

Our heartfelt appreciation to the stars
on the cover, from left to right:
Melissa Hassan, Allysa Mentoor, Kayla Erkil

You, Me and Montessori

What Every Child Deserves

Grace Bosman; Leon G. Caesar



PARTRIDGE

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Contents

Dedication	vii
Not An Apology.....	ix
Preface	xi
Preface	xv
Dedication	xvii
Acknowledgements.....	xix
In Lieu of an Introduction.....	xxi

THE CHILD'S METHOD

Chapter 1	The Montessori Method	1
Chapter 2	Montessori: A Classroom View	20

FOLLOW THE CHILD LIKE YOU MEAN IT: IMPLEMENTATION AND RESULTS

Chapter 3	'Follow The Child' and See How They Bloom... ..	29
Chapter 4	Rayan The Indomitable	33
Chapter 5	Anthrah The Organised.....	40
Chapter 6	Jackson The Eager Beaver	49
Chapter 7	Jackson Round 2.....	57
Chapter 8	Fahed The Dinosaur Hunter.....	64
Chapter 9	Ishrah The Thinker	72
Chapter 10	Learning With All Fours.....	79

Chapter 11	Lama: The Expanded Version	87
Chapter 12	Sensitive Mothering: Firmest Foundation For The Future	99

STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT

Chapter 13	The Absorbent Mind and The Sensitive Periods Of Development	109
Chapter 14	Play and The Holistic Development of Children	121
Chapter 15	Discipline, Obedience, and The Will	127

MONTESSORI AND SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION

Chapter 16	Montessori and Special Needs Education	133
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RESULTS, CRITIQUE AND LAST WORDS

Chapter 17	Results Speak for Themselves.....	141
Chapter 18	Critique: A Children's Utopia In A Dystopian World	145
Chapter 19	Concluding Remarks	151
Postscript.....		153
References		157

DEDICATION

For Quinlan, aka Fireman Sam. A Montessori lad like no other. Visions of your roaring laughter and your confident and elaborate explanations are etched into our souls forever. Wherever you are, little chap, we love you and we miss you.

NOT AN APOLOGY

Dear reader, you may find awkward particular formulations used in this book, namely *s/he*, *her/his*, *her/him*, *herself/himself*, because the generic *he* is so much smoother. If so, tough luck, but we will not feed into even the smallest vestiges of the mindset that is fine with forgetting that women are as important as men. Many writers use *he/she*, etc., but why must men be mentioned first? The first steps in breaking an outdated cycle are always difficult, but every journey begins with a single step.

P R E F A C E

Parent-Teacher conference day. A father stepped up to his child's teacher, greeted her with heartfelt warmth, bended the knee, and with tears in his eyes thanked her profusely for the astounding progress his son had been making. It happened and only two months before the writing of this book commenced. Can ever there be a better evaluation for a teacher, more definitive proof that she is an effective educator? According to his parent, Raymond, who was 2.9 years old at the time, had been showing delayed development and had even been diagnosed as such by a psychologist. This had been 'confirmed' by the previous nursery he attended, and the family had resigned themselves to the fact that this was ultimately to be Raymond's reality. His teacher, Ms Grace, never believed there was anything amiss with Raymond. She knew that he only needed a proper environment and to be given space within which to grow in his own unique way. When the incident of this impassioned dad was narrated to me, I was actually startled; never before had I heard of anything like this. I could not—cannot—shake this moving image from my mind.

The inspiration for this book, Ms Grace, is a Montessori directress (teacher) at a Montessori early years centre in Kuwait. Consider that I am a high school teacher at an inclusive school; on top of that, I am highly critical of the traditional educational

philosophies and methods. However, I have been fascinated with all things Montessori due to years of interesting discussions with Ms Grace. I found many answers to so many of my questions in Montessori. As a bonus, I had the opportunity to experience how the theoretical bones of this method acquired flesh and came to life through the students she taught. I learnt the names of many of her students, about their progress, their characters, their shenanigans, and so much more. These little ones crept into my soul and it is their development, spurred on by means of the Montessori Method, that motivated me to share what they revealed to me.

I took particular interest in the obstacles they faced in the paths of their development and how these have been overcome by the teacher's guidance. In this manner, I have been given a front-row seat in an unfolding Montessori extravaganza, and I thank Ms Grace for sponsoring my ticket.

As a strong believer in the rights of children, what these little ones taught me ignited a flame that needed to be fed. The Montessori Method became a keen interest, which combined with Ms Grace's passion to combust into the fire within which this book was forged. The reading and writing that this book required was a journey of enlightenment if only to teach me that some of what I thought I knew about raising and teaching children had been resting on quite poor foundations. For example, I really thought I had the handling of kiddie tantrums down to a mastered skill, until Madame Montessori spoilt my smug hubris.¹

Dr. Maria Montessori, almost 100 years ago, made a fascinating description of the traditional education system that has stood the test of time on very sturdy legs. 'The education of today is humiliating. It produces an inferiority complex and artificially lowers the powers of man. Its very organization sets a limit to knowledge well below the natural level. It supplies men with

1 More on tantrums later (much).

crutches when they could run on swift feet. It is an education based on man's lower powers, not on his higher ones' (*The Absorbent Mind*, 1995, p. 214). I fully concur with this critique; as a teacher, I know it to be true. It is from my experiences in (and knowledge of) the traditional education system that I have been drawn to the Montessori Method like a moth to a flame.

