action at the *Leadership Institute*, August 5-8, 2013.

Panama After 50 years

From June 29 – July 1, 2013, **Lee Havis**, IMS director, visited Panama to attend a 50th year reunion of Peace Corps volunteers in that country. For Lee, this was the first time he returned to Panama after serving there as a volunteer from 1966-68.

In the Peace Corps, Lee served as assistant professor at the faculty of engineering of the University of Panama in Panama City. During this time, Lee and native Panamanian professor, **Roberto Smith**, comprised the entire mechanical engineering department in the faculty, with a first graduating class of only seven students.

Lee recalls the great challenge and frustration of teaching advanced math and engineering subject matter to students in a foreign language. Nevertheless, he states, "This first teaching experience got me interested in the problems of education, which then led me to the Montessori approach which I took up when I returned to the United States."

At the Panama reunion, Lee learned that many of the faculty and students he knew in the 1960's became prominent leaders in the later development of technical higher education in the country. From the initial

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Lee Havis (left) and Roberto Smith (right), colleagues in the engineering faculty of University of Panama (1966-68) reunite in Panama after 45 years



Questioning

by Lee Havis

"If there is some child who persistently annoys the others, the most practical thing to do is to interrupt him...often a question will serve, such as 'How are you, Johnny?' Come with me. I have something for you to do."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Ed. for a New World*, p. 36-37

The IMS technology includes the technique *questioning* as a tool for controlling your verbal interaction with children. Its primary use is for resolving misbehavior, however, it also serves quite well as a means for stimulating a child's self-directed academic learning.

Questioning, like the other two verbal techniques, *clear direction* and *reflective language*, must follow laws of nature if it is to achieve its intended purpose for the true normal development of children. The IMS technology therefore provides a series of protocols to guide you in this way. For example, one protocol, *eye contact before talking*, makes sure you have the child looking at you before asking your question. Only then will your question create the right psychological space for the child to return to self-awareness in present-moment reality.

Giving Space

"The usual conception of direct correction and suppression of defects is wrong... Correction is possible only by expansion, by 'giving space,' by opening up the means for the expansion of the personality."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Formation of Man*, p.49

Montessori teaching functions indirectly with children by giving space for the child's true nature to fully emerge. The technique *questioning* helps do this by removing the detrimental influence of your personality in the environment. Asking a question, for example, gets the child's attention on reality much more naturally than does giving some critical reprimand to a misbehaving child.

The protocols *no negative attention to misbehavior* and *don't correct child*, help keep your questioning neutral and positive with children. Following these protocols, for example, use a well-focused, friendly question such as "What are you doing?" to gently guide a misbehaving child back to normal learning experiences in the environment.

Experiences upon the environment

"Education...is acquired not by listening to words but by experiences upon the environment."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Ed. for a New World*, p.36-37

Montessori teaching is primarily non-verbal in nature, always helping children learn through sensorial experiences with physical objects in the environment. By

contrast, conventional teaching primarily employs verbal instruction that makes children dependent on external adult control.

Silent and observing, Montessori teachers encourage children to normalize through self-directed concentration on physical objects. To facilitate this normalization, you must reduce the impact of your personal presence, such as by avoiding any verbal interaction with children. When you must speak, therefore, carefully weigh your words so you don't distract children in their own self-directed activity.

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 *Secret of Childhood*, p.104

While resolving misbehavior, you must especially guard against using any negative language. The IMS technology assists you in this by offering a series of safe word phrases, such as "Come over here" and "Take my hand" to use in place of the very negative words, 'No' and 'Don't.' One safe word phrase is the question, "What are you doing?" Asking this question is especially effective to begin a dialogue with some misbehaving child who otherwise stubbornly avoids any contact with reality.

While remaining silent with children is usually best, this is not always wise or effective. For example, when a child approaches you asking for help, you must logically give some type of verbal response.

Asking for Help

"Some children...ask an adult for help...What seems to be an eager curiosity is in reality a means of keeping a person whom they need for support near at hand."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Secret of Childhood*, p.161-62

A child approaching you for help usually starts by asking a question, such as "Will you help me with this?" or "How do you do this?" While you can sometimes answer with just a smile, nod, or gesture, a more natural response is to answer verbally in some way.

The protocols *least amount of adult involvement* and *enhance independence* teach you to carefully weigh your words in any discussion with children. For example, instead of directly answering the child's question, use *reflective language* by just repeating the question back to him. When the child says "Can I use that broom?" you (teacher) say back "Can you use that broom?" This then re-directs the child to find an answer on his own elsewhere in the environment.

Answer to all questions

"The universe is an imposing reality, and an answer to all questions...all things are part of the universe, and are connected with each other to form a whole unity."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *To Ed. the Hum Potential*, p.80

Montessori teaching follows the *enhance independence* protocol by helping children find answers through their own self-directed research. So, when a child asks you for help, first try *reflective language*. If that is not enough, try using a question, such as "What do you think?" or "Who could you ask to help you with that?" You might also give a brief lesson presentation, using the common *clear direction* safe word phrase, "Come over here... Let me show you." Of course, in a social group, children can also find answers by asking each other for explanations.

