



# The Montessori OBSERVER

*Distr action*

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

## Montessori School in Brunei

In March, 2010, IMS recognized its first Montessori school in Brunei, which is located in southeast Asia on the island of Borneo. The school's director, **Helen Sitai** became especially interested in true natural Montessori teaching after attending several IMS workshops in nearby Malaysia.

In 2006, *Joyful Kids Montessori School* was established in the capital city of Brunei Darussalam by two educators dedicated to the philosophy and principles of Dr Maria Montessori. Its mission is to provide children a homelike setting where they can develop their full academic, social and physical potential.

The classrooms are set up as wide living rooms equipped with child sized furniture and the complete range of Montessori apparatus for children from 3 to 6 years of age. The three-year Montessori program is conducted primarily in English; however, two other language teachers also provide guidance and direction for learning the Malay and Chinese languages as well.

Starting with two teachers to a single child, the school's program has grown steadily in the past four years. At present there are four classes; two in the morning and two in the afternoon with 26 children in each class.

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Michelle Wong, IMS student and coordinator of IMS workshop and seminar activities in Malaysia. She has been making contacts to organize IMS events throughout the whole region of southeast Asia.



Lee Havis consults with staff at Ti-Ratana Welfare Center, during his visit in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, December, 2009

## Character Teaching Project in Ecuador, India, and Nepal

The *Character Teaching* (CT) project, sponsored by IMS, aims to overcome deep cultural poverty in countries where these conditions are most problematic. The CT project aims to resolve the cause of these conditions by supporting the true normal character development of children. In Ecuador, Nepal, and India, the project has been especially active in recent months.

### Ecuador

A team of three CT board members is now established to provide local coordination and consultation for the project. Joining **Carlos Vallejo** on this board are **Diana Hernandez** and **Silvana Murgueytio**, both of whom have considerable experience in the field of Montessori teaching. Diana is currently renewing

operation of her NGO "Crecer Juntos" (growing together), which may also participate actively in the CT project.

On April 13, 2010, the three board members met personally to discuss specific planning steps for the project, such as obtaining wider support among local NGO's. The project is now seeking to do this by placing an invitation notice in a major national newspaper.

### India

On April 8, 2010, **Sudev Suchan** met with the chief officer of the state of Karnataka to discuss the CT project and obtain a suitable letter of support. Sudev reports positive interest in the project during his extensive two-hour meeting. He has also set up an internet discussion group to facilitate communication among the CT board member in India.

In the state of Uttar Pradesh, **Rahul Gupta** joined the CT consultation board. Rahul is president and trustee of the *M.G. Educational Development and Welfare Society*. Among other educational activities, the Trust operates the M.G. Convent School, which is now recognized by IMS as a Montessori school.

### Nepal

In January, 2010, **Ratna Maya Awal** joined the CT consultation board. Ratna is chairman of the women's division of *Community Radio FM*, and serves as director of *Saraswati Community Montessori Day Care*.

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## Reflections

By Wendy Lieberman

Wendy, director of *New Way Montessori School* (Meridian, ID) reports here on her experiences with conducting true natural Montessori teaching with children at the school.

### Success

On Thursday (February, 2010), I decided to start writing down some of the good things that I was doing at school every hour...The more I drew my attention to what I was doing right, the more that was reinforced for me to repeat. I also realized that I could tell when I was doing things right, not from what the children's reactions

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# Distraction

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 to show you.'"*

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

Montessori teachers must sometimes control the environment by distracting children away from fantasy and disorder. The IMS Montessori teaching technology provides the technique *distraction* especially for this purpose. Practitioners of true natural Montessori teaching will probably need to use this technique quite often before concentration finally brings about the ultimate result of true normal being in children.

## Before Concentration

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

**Dr. Maria Montessori**  
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.278

Children ordinarily enter the Montessori environment conditioned from home to act out various patterns of disorder and inattention already built into their personalities. Before concentration, you may need to use a very heavy type of polishing to overcome and resolve these patterns. These patterns are often most directly associated with a condition of deeply entrenched abandonment.

## Abandonment

*"...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

Busy parents are often too involved with their own activities to notice their child's need for closer observation and supervision. Indeed, some parents even encourage this abandonment, viewing the child's escape into fantasy as if it were some type of free expression of the imagination. Montessori teaching can only dislodge this entrenched abandonment by heavy polishing that effectively gets the child's attention away from the specific misbehavior involved.

