



The Montessori OBSERVER

*Simplify Complexity
- Hint*

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Mansfield Montessori at Walnut Creek

The *Mansfield Montessori at Walnut Creek* developed from the visionary leadership of its founder, **Melissa Arnold**, who first entered the education preschool business in 1983. After leaving the field briefly in 2006, she returned to establish the Mansfield School in August 2010, utilizing many of the same staff members from before who now returned to join her in this new educational endeavor.

At the Mansfield school, Ms. Arnold immediately began using Montessori teaching with the overriding goal of empowering children, families and teachers by following laws of nature in all aspects of the program. Among her life-affirming statements are: "I am love and respect. I may choose harmony and happiness daily. I am powerful and my achievements are limitless. I am full of potential, talents, and abilities."

Ms. Arnold aims to actualize these positive affirmations by planting seeds of interest that will grow into a passion for learning. She says, "Our mutual goal is for this school to make more than just a 'difference' in a child's life. Mansfield Montessori at Walnut Creek is about impacting, in a powerful way, every child and family that walks through the door."

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Child working with long rods at Mansfield Montessori at Walnut Creek in Mansfield, Texas.



Lee Havis, in broadcast studio of DC Contigo in Arlington, VA - panel discussion on major news topics of interest to the international Hispanic community. Broadcast "en tarde" show by video and radio in Spanish. Moderator is Mario Sol (not shown) with Mercedes Sosa (left).

Broadcasting Montessori in Spanish

Beginning in Spring, 2017, Lee Havis began appearing on the news panel show, *en tarde*, from 4-6 PM on the Spanish language channel *DC Contigo*. Moderated by well-known Spanish broadcast personality, **Mario Sol** with **Mercedes Sosa**, the show is presented live video and radio through facebook and other social media. It is also aired live-stream and archived at the website, *DCContigo.com*.

The show features a review of all major news topics of special interest to an audience that extends throughout the entire international Hispanic community. Among the many wide-ranging issues discussed,

the topic of "immigration" policy in the United States is quite popular with those who call in. However, education has also been frequently discussed, especially as related to addressing the serious problems of poverty, corruption, and violence in the world.

On July 5, 2017, the show engaged a lengthy discussion of "education", which led Lee to describe the unique IMS "Character Teaching" (CT) project which applies Montessori teaching to address the issue of long-term cultural poverty. During this discussion, Mario aired a video showing Lee demonstrating the CT project in operation with poor children on the streets of Cebu, Philippines. In addition, Lee was able to describe the IMS technology, which is a central component of the project as related to the training of teachers.

As an analyst on the panel, Lee attempts to use this broadcast outreach not only to point out problems of policy and strategy in the political realm, but also to present solutions, such as the "new education" that follows laws of nature to bring about the child's true nature. Reflecting on his broadcast experience, Lee says, "I'm very grateful to DC Contigo and Mario Sol for allowing so much time and attention to discuss issues of such depth and importance for a wide international audience. In this way, people around the world are gaining a better awareness of world issues as well as becoming acquainted with the "new education" and its function to solve age-old problems that so often invite only confusion, fear and discouragement."

IMS Montessori Workshops

In Pakistan, US, Malaysia, China, Aruba, and elsewhere, individuals are inspired to lead the effort for coordinating interest to schedule the unique IMS workshop, "*Creating the New Education*" in their country. The workshop is important for its presentation of IMS technology in a very convenient two-day weekend format. In July, 2017, **Samina Shahzad**, visited with Lee Havis in Washington, DC to discuss the problems of scheduling this workshop in her home country of Pakistan.

