



The Montessori OBSERVER

Enhance
Independence

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



Group lesson with children at the Flintridge Montessori School in La Canada, California.

Flintridge Montessori School

The *Flintridge Montessori Preschool and Elementary* in La Canada, California was established in 2000 by a group of women who recognized the need for Montessori education in their local community. One of these women, *Rohini David*, now leads the school's operation as partner and site director.

While the school started with only a handful of children, Rohini reports that the enrollment doubled within a few short months, and within a year, it was operating at full enrollment. Today, the school serves a diverse community of professional and non-professional people from all over the world, representing a wide range of class, creed, religion and color.

The school employs a policy of sensitivity to the environment, eliminating and recycling waste as much as possible. For example, parents are encouraged to send lunches in reusable containers and recycling plastics as much as possible.

Respect for the environment also extends to nature as well. For example, over the years, staff and children have planted fruit trees, including grapes, apples, plums, nectarines, peaches and apricots. Rohini says, "Children love harvesting them and having them for snack. By participating, they understand where fruit comes from (not from the supermarket), and how plants grow and what care is needed."

On the academic side, Rohini says, "The schedule of our day resembles the natural rhythms of family life – time for work, time for meals, and time for rest. Each day, the children participate in the work of 'making home', setting the table, washing dishes, folding laundry, watering plants, sweeping, etc." The school environment also includes an abundance of materials for learning such subjects as math, language and culture. In this environment, Rohini notes that, "Children are given the experience of discovering the answers for themselves. This leads to a much deeper learning experience and creates a life-long love of learning as a self-directed process of problem solving and discovery."

For further information, Contact Rohini David, *Flintridge Montessori Preschool and Elementary, Inc.* 1739 Foothill Blvd. La Canada, CA 91011 Website: <http://www.flintridgemontessori.com> Tel. 818-790-8844.

CT Project in Namibia Rising

In summer, 2016, Lee Havis designated **Menfret Melk**, a citizen of Namibia, West Africa, as first member of the consultation board of the "Character Teaching"(CT) project in that country. In this role, Menfret will contact high level government officials to obtain their support for this project that aims to eradicate poverty by using the IMS technology in various situations with the poor children and

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Donna's Montessori Ministry

In Petaluma, California, **Donna Curtis** (IMS '06) has established an in-home Montessori school which she views as a "ministry". Donna set up her *Montessori Ministry* because the normal business model involved too many regulatory obstacles from government. She says, "I am blessed in that I don't need to earn money, so I call myself a ministry and do not charge tuition or have any fees. I serve ten families presently with several on a wait list."

Donna's program provides a three-hour Montessori classroom in the morning, which she directs. In the afternoons, the classroom is open for parents to use with their children on their own. With this format, Donna is able to help parents practice Montessori teaching with their children at home. She says, "... Again and again, the major obstacle between adult and child seems to be lack of communication due to limited use of *proximity* or *eye contact*... Parents can't believe how simple is the solution... to approach the child and speak softly with eye contact. It is nothing more than speaking love and respect from the heart to the child."

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Montessori Tools and Tips

On-line group discussion

Montessori Tools and Tips, the IMS group discussion on Facebook, now has over 5,000 participating members around the world. In 2015, Lee Havis established this group to provide practical guidance for all those interested in applying the IMS technology with children. He says, "In this group, we engage many issues and problems that are common to parents and teachers in every culture in the world. Through this means, people in the most remote areas can gain access to this technology with nothing more than a computer with internet connection."

The group is "closed" in format to assure that only those with genuine interest may participate. Lee says, "We found it necessary to do this to guard against intruders who join just to advertise unrelated goods and services. Since all new post topics are pre-approved before posting, members are not bombarded with unrelated entries in their inbox that are outside our basic purpose. In general, I'm very pleased with the level of respect and cooperation members have for each other in such a diverse field of participants. While English is the language of communication, I'm impressed that members represent such a large diversity of non-English speaking countries."

Anyone on Facebook is welcome to join this on-line discussion, which is completely free to all. To join, go to the Facebook page "Montessori Tools and Tips" and apply to "JOIN". Once a member, you can browse through the many past topics that have been raised and settled before, comment on any current

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Enhance Independence

by Lee Havis

"If teaching is to be effective with young children, it must assist them to advance on the way to independence."