## Getting Attention

*"...in the child's formation, the fixing of his attention is basic to all that comes afterwards...once his attention has been focused, he becomes his own master and can exert control over his world."*

**Dr. Maria Montessori**  
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.217

The *distraction* lesson presentation functions as a sequence of steps that first begins with getting the child's attention, and then

moves on to giving a *clear direction* for the child to do something connected with present-moment reality. Following the protocol *least amount of adult involvement*, consider first using one of the lighter techniques, such as *proximity*, to get the child's attention. However, if approaching alone doesn't get the child's attention, use the technique *distraction*, such as by touching or holding whatever physical objects the child is misusing at the time.

## Physical Objects

*"If a teacher sees that material is being used in a way that will not attain its goal...she should prevent him from continuing..."*

**Dr. Maria Montessori**  
from *Discovery of the Child*, p.153

With physical objects, the *distraction* technique involves briefly touching or holding the misused object until you get the child's attention. Then, let go of the object and give a clear direction, such as "Come over here. Let me show you something." Finally, offer some simple piece of work to connect the child with present-moment reality, for example, to put something away, sharpen a pencil, or water the plants. The critical moment in this process is when you are touching or holding the physical object. At this point, you must quickly release your hold of the object to avoid violating the protocol *least amount of adult involvement*.

## Least Amount of Involvement

*"The adult...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

The *least amount* protocol teaches you to use the heavy *distraction* technique with great care, restraint, and moderation. While controlling objects, for example, carefully avoid any prolonged holding so you don't provoke a violent power struggle tug-of-war with the child. If, after distraction, the child returns to misusing the object as before, try using other techniques, such as *patient waiting* and *repetition*.

## Patient Waiting

*"...it is not so easy...to stand still and watch..."*

**Dr. Maria Montessori**  
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.272

The technique *patient waiting* couples well with *distraction* to effectively resolve many misbehavior situations. For example, if your first effort at distraction doesn't work, just patiently wait a few seconds to see if the child looks up or corrects his behavior on his own. If not, try using another technique called *repetition*.

## Repetition

*"Repetition is the secret of perfection..."*

**Dr. Maria Montessori**  
from *Discovery of the Child*, p.92

Repeating the *distraction* technique is often the best way to resolve a stubborn pattern of misbehavior. Here, you are also applying the technique *repetition* to add weight to your prior distraction. Between each repetition, however, allow a brief period of *patient waiting* to avoid giving negative attention to the misbehavior in question.

## Negative Attention

*"The greatest source of discouragement is the conviction that one is unable to do something...An adult, by constantly humiliating a child and making him aware of his weaknesses, dampens the child's desire to act."*

**Dr. Maria Montessori**  
from *Secret of Childhood*, p.169

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Look for the  
May 2010 Observer  
featuring  
**Nomenclature**

ISSN 0889-5643

### The Montessori Observer

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

Worldwide Web:  
<http://imsmontessori.org>

Lee Havis, Executive Director

The Montessori Observer is mailed four times each year, in March, May, September and November, to Society members throughout the world. The purpose is to provide news and information about the Society's work in Montessori education, and to extend awareness of Montessori principles throughout the world.

### INTERNATIONAL MONTESSORI SOCIETY

The International Montessori Society is sponsored by Educational Services, Inc., a non-profit corporation organized in Maryland, USA. The Society's purpose is to support the effective application of Montessori principles throughout the world.

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Subscription to this Observer publication may be obtained by requesting Society membership, which is open to all individuals for a \$30 annual fee. Associate schools, \$35 annual fee. Society members also receive a subscription to the Montessori News and other membership benefits.

### IMS ON THE INTERNET

An on-line IMS discussion group, intmonsoc (International Montessori Society) is available for anyone to join at no charge.

To subscribe to this list, send an email to - intmonsoc-subscribe@yahoogroups.com, and then follow instructions to request placement on the list.

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# Messages to IMS

January, 2010  
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Hello Lee

I have been promoting your True Montessori Teaching with the homes and shelters that I volunteer in now. You know, the response so far is positive...My experience in Ti-Ratana welfare center is so amazing and now, I am planning to set up a similar school in another orphanage home that I have mentioned to you earlier. The volunteers there now understand the True Montessori Teaching and are beginning to practice it. So, my plan is to help them set up the right environment and train them to conduct the classes the right way. Soo Fong (Ti-Ratana school director) is going to help me...We have so much in common on the True Montessori Teaching...

