Character Teaching

Progress update

Sponsored by IMS, the Character Teaching (CT) project aims to overcome long-term cultural poverty by creating new conditions for true natural character development in young children. It is primarily active now in the initial planning stages in various countries through the efforts of local volunteers serving on the CT consultation board.

Pakistan

CT board member, Abdul Reyman Sani, Director, Al-Sani Institute, (Karakchi) attended the IMS convention in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia along with one of his main staff members. At the convention, he presented two letters of support for the CT project in Pakistan, one from his institute, and one from another prominent educational NGO in Karachi, Jamat Meerti Salawtan Pakistan. To further support these efforts, Lee Havis, CT chairman, submitted a letter to the president of Pakistan and the mayor of Karachi requesting their support as well.

India

Sudev Suchan, CT board member in Karnataka state (Bangalore), met with the governor of his state on July 28, 2009 to explain the CT project and request his official support. The governor expressed his pleasure about the project and asked Sudev to meet with his staff to provide details. In Calcutta, West Bengal, Sakyajit Banerjee joined the CT consultation board. Sakyajit is on the staff of Daffodil Buds Montessori school in Calcutta.

Nigeria (Africa)

Rashidah Sulaimon joined the CT board in June, 2009 after having attended the IMS convention in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in May 2009. Rashidah is director of studies at the Ar-Rahman Montessori School in Lagos, Nigeria.
In 1907, Dr. Montessori discovered a reality which has no meaning or existence in a conventional context. Infinite and timeless in nature, this new Montessori reality is only bound by laws of nature, which are beyond all human understanding.

Lacking a suitable context for understanding this true natural reality, efforts at creating it invariably lead to confusion and misinterpretation which finally degrades it into limited forms of expression that are dependent on personality or culture. In 1979, however, a new context for properly understanding true natural Montessori teaching came to light as a type of commitment to laws of nature.

Laws of Nature

“Life increases, becomes manifest, and perfects the individual, but it is confined within limits and is governed by insuperable laws.”

Dr. Maria Montessori
from Discovery of the Child, p.61-62

While Dr. Montessori did recognize the primacy of laws of nature in her approach, she didn’t fully understand or explain how to apply this knowledge in practice. For example, saying “do nothing” or “don’t abandon children” is simply too broad and indefinite for effective practical use.

 Likewise, describing laws of nature in terms of fundamental principles, such as individual liberty, observation, and preparation of the environment is still too imprecise and limiting as well. In the end, Dr. Montessori simply left the problem of contextualizing her discovery to others. Instead, she focused her attention on its outward content, consisting largely of various distinctive materials and the visible effects of the child’s behavior.

In 1979, the discovery of Montessori teaching as a commitment to laws of nature, however, made possible its experiential understanding and scientific practice through controlling the environment, not the child. At its most basic psychological level, this creative way of being is a process of giving space for the emergence of the child’s true nature.

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.36

In a conventional context, space for all being is bound by relatively fixed knowledge and expectations built on experiences of the past. By contrast, the context ‘commitment to laws of nature’ is constantly giving space beyond what is known or experienced before. With the proper tools, creating this expansive context can be an orderly, objective process of controlling the environment around each child in question.

Controlling the Environment

“To ensure the psychical phenomena of growth, we must prepare the ‘environment’ in a definite manner and from this environment offer the child the external means directly necessary for him.”

Dr. Maria Montessori
from Spont. Act. in Education, p 71

At the contextual level, Montessori teaching is a scientific way of being committed to laws of nature. In content, it is all you do in controlling the environment around each.
Context and Content

Cont'd. from Page 2, Col. 3

Dependency

The teacher here realizes the negative effects of dependency patterns she has created with children. However, she still is unable to disengage from these repressive patterns without going to the other extreme of “abandonment.” (See Observer, May, 2009) The solution to this moment of peril is to avoid either extreme of negativity or abandonment, following instead the path of commitment to laws of nature.

The teacher’s problem is actually fairly typical of ordinary adult personality expression with children — shifting between abandonment and negativity, without really discerning the way to fully support true natural development of children in the present moment situation.

The point of entry into controlling this bipolar personality expression is to focus on the disobedience issue, which seems to trigger all the other reactive patterns.

Analyzing disobedience, there are only two reasons for this to occur: (1) the child can’t or (2) the child doesn’t know how. Where there is a clear negative reaction to the adult presence, this usually signals a power struggle, and the reason for disobedience is “can’t.” In this situation, the teacher is right to “reduce her involvement”; however, she still must maintain an observant patient waiting, rather than going to the extreme of allowing children to escape into fantasy. Applying patient waiting, the teacher must stay alert to the child’s behavior, and reenter the situation as soon as the child’s attention is distracted from her presence. Then, use repetition and proximity, and, if necessary, heavier polishing with clear direction and distraction.