During the meeting, Lee and Samina discussed the various obstacles in this undertaking. For example, although many in Pakistan are well-acquainted with conventional Montessori teaching, they have practically no understanding of the unique IMS "true natural" type that follows laws of nature. Lee said, "Resistance to the IMS

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Simplify Complexity - Hint

by Lee Havis

"The mind of a little child is certainly not a blank when he begins the education of his senses, but his concepts are confused. The chaos of his mind has greater need of ordering what it already knows than of gaining more knowledge."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Discovery of the Child*, p. 172

Montessori teaching prepares the environment, in part, by providing a range of materials, from simple to complex, for children to use in their self-directed learning. These materials are designed to reflect the perfect order of nature so that by interacting with them in an intelligent manner, the young child will internalize this order through his uniquely absorbent mind.

The orderly nature of these materials allows children to use them successfully on their own without adult involvement. However, when a child does ask for help, the IMS technology gives you tools for this, such as the protocol *simplify complexity – hint*. Applying this protocol helps the child solve the problem on his own, such as by working more effectively with the didactic materials.

Didactic Materials

"The didactic material, in fact, does not offer to the child the 'content' of the mind, but the order for that 'content'."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Dr. Montessori's Own Hand*, p.136-37

Montessori didactic materials are designed to present various concepts and skills for the child's learning with a minimum of adult involvement. One way to assure this self-directed learning is by isolating the senses in the materials to focus the child's attention on just one single feature or variable at a time.

Isolate the Senses

"It is necessary to isolate the senses as far as possible if some single quality is to be brought out."

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

The Montessori "sensorial" materials especially aim to materialize some single abstraction of nature, such as size, shape, dimension, color, or sound. Here, the idea is to simplify the complexity of ordinary objects, to bring out a single variable for the child's attention. This is a practical application of the protocol *emphasize main point(s) – isolate variable*.

The "pink tower", for example, presents the abstraction of "volume" in concrete form by having 10 cubes that uniformly vary only in this one single quality. All cubes are colored "pink" to neutralize any distraction that would arise from variation in their color. Then, building up the tower, the child can concentrate on the one concept "volume" through his sense of vision and touch. You can further isolate the sense of touch by blindfolding the child to neutralize the visual sense as well.

In this way, the child can internalize the basic order of nature directly from the material itself, without any outside adult teaching. This type of built-in order also helps to enhance the child's independence in the learning process as well.

Enhance Independence

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

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Discovery of the Child*, p.57

The IMS technology includes the protocol *enhance independence* to keep from creating undue dependency on your physical presence with a child. In practice, you use this protocol whenever a child comes to 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 *Discovery of the Child*, p.57

Giving help to a child is a delicate matter that requires great care and control of your adult personality. So, when a child asks for help, give it only briefly, following the protocol *least amount of adult involvement*. And, applying the *simplify complexity* protocol, offer just a "hint" to show the child how to solve the problem on his own.

Just a Hint

"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.58-9

Applying the *simplify complexity* protocol involves essentially giving the child a "hint" or "clue" to get to the right solution. For example, using the technique *reflective language*, simply repeat the child's question back to him. Or, with the *clear direction* technique, say only, "Check your work again" or "Look over here". Using the *questioning* technique, a heavier hint would be asking, "Who else can help you with that?" or "Where does this go?" Beyond that, you could also provide some new, useful information, such as "The next one is longer." In all these verbal interactions, however, keep your comments brief and simple, using only the least words sufficient to the situation.

Least Words Sufficient

"The best instruction is that which uses the least words sufficient for the task. The fewer the words, the more perfect will be the lesson."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Discovery of the Child*, p 106

In helping a child, the challenge is to find the right balance between "not enough" and "too much" help. For example, if you give

"too much" help, the child becomes dependent on you. And if you don't give enough, this will discourage the child from making any further effort on his own. The right balance, therefore, is the least words sufficient to start the child in the right direction. This requires making prudent observations by constantly scanning the environment to see what is happening from one moment to the next.

Prudent Observations

"The teacher...must be able to make prudent observations, to assist the child by going up to, or withdrawing from him, and by speaking or keeping silent in accordance with his needs."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *The Child*, p.12-13

Observing the environment with care and prudence, you can more easily apply

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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.