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Lee Havis, Executive Director

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Moment of Peril

by Lee Havis

Making a Mess

The teacher here is frustrated with 2 ½ year old Mark who seems to make a mess of anything he does. See *Observer*, May, 2013. Apparently, he shows very little attention or true interest in any activity he undertakes with materials.

Analysis: Mark is the hub child, and the primary detrimental influence is “physical objects.” The problem here seems to reflect the teacher’s need to have Mark active with materials, without giving much regard to his genuine interest and level of ability in handling materials.

Practical Advice: Mark makes a mess with the materials because he doesn’t know how to use them properly. In addition, he is not particularly interested to learn their proper use due to a general lack of self-awareness and attachment to reality in the present moment. In this situation, you need to especially follow the protocols *basis of interest* and *simplify complexity – hint*.

The typical *moment of peril* with Mark begins with his messy handling of some piece of work. So, start here by approaching Mark (*proximity*) to control the physical objects he is mishandling. Then, use other techniques to guide him back to work with materials in present-moment reality. For example, get Mark’s attention by touching or holding an object in his hand (*distraction*) and then, let go of the object as soon as he looks at you. (protocol: *least amount of adult involvement*). Next, use the technique *clear direction* to say, “Come over here. Let me show you something.” Finally, follow the protocol *simplify complexity – hint*, by leading Mark to a simpler more orderly piece of work, such as a dressing “button” frame.

With the dressing frame, show Mark the basic hand and finger movements for this activity, using *cooperative touching* by doing the activity with him in a slow, careful manner. If Mark becomes disorderly with this, use the technique *repetition* to show the movement again and again, as often as he will pay attention to your instruction. If necessary, have Mark fold his hands in his lap while you are demonstrating. For this, use the safe words “watch” and “fold your hands together” to help him focus attention more directly on what you are showing.

If, after several presentations, Mark continues to mishandle the material, or otherwise loses interest in the work, return it to the shelf by saying “Let’s put this away now.” If he persists in mishandling other objects, interrupt act activity quickly before it becomes a mess. Only after he shows a clear understanding of the basic order of the environment, would you allow him to freely handle any materials on his own.

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Asking for explanations

“...children of different ages help one another. The younger ones see what the older ones are doing and ask for explanations... there is a communication and harmony between the two that one seldom finds between the adult and the small child.”

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Absorbent Mind*, p.226

A mixed age group of young children offers help for learning in many normal ways. For example, a child can watch another child to see how to do something and, if necessary, ask him for an explanation.

A child can also ask you for a lesson which you can offer if it doesn’t violate any protocol, such as *well-being of the total environment*. If you do give a lesson, however, make sure it is as brief and simple as possible, only enough to get the child started with the work on his own.

Enough to give a start

“The instruction of the teacher consists then merely in a hint, a touch – enough to give a start to the child. The rest develops of itself.”

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Dr. Montessori’s Own Hand*, p.58-59

The Montessori technology offers two types of lesson presentations with materials: *sensorial introduction* and *nomenclature*. With either one, you must carefully limit what you say to keep the child’s attention on the object of the lesson rather than on your personality.

Following the protocols *least amount of adult involvement* and *simplify complexity – hint*, keep your language plain and simple. Asking a question can sometimes be very effective for this purpose. For example, following these protocols, you might ask “Which one goes next?” when you are showing an ordering activity. At other times, however, it’s better to wait for the child to ask you a question.

Waiting for a question

“We wait for a child to ask, pointing at the compartment for zero; ‘And what should I put there?’ We then answer: ‘Nothing. A ‘0’ is nothing.”

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Discovery of the child*, p.111

The protocol *basis of interest* teaches you to wait for the child to show some specific outward evidence of interest in something before offering to show it. For example, showing the spindle box for matching numerals with the spindles, 0-9, don’t mention the ‘0’ numeral compartment until the child shows a specific interest in that, such as by asking “What goes here?” Only then, following the *basis of interest* protocol, would you answer by saying, “Nothing. ‘0’ means nothing.”

The IMS technology includes the nomenclature type lesson presentation to show the specific relationship between objects and concepts and their corresponding words. Here the process calls for a series of specific words, including a final question ‘What is this?’

What is this?

“...Seguin’s method...is also very useful...The third stage is a rapid verification of the first lesson. The teacher asks the child: ‘What is this?’”

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Discovery of the Child*, p.272

The nomenclature lesson is based on the three-stage method described by Eduard Seguin in the 1800’s. The stages are: (1) “This is...”, (2) “Show me...” and (3) “What is this?” The final stage, “What is this?” invites the child to confirm his understanding of the specific word-concept relationship at issue. Here, the technique *questioning* is used for teaching specific academic content.