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

In Montessori teaching, observing children involves the function of looking for evidence of their emerging true nature. In outward form, this evidence is best reflected in the child's independent, self-directed activity. In young children, however, we don't see this "independence" itself, as much as the child's inborn URGE and "instinct" for independent activity, which comes out only in small, subtle ways over time.

Sadly, parents often repress and oppose this natural urge to independence by creating various obstacles that build up dependency in the adult-child relationship. So, Montessori teaching must overcome this pattern of dependency in children, by always acting to enhance their independence. The IMS technology, in fact, provides a specific *enhance independence* protocol to keep you focused on interacting with children in this way.

While the newborn infant certainly doesn't show much outward evidence of independent activity at first, small signs of his strong urge to independence do emerge if you look closely. Observing the child, you must take into account all these small signs of change towards independence because they point to the child who is growing normally towards ever greater mastery of his environment.

Growing Normally

"The child who was born normally and is growing normally, goes towards independence."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.92

From birth, the infant is growing normally towards independence by looking around, touching objects and crying out for help when necessary. Later, he shows his urge for independence by sitting up, crawling, walking, and finally talking intelligently with others.

Sadly, parents often fixate on the child's failures, mistakes and limitations, rather than his positive steps towards independence. So, the child becomes discouraged with harsh words, punishment, and various impatient actions that interrupt his normal self-directed activity. Adults also interfere with the child's normal growing independence by offering various forms of useless assistance.

Useless Assistance

"Even though child and adult seem to have a deep understanding and affection for one another, they are ensnared in the same net...an adult with his useless assistance and hypnotic influence has substituted himself for a child and impeded his psychic growth."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Secret of Childhood*, p.162

Offering unnecessary help to children, the typical parent or teacher views this interference

as an act of sympathy or kindness. In fact, such useless assistance gravely harms the child's normal growth towards independence which is vital for his successful mastery of the environment in all later life. So, while your unnecessary "help" may bring some momentary pleasure and happiness, the long-term effect of this is to set up a life-time pattern of enslavement and dependency on others.

Happiness

"Happiness is not the whole aim of education. A man must be independent in his powers and character, able to work and assert his mastery over all that depends on him."

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

In fantasy play, young children can seem quite free and happy in their activity, even though this happiness often dissolves into outbursts of crying or destructive, violent behavior. Montessori teaching deals with this fantasy by interrupting it with such techniques as *distraction* and *clear direction* to return the child to the firm ground of real work with physical objects. Such attachment to reality is most vital during the period of childhood when the child is forming his whole sense of truth and reality for life.

Period of Childhood

"The period of childhood...is particularly subject to suggestion. During this time an adult can insinuate himself into a child and animate his will and mobility with his own."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Secret of Childhood* p.91

Before the age of six, the environment has an especially powerful influence on the child due to his amazing absorbent mind during that formative period of life. In the Montessori environment, young children can therefore readily return to the normal path towards true independence under the healing influence of your commitment to laws of nature. By contrast, conventional education reinforces patterns of weakness and dependency in children which ultimately emerges in the nameless slavery of ordinary adult society.

Nameless Slavery

"It is strikingly impressive that humanity despite its nameless slavery forms a kind of stereotyped chorus crying out that it is free and independent. Those miserable and degraded people proclaim their own sovereignty."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Formation of Man*, p 16-17

Parents and teachers bring about life-long patterns of weakness and dependency in children by their thoughtless acts of unnecessary help and instruction to children, often done under the guise of love, discipline or "teaching". Young children then take on the role of "victim" to external authority, which Montessori teaching must overcome by creating a very new and different type of environment, oriented instead towards the child's free, self-directed activity.

Environment

"...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

The Montessori environment supports true natural development by allowing children to freely pursue their own individual needs and interests from one moment to the next. In practice, you create this unique condition by removing detrimental influences that come the physical objects, other children and the adult personality around each child in question. Removing the detrimental influence of the adult personality is the foremost challenge in this process.

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Look for the
November, 2016
Observer
featuring
Emphasize Main Point(s)

ISSN 0889-5643

The Montessori Observer
Published by
INTERNATIONAL MONTESSORI SOCIETY
Tel. (301) 589-1127
havis@imsmontessori.org

Worldwide Web:
<http://imsmontessori.org>
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The Montessori Observer is mailed four times each year, in March, May, September and November, to 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.