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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/montessoritoolstips/>

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Moment of Peril

by Lee Havis

Punishment or Order

In this *moment of peril*, the mother of 9 year old Jason has a conflict with Jason's teacher who insists on restricting Jason from going outside with his class because of his talking during "silent reading" period. (See *Observer*, May, 2017). How should the mother respond to support her son's true natural development?

Analysis: Jason's teacher is imposing a "rule" on her son that is based on his own personality. This, however, violates the *no rules for children* protocol, making the teacher's personality the primary detrimental influence. The teacher is also violating the protocol *no negative attention to misbehavior*. Jason's mother must therefore decide how to point out and resolve these violations of Montessori teaching with the teacher.

Practical Advice: Speaking with Jason's teacher, the mother must point out his mistakes and show him how to secure order in the classroom in a non-punishing, positive manner. With Jason, she must also help him confront and resolve the problem on his own as well.

Dealing first with the teacher, the mother must apply the protocol *confirm accuracy – clarify/expand*. Applying this protocol, first confirm the accuracy of the teacher's need for order, but then "clarify and expand" this need to obtain order in such a way that doesn't violate the *no rules* and *no negative* protocols.

For example, "expand and clarify" the teacher's use of Montessori teaching by suggesting he use the techniques *questioning* and *distraction* during silent reading, to remove the detrimental influence of other children around Jason at the time. In addition, you could suggest the teacher call a total class meeting to discuss how the children themselves could come up with a suitable solution to the problem of "talking during silent reading". With Jason, the mother should practice *reflective language* and *questioning* to help him find a good solution to the problem on his own.

However, in the end, if these efforts at speaking with Jason and his teacher ultimately fail, the teacher may be simply too committed to a "personality" type of Montessori teaching, and unwilling to abandon this in favor of the "true natural" type instead. If so, the mother's only logical option is to remove Jason from the environment, and find a more suitable alternative school somewhere else.

Re-engaging Interest

While reading a picture book to 2 ½ year old Chad, the adult helper sees him suddenly becomes totally distracted by other people

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Simplify Complexity - Hint Cont'd. from Page 2, Col. 3

such protocols as *simplify complexity - hint* in an effective, timely manner. For example, noticing a piece missing from an exercise prepares you to intervene to point this out if necessary. Or, seeing an excessive quantity of material around a child, you can simplify that complex situation.

Excessive Material

...an excessive quantity of the educative material...may dissipate the attention, render the exercises with the objects mechanical and cause the child to pass by his psychological moment of ascent without perceiving it and seizing it."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Discovery of the Child*, p. 149

When a child takes out several pieces of work together, this may bring about considerable disorder and confusion which you must resolve in some way. So, while it's good to allow freedom to experiment by combining materials together, you must still guard against the danger of excessive materials as well.

When there are excessive materials, for example, you might simplify the complexity by directing the child to bring

Follow the Child

by Lee Havis

"Follow the child" is a common term associated with Montessori education. However, what is the "child" you are following?

In the "personality" type of Montessori teaching, the "child" is a projection of your own habits of thought and feeling from childhood; or those of some prominent figure of presumed authority in the field. In the "culture" type, you are following the child who reflects the surrounding culture, which is defined by each to region, country or tribe.

In "true natural" Montessori teaching, however, the child is universal being in perfect harmony with infinite and eternal laws of nature. This is the child that Dr. Montessori discovered in 1907, and described in outward form as "normalized". Following this child requires following laws of nature, which are beyond all bounds of personality or culture.

Since we can't follow these laws of nature directly, we must do so in an experimental, scientific manner. Happily, the IMS offers the precise technology for doing this in practice. So, applying this technology leads you to this "true natural" child who ultimately emerges in outward form to show his true normal qualities of perfect order, self-discipline, peace and harmony with the entire environment.

another floor mat to better define the larger space he needs for this work. Or, if a child takes out work that is clearly too difficult, you can intervene to limit its use.

The *simplify* protocol also applies when you are conducting a formal lesson presentation with materials. Here, you may simplify the situation by removing distracting factors from around the main point of your presentation.