This book is excellent for all teachers, parents, grandparents, and student teachers. You be the judge, but I am confident all the little ones will agree with me.

(The names of children described in this book, have been altered for obvious reasons.)

Leon G. Caesar

P R E F A C E

Montessori has changed my life. I grew up in a family that you can say was the antithesis of the Montessori Method: very traditional and serious adults. Children had to be housed, fed, clothed, and taken to church—period! Only to be seen and not heard, not allowed opinions or independence. When I became a parent, I sort of continued this ‘method’ that was handed down to me because I did not know any better. With negative traditions, we have to break the cycle and, with it, break the mould. It took a while, but I destroyed that cycle, and I broke that mould into little pieces! If you truly know what I am talking about, then go ahead and you smash those chains that link you to the past.

Starting my teaching career in a traditional kindergarten, I felt as out of place as the students must have. Little darlings being ‘educated’ as if in a military school. I saw and felt how the system repressed and stultified them all, and I was its instrument. I had to find a different way, and I did, and it is called the Montessori Method. Maybe because of my ‘anti-Montessorian’ upbringing, I immediately assimilated the beauty of the method. In addition, I have had great success with my students. Since obtaining my Montessori certificate, I never had to look back.

Having made this important Montessori journey in my mind and soul, I landed in a wonderful place. A place where I see not

children but little people. A place where my eyes and my mind are open to experience the wonder and magic of children without arrogance or prejudice. A place where the children are the teachers and I am the student. My experiences as a Montessori directress have brought me the greatest satisfaction and the abundant and unconditional love of my students and respect of parents and colleagues.

As I am a practical person, working on this book with Leon has given me the opportunity to revisit the theoretical aspects of my field. It has been a real pleasure to see and reflect again on how my experiences stand up to the theoretical benchmarks of the Child's Method.

Grace Bosman

DEDICATION

To our children, Hadley, Nicole (Nikki), Nadia (Nadz), and Chante, the many mistakes we made during your upbringing were the results of ignorance, never intent. Had we known then what we know now, your lives would have been much, much more satisfying, more enriched, and less stressful. But let us look on the bright side. We will make it up to you with our grandchildren.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our thanks to Berna Elias for reviewing and verifying the references. The contribution of Jodi Clarke, our editor, is tremendously appreciated; her attention to detail is second to none. Should there be any omission, the responsibility would be ours alone.

IN LIEU OF AN INTRODUCTION

Underestimate the Little Ones at Your Peril

Ms Grace and her students were sitting on the carpet discussing the developments of the day. A colleague entered and started to talk loudly to the teaching assistant. She seemingly got annoyed because the students were talking and, in Arabic, told them to be quiet. She must have rued the day that Little Jassim (1.11 years old), still in his nappy, told her in English, 'No, this is our class. Ms Grace does not say be quiet. Look, look, we are talking. This English class, your class Arabic. Go to your class!' His face was serious as he pointed and shook his tiny finger in the direction of her classroom. She could only but vacate the room as gracefully as possible under the circumstances.

Martin (2.6 years old) went for an interview at the school his parents wanted him to attend the following year. The interviewing teacher picked up a flat geometrical shape, placed it against the magnetic board, and told him it was an oval. Martin firmly contradicted her, taking the shape; and as he pointed to the ends, he stated that it did not have a small side on top and a big side at

the bottom. ‘This is an ellipse,’ said the little genius. ‘Can you see the top and the bottom are the same, equal?’

Both teacher and mom were stunned. What the teacher (or Martin) did not realise is that all ellipses are ovals, but not all ovals are ellipses, so she could not clarify the matter to him. The interesting thing is that in a limited way they were both correct. That little one taught two adults an important lesson that day: the teacher learnt about the limits of her knowledge, and the mom learnt about an ellipse!

A colleague doubted that Ms. Grace’s class of 2- to 3-year-olds had the ability to follow a theme on the solar system. After a few lessons, she came to the class and started to randomly ask the students questions to test their knowledge on the planets. There was not a single one who could not answer any of her questions correctly; they knew the names of all the planets as well as some of their features, and they knew the name of the planet they live on. She left the classroom in disbelief. Let us hope she learnt something about the true capacity of the little ones.

It was the month of November, planting time for all classes. Ms Grace decided to expand the theme by teaching her class about the parts of a plant. She used a poster as well as a manipulative made of felt that had removable parts. A colleague had no hope that the students could master such knowledge. However, the students were very eager to accept the challenge and flourished in the lessons, making excellent progress. A few times one student, Raymond (2.7 years old at the time), would hurriedly say goodbye to his dad in the morning, grab Ms Grace’s hand, take her to the plant poster, and point to the various parts while saying them correctly, if in his own way. He could not say all the names properly, but he surely knew them.

