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.

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.

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...
by Lee Havis

“...if there is some child who persistently annoys the others, the most practical thing to do is to inter-rupt 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 neces-sary, 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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Distraction
Cont’d. from Page 2, Col. 3

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...
Reflections Cont’d. from Page 1, Col. 2

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, because the children often show continuallisting 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 them. Instead, we have the technology of nature and we have the technology of life 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.

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.