Michelle Wong

February, 2010  
Sydney, Australia

Hi Lee

I attended a workshop of yours in Sydney, Australia in 2001, "Creating the New Education," with my work colleagues. We put a lot of what you said into practice in our centre. It was refreshing as it reminded us of our aim as educators. Thank you for your very gentle nature and insights. Hope to see you over here again.

Regards,

Cari Sheedy

April, 2010  
Indiana, USA

IMS list

Well, I had a great growth experience at New Way Montessori School in Meridian, Idaho this week with Wendy, the kids, and the parents. I'm genuinely impressed by how closely Wendy sticks to protocols and techniques during the day. She maintains consistency with her own kids, when she's tired, and even when she bumped her head hard on the building outside. Talk about having an even keel!

Esther Rupert (IMS '07)

April, 2010  
Arcadia, California

IMS list

Wow! Wendy!! (Wendy Lieberman, director, New Way Montessori school) I'm amazed by all the recent posts. It must be a very rewarding experience for you to reap the fruits from the work you have done!! I wish all the people who doubt the 'true natural being' concept would read your posts...it will be a good blow to the conventionalist...All your experiences inspire me a lot. Thanks for posting tirelessly!! Best wishes,

Suja Saikuman (MS '09)

December, 2009  
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Dear Mr. Lee Havis,

Your presence means a lot to us. We are going to practice the 10 techniques, 20 protocols and safe words until it becomes part of us.

Soo Fong  
Ti-Ratana Home School

## Moment of Peril

by Lee Havis

### Self-Control

In this *moment of peril* (See *Observer, March, 2010*), the teacher can't control her automatic negative behavior towards misbehaving children. Here, the adult personality is the primary detrimental influence that needs special attention.

Controlling automatic reactions, such as tense facial expression, loud, quick talking, jerky movements, and negative judgmental language can be most difficult to control due to deeply engrained attitudes and habits from the past. Nevertheless, the IMS technology offers a number of useful tools to help teachers gradually work through these issues of self-control.

Resolving any destructive pattern, you must first identify the specific series of outward events involved. Then, use such techniques as *Imagination-Previsioning* (IP) to analyze them further to finally change your behavior in actual practice.

To begin, the teacher must therefore focus on the first event in the pattern, such as a tension in the nerves or some negative thought about what the children are doing. Then, she must try to connect this with some mistake she is making at that time in following the IMS technology. For example, is she giving undue attention to one specific situation, rather than looking around at other children to follow the key protocol *well-being of the total environment*.

With IP, the teacher must analyze the misbehavior pattern more closely, for example, using a tension the nerves or a negative thought to signal the need for *patient waiting* to become more aware of her facial expression, body posture, and thoughts at the time. Now, she provisions herself correcting the mistake, for example, by following the *well-being* protocol to look around the environment instead of fixated her attention entirely on the immediate hub child in question. Finally, the teacher must practice her imagined solution with children in the real live situation. Since reactive personality patterns tend to stubbornly persist over time, it is vital to conduct IP each day, using the technique *repetition* to gradually acquire the new habit of effective Montessori teaching.

In the immediate situation, the teacher can also obtain more self-control by practicing various objective observation exercises. When feeling tense, for example, she can focus her gaze on some meaningless physical object, trying to look intently

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### DISTRACTION

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Following the protocol *no negative attention to misbehavior*, you must avoid provoking the child's defensive reaction or angry power struggle while using the distraction technique. So, always maintain a neutral, non-judgmental facial expression and voice tone while dealing with any misbehavior situation. In a group imitation situation, however, *using the distraction* technique is much less likely to provide a negative reaction.

### Group Imitation

*"The foolish act is multiplied in the group...In a crowd; the spirit of imitation spreads and enhances individual defects."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.267

Group disorder occurs when children follow each other in wild fantasy activity, such as running around in a circle. In this group imitation situation, use the *distraction* technique by positioning yourself in the path where some child in the group must run into you to continue. Then, give a *Full-body Embrace* (FBE) to get the child's attention. The FBE is just the type of strong hand tactic most suitable in these cases of extreme physical disorder.