Distracting Factors

"The perfection of the exercise consists in removing as far as possible any distracting factors."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Discovery of the Child*, p.102

While presenting materials, your physical presence ordinarily brings in various inadvertent distracting factors, such as scratching your nose, tapping your finger, adjusting your clothing, or clearing your throat. To reduce the impact of these distracting factors, apply the protocol *same routines all the time* by using certain uniform patterns of behavior and language in all your lesson presentations.

The protocol *basis of interest* also helps simplify your lesson presentation by focusing only on the child's true interest. This assures the child's full attention, rather than forcing attention to some sequence of "simple to complex" curriculum that may seem logical to you.

Simple to Complex

"Too many teachers are inclined to be continually interrupting and teaching...The teacher considers that she must lead him from the easy to the difficult, from simple to complex, by gradual steps, whereas the child may go from the difficult to the easy and makes great strides..."

Dr. Maria Montessori

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

The young child's natural inner guidance leads him to work with material in ways that don't always follow the path of simple to complex. So, following the child's interest, only give a lesson presentation when there is clear outward evidence of such interest.

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Child working with practical life exercise at the Manfield Montessori at Walnut Creek School (Mansfield, Texas)

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Simplify Complexity - Hint *Cont'd. from Page 3, Col. 3*

And, when a child does take interest in work that seems too complex and difficult for him, don't interfere to simplify the complexity, as long as he is using the material in an intelligent, careful manner. Often, what interests the child is the challenge to overcome some difficulty in the work. So, focusing on the difficulty is what brings about the child's deep concentration which you must not interrupt.

Don't Interrupt Concentration

"When the child begins to show interest...the teacher must not interrupt...This is the moment at which the teacher most often goes wrong."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from Absorbent Mind, p.255

Montessori teaching highly values the child's deep concentration on work, because this is how he enters into normalization to return to the state of true natural development. Therefore, follow the protocol *don't interrupt concentration*, to allow the child to continue any work that holds his interest and attention, even if it seems too difficult.



Child working with color tablets sensorial materials at the Mansfield Montessori at Walnut Creek School (Mansfield, Texas)

A child can concentrate on work with varying levels of difficulty, either simple or complex, depending on his particular interest. For example, in simple work, the child concentrates by repeating the same basic action or sequence, over and over again. With a complex piece of work, he concentrates to overcome some difficulty until he achieves a suitable end result. In either case, the protocol *don't interrupt concentration* teaches you to simply allow this activity to proceed without any involvement or interruption from you.

Before normalization, children also concentrate as well, even though they may ask for help and instruction at times. When this happens, however, you have the protocol *simplify complexity* – *hint* to help you gradually return the child to work with materials, which will ultimately bring about his deep concentration and the ideal state of true normal development.

IMS Workshops

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workshop is not just lack of awareness or confusion with other types of Montessori teaching. Rather, it reflects deep cultural prejudices and false ideas about human nature itself."

Lee noted the solution to this resistance is to communicate the IMS workshop opportunity with greater clarity and persistence. He said, "In every society, there are always some who are open and receptive to new and novel ideas. The real challenge to find these persons is therefore not really a problem of 'other people', but rather a spiritual struggle within yourself to overcome fear of rejection and lack of easy agreement with others."

IMS welcomes the opportunity to work with persons anywhere who want to bring the unique "new education" learning opportunity to their particular part of the world. Contact IMS for specific guidance to actively engage in this type of "new education" outreach in your area. havis@ismontessori.com 301-589-1127.

Moment of Peril

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and noises in the room. The adult helper can't get Chad's attention back to the book, because he has gotten up and is walking around the room, touching things and looking like he is in a trance. How does the adult helper reengage him again in the book reading activity?

Answer in Observer, November, 2017



Samina Shahzad and Lee Havis meeting in Washington, DC to discuss the development of the "new education" in Pakistan. (August, 2017)