In abandonment, the disobedience to clear direction is for the reason “doesn’t know how.” Here, the correct response is to re-engage with the child by offering clear direction as before, except, perhaps, using the protocol emphasize main point — isolate variable to show the child what to do in a slower, more precise and exaggerated manner. In this way, adjusting her response in a flexible manner based on the right reason for disobedience, the teacher will eventually resolve the repressive dependency pattern without reverting to the other extreme of “abandonment.”

Child by removing its detrimental influences that arise in other children, physical objects, and the adult personality. Since 2003, the content involved in this type of scientific Montessori teaching has now become greatly clarified by the emergence of a precise technology for its effective application.

The IMS technology of Montessori teaching now supplies the basic content for true natural Montessori teaching in the form of such techniques as eye contact, proximity, and distraction. Using this content with the contextual controls of 20 protocols then becomes the functional equivalent of following laws of nature. However, even with this clear, precise technology, confusion still remains by viewing the child as content, rather than contextually as spirit.

Spirit

“...in the birth of every child...a spirit enclosed in flesh comes to live in the world.”

Dr. Maria Montessori from Secret of Childhood, p. 29

In Montessori teaching, the child is an unknown spiritual being guided by perfect laws of nature. However, in a conventional context, this spiritual child is confused with its content of external behavior, physical body, and personality. Then, controlling misbehavior often becomes controlling the child through various forms of repression and manipulation under the guise of help or teaching. This fundamental confusion about the child as content rather than context makes communicating its true nature quite difficult, if not impossible.

Communicating Normal Being

“...it is impossible to discuss education without first establishing the basis for the discussion...we must speak of the liberated child whose condition of life is normal...”

Dr. Maria Montessori from Child in the Family, p. 71-72

The child’s true normal being has never fully emerged with any permanence since 1907 due to lack of a sufficiently strong context for its understanding and perception. Absent this context, therefore, any normalized behavior in children appears to be accidental or as if caused by some external effect, such a set of special materials or a particularly skillful teacher or parent.

Even with the 1979 context of true natural Montessori teaching, communicating what is normal being has been difficult due to the stubborn persistence of conventional reality and the lack of practical guidance for creating the distinctive Montessori context. Since 2003, however, the IMS Montessori technology has greatly simplified the process of creating this new reality for true natural being.
Creating a New Reality

“The continuity of anything which nature has not fixed but which evolves gradually as a social pattern must do...is a creative operation which may come under our control”

Dr. Maria Montessori
from Absorbent Mind, p.174

Creating a new reality is a matter of acting in accordance with the conditions of that particular reality over time. As occasional or separate actions become consistent patterns and habits, the new reality acquires a certain permanence that others can perceive, understand, and recognize in its external form and expression. So, as long as you continue acting in harmony with laws of nature, the child’s true normal way of being will eventually take on the permanent external form of personality for life by about the age of six.

Creating the unique Montessori context is now essentially a process of using a content of various techniques and lesson presentations under the contextual control of 20 protocols. Applying this IMS technology to assure the right context and content for Montessori teaching allows the child’s true nature to fully materialize in the world.

Messages to IMS

Cont’d. from Page 3, Col. 3

June, 2009
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Dear Lee
Thank you...for your talk at our college. The techniques on dealing with behavior are most helpful and we use them frequently these days in our lectures. Just yesterday, for example, when the college students were practicing with the Large Moveable Alphabet, one of the students decided to play the role of the disruptive child and messed around with the letters. The group was asked about what could be done. Immediately, they adopted the technique of distraction, eye contact and clear direction...We also make frequent references in our lectures these days to 'green light'. In more ways than one, the information gained from the conference has enriched our lectures at the college...The lecturers also plan to share the techniques with our teaching practice students...When we visit the schools and see how they sometimes struggle to work with the children, we now have the language to discuss what went wrong and techniques to recommend for them to try out.

Vasanthi
Participant, KL convention

June, 2009
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Dear Lee:
Every day...I am more determined to develop further into your techniques of the New Technology in Montessori. I have no children yet myself but worked a fair bit with other children from needy and orphanage home. I am particularly interested to work with the special need children with this method....Hope to receive your guidance and be my mentor.

Michelle Wong
Participant, KL convention

Grabbing and Squeezing

In any conflict situation with children, 3 year-old Larry has the habit of grabbing and squeezing other children very hard. He seems especially violent with the youngest and most fragile children. Since Larry is large and strong for his age, his grip is extremely hurtful when it does occur. Although the teacher stays close by Larry as the hub child of the group, she is still unable to always protect other children due to his quick and unpredictable reactive behavior. What to do?

Answer in Observer, November, 2009