Questioning is especially useful with elementary children in the second (6-12) plane of development. At this age, children learn less through handling objects on their own and more through social and verbal interaction with others.

Montessori elementary teaching, therefore, uses the verbal technique *questioning* quite regularly to stimulate

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Panama after 50 years

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graduating class of just seven students in 1968, the student enrollment had grown to almost 20,000 in 2013. During this time, the faculty of engineering became transformed into a whole new technology university consisting of seven separate campuses around the country.

Lee also learned that since 1968, some of his former students and fellow professors had achieved positions of significant responsibility in the management and operation of the country’s primary asset, the famous Panama Canal. Others became prominent in the development of industry, commerce, and construction that has made Panama the fastest growing economy in the region.

While in Panama, Lee found out that one of his associates on the faculty staff, **Edilma Moreno**, had entered the field of early childhood education to ultimately become the national director of education. Now, she is director of a commission to reform education in the country. Lee has therefore renewed contact with Edilma to hopefully work with her to continue improving education in Panama.

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Sally Korte in Kansas Con't. from Page 1, Col. 1

waited to see what would happen. Soon, Dylan calmed down, sat up properly, wiped her tears and said, "I am ready Mrs. Korte. I will line up." Then I called her to join the rest of the class, and she has never acted that way again.

On another occasion two girls were fighting over the metal inserts. One of them, MacKayla called me and asked for my help to solve the problem. Although I made eye contact at times, they still kept on fighting. So, as I patiently waited for a minute, Adelaide suddenly looked at MacKayla and said, "You can have it, I am going to work with the spindles." When they smiled at each other, I could see how naturally the problem was resolved by the children themselves.

At another time, one child, Ethan, was trying to write the alphabet on a small black board. While writing, he would get lost after writing the letter G and start all over. Next to him was another child, Drake, who had already mastered writing his alphabet. Since Ethan was frustrated after many attempts, he raised his hand and called for my help. Instead of rushing over to him, I patiently waited to see what would happen. In a few seconds, Drake looked at me and said to Ethan, "Don't worry, I will help you." Then, Drake offered his help by writing one letter and waiting for Ethan to write it. In this way, together, they finished writing the alphabet without my intervention.

Since I started to study more about Montessori philosophy and techniques, I see my work with children in a different way. I have now come to realize how important my role is as a teacher in preparing the environment. Many times before I would be so worried about how the classroom was decorated and organized. Now, my thoughts are different. I question myself daily about what I can change in my personality so my work with the children will be better.

I love how Maria Montessori used the story of St. Francis to explain this. When St. Francis heard God tell him to rebuild his church, he thought that meant to build a physical building. Later, however, he learned that the real church to build was about the conversion of human beings, beginning with himself.

Moment of Peril

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For basic order in the environment, show Mark how to fold hands together, sit down with legs crossed, move a chair, roll and unroll a rug, walk on a line, carry an object with two hands, and other such simple practical life activities that are necessary for basic movement around physical objects in a group.

Only after Mark has learned these basic self-control skills in a group situation, would you allow him to handle materials on his own. With this preparation, then, he will soon be prepared to handle work with greater care and attention in a proper, orderly manner.

Uninvited "help"

Six year old Michael loves to help younger children; however, his "help" usually amounts to interference and disturbance. For example, he approaches a young child concentrating on work, and takes over the activity to give a "lesson." He also routinely talks to children without eye contact, and criticizes their mistakes in a rude and negative manner. The teacher wants to encourage Michael's natural desire to help others; however, she doesn't know how to show him the right way without violating the technology herself with him. What to do?

Answer in Observer, November, 2013.

Questioning

Con't.d. from Page 3, Col. 3

the child's expansive interests in the complex reality of the whole universe. In this *cosmic* approach to learning, questioning helps children unlock basic mysteries of life by finding how all things are interrelated in service to the whole. Adults also learn and grow in this way, everyday, answering the same profound question, "What do I do now?"

The Profound Question

"Woe to us, when we believe ourselves responsible for matters that do not concern us, and delude ourselves with the idea that we are perfecting things that will perfect themselves quite independent of us!...the profound question arises: What, then is our true mission, our true responsibility."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from Spont. Act. in Ed., p.6

Montessori teaching unfolds in practice as a series of questions, the essential one being 'What do I do now?' Using the IMS technology, we now have an elegant scientific means for answering this question through our logical experiments to control the environment, not the child. In time, this experimental question-answer process leads to the emergence of the child's true nature.

Montessori teaching is therefore not a robotic, thoughtless formula of applying rigid rules with children. Nor is it a means of dispensing a prescribed academic curriculum or random guessing and endless waiting for some magical new "child" to emerge. Rather, it is a rational scientific way of being with children that ultimately answers the question of who we are. Answering this most profound question comes about in a gradual way by following laws of nature to discover and bring about a whole new and better humanity in the world.