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The International Montessori Society is sponsored by Educational Services, Inc., a non-profit corporation organized in Maryland, USA. The IMS purpose is to support the scientific approach to true natural being throughout the world.

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Moment of Peril

by Lee Havjis

Child Won't Talk

When six year old Valerie doesn't talk at all in a social situation, the question arises "What is the problem?" (See **Observer**, May, 2016). Since children normally interact in a verbal way with others, not talking at all points to some detrimental influence at cause in the environment which you must find and remove.

Analysis: Physical objects and other children are not detrimental in this situation, so we are left to consider only the "adult personality" as the cause. In some way, the teacher is promoting some fear in the adult-child relationship. However, since Valerie is not misbehaving in any violent, disorderly manner, this situation is a low-level "fantasy" priority, much as a child sitting in the corner by herself, idly looking out the window.

Practical Advice: To understand the problem better, first inform the parent of the non-speaking situation, and find out what is Valerie's speech behavior at home. If she speaks normally at home, it's clear the problem is entirely psychological, rather than physical.

Following the protocol "well-being of the total environment", don't give this low-level situation more concern and attention than necessary. Focus instead on dealing with the more serious misbehavior scenarios elsewhere that may be present. However, whenever Valerie looks up at you, be sure you are looking back in a calm and friendly manner to be sure you are not projecting abandonment. Just such simple eye contact will gradually reduce Valerie's fear of more open verbal interaction, so that at the right time, she will speak up to express herself in a normal, verbal manner.

This non-speaking situation is similar to the non-participating child who simply watches what others are doing, rather than taking up work on his own. Here, you don't force the child to take up some physical work, because he is learning by watching others instead. In the same way, Valerie is learning to adjust to the social situation in her own way, that will eventually resolve itself without any extreme or excessive adult interaction.

Clean up issues

The teacher here has been frustrated that 4 year old Nathan doesn't clean up his work, even though she has reminded him many times over the past several weeks. Although she gives him good clear direction to "put work away", and shows him exactly what to do, he still walks away from work left on the floor. Even at the end of the work session, while others are cleaning up the room, Nathan simply sits and watches, talking with other children, while others clean up his work and the rest of the room. What to do to resolve these clean-up issues with Nathan? *Answer in November Observer.*

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Adult Personality

"Adults are also a part of the child's environment...They should not be an obstacle to a child's independent activities, nor should they carry out for him those activities by means of which a child reaches maturity."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Secret of Childhood*, p. 110

The adult personality is a detrimental influence on children when it projects either negativity or abandonment in the environment. Negativity involves repressing the child's free, self-directed behavior, which can occur by punishing or even just pointing out a child's misbehavior. It can also occur by offering unsolicited help while the child is successfully working through a difficulty on his own. And, even when the child does ask for help, you must restrain the urge to do more than what is necessary to return him quickly to his own independent activity in the work.

What is Necessary

"The adult must give and do what is necessary for the child to act for himself... if he does less than is necessary, the child cannot act meaningfully, and if he does more than is necessary, he imposes himself upon the child, extinguishing his creative impulses."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Child in the Family*, p.72

Following the protocol *enhance independence* involves a constant balance between offering too much help and not enough. For example, if you don't offer enough help, you are abandoning the child to frustration that discourages him from continuing with any effort on the task at all. On the other hand, by offering too much help, the child becomes dependent on you as a routine pattern and practice. This issue of balancing your involvement between too much and too little comes up most clearly whenever a child approaches you asking for help.

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

When a child asks for help, you must always give it in such a way that it will not promote dependency on you in the process. The IMS technology provides several useful techniques, such as *reflective language* and *questioning*, to help you do this well in many situations. For example, using the technique *reflective language*, repeat the child's question back to him, so that when he asks "How does this work?", you say back, "How does this work?" Very often, this simple reflective language allows the child to see the

problem in a new light, so he will proceed independently on his own after that.

Using the technique *questioning*, you might respond to the child using a separate question that helps him solve the problem on his own. For example, when the child asks, "Will you help me with this?", answer back, "Who else can help you with that?" If applying these simple verbal techniques is not enough, however, you can also interact in other effective ways, such as by providing some brief moment of specific instruction.