### Strong Hand

*"The child who, having lost control of himself momentarily, needs a strong support to which he can cling. The work of assistance at such a time means extending a strong and friendly hand towards one who is weak."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Discovery of the Child*, p.153-54

The FBE interrupts wild, fantasy behavior and gets the child's attention by firmly holding the child's whole body. While embracing the child in this strong hand manner, continue speaking in a calm, friendly manner about present-moment reality, and then give a *clear direction*, such as "Take my hand," to lead the child to some other activity in the environment. Over time, this type of distraction activity becomes more limited as children gradually return to their normal state of calm and orderly behavior.

### Limited Activity

*"The more the environment corresponds to the needs of the child, the more limited becomes the activity of the teacher."*

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

Following such protocols as *least amount of adult involvement* and *well-being of the total environment*, Montessori teaching moves from heavy to light polishing as children become more calm and orderly in their outward behavior. So, your initial use of heavy polishing with the *distraction* technique gradually shifts to using lighter techniques, such as *proximity*, *eye contact*, and *patient waiting*. In this way, your activity in the environment is increasingly limited, until you

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## Moment of Peril

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on that object without any ordinary negative thoughts and judgments. Then, she returns her gaze towards the problem situation with children, maintaining that same non-judgmental objective observation.

The teacher may also find it helpful to imagine children as having brains made up of cotton wading to overcome the automatic tendency to project defects and flaws from her own personality. In time, she will use all these tools of objective observation to gradually increase her self-control with children. Then, her new way of being becomes a habit that is even further supported by the children's positive response with greater calm and orderly behavior.

### Helping others

Although the teacher can now easily conduct Montessori teaching on her own with the children, her assistant makes repeated errors, despite the teacher's constant, daily instruction and observation. In addition, her counseling of parents seems inadequate as well, since the children often show continual defects from their conventional treatment at home. What to do?

Answer in *Observer*, September, 2010

### Marketplace

**Montessori teachers:** Palm Harbor Montessori Academy (Palm Harbor, FL). 250 students, ages 1-year to 8th grade. Competitive salary with benefits. Fax or e-mail resume and letter of interest: Christine Varkas, Palm Harbor Montessori Academy, 2355 Nebraska Ave., Palm Harbor, FL 34683, (727) 786-1854; Fax: (727) 786-5160; www.floridamontessori.com, cvarkas@gate

## Reflections

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were as much as from my own feelings about how I handled things.

I realized that Montessori teaching is really pretty simple. It is basically doing the same things all the time. I have seen a lot of good results from what I am doing also. The children are going through transitions more quickly and easily than in the past. There is more cooperation at nap time and other times of the day. I feel more certain than ever that I am succeeding in what I am doing at school.

### Choosing True Nature

The issue of whether to follow Montessori teaching or to follow conventional ways with children is a difficult one. Society is always at odds with the creation of an environment where the child's true nature can emerge. The struggle seems to be going on outside ourselves with our spouses, our children, and other adults. Really, those things we see external to us are just a reflection of our own inner struggle. We were raised to deny the child's true nature and to believe the only way to deal with children is to either control them or neglect to support their natural development.

Since we are aware of the child's true nature and we have the technology of Montessori teaching and people who can help us support that way of being, we have a choice. Do we cooperate with the child's inner guidance or do we fight against it and teach our children as we were taught? The choice is obvious to me.

I believe in my children's perfect inner guidance and choose to do my best to allow them to follow it. I have never regretted that decision even though the world we

live in is opposed to it. I believe that a child who is self-confident, independent, eager to learn, able to concentrate, self-disciplined, orderly, and in social harmony with others will be able to deal with traditional approaches much better than one who is the opposite. That child won't lose himself to dependency and weakness as the child who was always conditioned under conventional methods will.

I want my children to make decisions, not just obey whatever the authority figure says no matter if it is right or wrong because they are afraid of being punished. We all need help along the way to figure out what we need to do to keep improving in our ability to create an environment where the child's true nature can emerge. However, as long as you keep trying to improve, the problems will keep going away, leaving you ultimately in the end with only the child's true nature.

## Character Teaching

Cont'd. from Page 1, Col. 3

In April, she wrote a letter of support for the project on behalf of her parent organization, *Youth Awareness Environmental Forum*. She also met with an official in the Nepal Ministry of Education to request their official written support. Ratna now joins **Rajalakshmi Golchha** on the consultation board to closely collaborate on the various initial steps of project operation.

## Distraction

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are finally only passively observing the children from a distance. Then, the children are functioning entirely on their own in an independent, self-directed manner that is fully consistent with their true natural development.