Instruction

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

In Montessori teaching, "instruction" is a type of lesson presentation that shows the child how to solve a particular problem or handle some specific piece of work. Following such protocols as *enhance independence* and *least amount of adult involvement*, however, you must keep your instruction as brief and simple as possible. Done well, this type of well-timed lesson presentation will help the child return successfully to his own independent work on the task at hand. Through this independent, self-directed work, he will then eventually come to a moment of deep concentration in that work, which you can recognize as the key central event of *normalization*. So, when you see a child concentrating on work of his own choice, don't interrupt him in any way.

Don't interrupt concentration

"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.177

Following the protocol *don't interrupt concentration*, keep far away from a child who is seriously involved in some solitary work with materials. For example, don't even pass close by, call his attention or even offer a word of praise, such as, "Good job". In time, this concentration to work will bring him to a normalized state of independent activity, which is the ultimate mark of success in all your Montessori teaching.

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topic introduced by someone else, or raise an entirely new topic of your own concern or interest. While topics are wide and varied, many relate to resolving misbehavior by using the IMS technology. Based on value and general interest, some of these topics will be presented in other IMS publications, such as either the "Observer" or "News".

Donna's Montessori Ministry

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In her ministry, Donna has found parents receptive, kind and generous. She says, "The parents all are also determined to pay me in some way, and I told them not one dollar into my hands...So, they decided on their own to donate to a cash box that is used to support charities of their choice."

Donna created one charity project as part of having the children participate in an outreach activity in the community. Dividing the children into groups, they would prepare and deliver a lunch to a family in need in the area. This project also included making cards and getting flowers and balloons to deliver with the lunch as well.

Through her ministry experiment, Donna has observed that "Normalized children are filled with love and kindness. I see it all the time...They hold hands going down the hall outside, they spontaneously join together in joyful work, they eat together, read together! These choices always occur after they have been working on their individual lessons."

When Donna has to leave the area for an extended period of time, she allows the parents to use the classroom on their own. For this purpose, she leaves a key hidden for the children to open and close the space as they wish. Beyond the classroom, Donna also supports family home schooling in the community, offering her knowledge and skill of Montessori teaching. In this work, Donna reports she is very happy that she has found families embracing 'true natural' Montessori teaching.

For further information, contact: Donna Curtis, 441 Gossage Ave., Petaluma, CA 94952, (707) 762-6524; donnamcurtis@hotmail.com



Menfret Melk, leading member of the Namibia consultation board of the "Character Teaching" project in that country.

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Mark of Success

"Blessed are the teachers who have brought their class to the stage where they can say, 'Whether I am present or not, the class carries on. The group has achieved independence.' To arrive at this mark of success, there is a path to follow for the teacher's development."

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

In Montessori teaching, the greatest evidence of success is the child's high level of independent functioning in the environment. Once this normal state of independent being is achieved, you can then observe the children passively from a distance. Following such protocols as *enhance independence*, therefore, helps you bring children to this ideal final state of true natural development.

CT Project in Namibia

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families involved. The CT consultation board also aims to raise funds for the project's first step, which is an initial consultation visit.

When 26-year-old Menfret contacted IMS to offer his volunteer services, he stated, "It has always been my dream to help eradicate poverty in Namibia. Since finding out about the CT project, I feel this is a remarkable opportunity for me."

Menfret's background includes a degree in Economics from the Namibia University of Science and Technology (2015). Besides his regular employment at the First National Bank of Namibia, Menfret does considerable volunteer work with children, including tutoring and textbook curriculum development in mathematics and statistics for high school students. In 2015, he helped to organize a leadership summit event hosted by Dr. John Maxwell, bestselling author and expert in the field of leadership.

Lee believes that Menfret is well-suited by character and interest to help launch the CT project in Namibia. He says, "Menfret sees himself as very hardworking and self driven. In addition, he believes in the power of taking a personal responsibility to make life better for others, and never giving up until they discover their potential. This type of determination, character, and faith is vital to achieving success in our fight to overcome long-standing poverty which is so widely felt in many cultures around the world."

An active member of the leading political party in Namibia, Menfret has already received favorable response for the project from his party's leadership and, with that support, he has spoken with the Director of Education in his region of Erongo which represents his coastal city, Swakopmund. His plan now is to travel to Windhoek to present the CT Project to the country's Minister of Education as well.

For more information about the CT project in Namibia and elsewhere around the world, contact: Lee Havis, IMS, havis@imsmontessori.org