The gem in this cluster is JuJu (2 years old). Little JuJu could not yet speak English—he is Italian—but he listened attentively

whenever his teacher spoke. How did she draw him in? By asking him questions that allowed him to point to the answers! And he was always right, which showed that he understood the lessons, even though the language was new to him. The fact that he could not speak English did not mean that he could not listen or that he did not understand. Working around his limitation and giving him opportunities to excel must have done wonders for his self-esteem. The language came later and when it did, it was a fabulous torrent.

ANALYSIS

Some of the above cases show instances when adults had too low expectations of young children and were proven wrong each time. Sadly, in each case, these adults were teachers of small children themselves; but let us not be too hard on these teachers, for underestimating the abilities of small children is a widespread global phenomenon, something that Madame Montessori has pointed out over and over.

Why is it such common practice to underestimate small children, in particular? The reason lies in how we see them: cute little things to be cuddled and loved as they bring immeasurable joy to our lives, but they can also be seen as a bother when we want to get on with our own things and they demand attention. Limitations in their communication skills certainly do not aid their cause. As long as we take care of their physical needs and they are comfortable, we seem to think our job is done. We focus too much on what they mean to us; and sadly, we neglect their 'people rights'. It is as if they still have to become people. We are with Madame Montessori that our mindsets need to change; they are born people, only tiny ones. This is our failing because they are much, much more than we give them credit for. They are

little people in the process of growing, little people with amazing abilities. The only limits we should accept for them are the limits they indicate to us (within reason and common sense, of course). Madame Montessori never made this mistake. She was merciless in a number of places where she seemed to be pulling out her hair as a lament to this state of affairs. She had the highest respect and regard for the powers of the tiny ones as indicated in many places in her works where she referred to the fact that children have the 'highest potentialities' (*The Secret of Childhood*, p. 32). Similarly, in *The 1946 London Lectures*, she stated, 'We make this great mistake. We think children are inferior beings without intelligence' (p. 183.)

Another point that stands out in bold relief from these cases is the confidence displayed by all these children. Jassim, in particular, was quite fearless. Such confidence is axiomatic for all serious Montessori teachers, and we will get into this a lot more when we deal with the Montessori Method, especially, with *the will*.

If they cannot speak the language (or have limited speaking skills), it does not mean they do not understand; they can speak with their hands. The less developed their speaking skills are, the better we should listen to them and the more creatively should we engage them. To follow Madame Montessori, we should observe them and learn from them whilst putting aside our prejudices. Just because they prow around in nappies with dummies in mouth, do not think they are easy prey for your morning blues. You might just get your comeuppance!



P A R T 1

The Child's Method

CHAPTER 1

The Montessori Method

In *The Discovery of the Child* (New York, 1967), Montessori elaborates in detail the teaching methods applied in the Children's Houses (the preschools that she had directed in Rome from 1907 to 1909). Having her own schools at her disposal came as a godsend at just the perfect time, having by then studied the works on education of Itard and Seguin² for ten years. She added her ten years of study together with the forty years of labour of these two remarkable pioneers, her time teaching children with mental challenges, as well as her time teaching at a mainstream elementary school. This shows the depth of wisdom that she would apply to the Children's Houses, which, in turn, became the primal breeding ground of what has come to be known as the Montessori Method³. Always mindful of the limitations of how traditional schools stultified the children, she sought to blaze a different path, one based on a scientific approach, which took as its starting point understanding the child. She did not have a finished method on day one; rather, the Children's Houses were the cauldron in

2 Both did extensive experimentation and writing on the education of children with serious mental challenges.

3 This name was given by a publisher, and it stuck. Madame Montessori preferred to call her system the Child's Method (*The 1946 London Lectures*, lecture 2).

which her method was tried, tested, and refined. This is not to say that research stopped here. Throughout her life, she continued to write and process new data from around the world, registered confirmations, and continued to learn, analyse, and refine.⁴

CENTRAL PRINCIPLES OF THE MONTESSORI METHOD

Freedom

The basis of the Montessori Method, which is a veritable pearl of wisdom to Dr. Montessori's credit, is the revelation that 'children must be free to express themselves and thus reveal those needs and attitudes which would otherwise remain hidden or repressed' (*The Discovery of the Child*, p. 46). A term she links with this freedom is *spontaneous actions*; gone is the notion that children must sit quietly on their behinds. They are free to move around in Montessori classrooms! The purpose is for children to 'manifest their natural traits' (ibid., p. 46). She wrote of this freedom, 'It was this part of the problem, which had not as yet been taken up by educators, that seemed to me to be most important and most pertinent to teaching since it has direct reference to a child's vital activities' (ibid., p. 46). A child is surrounded by restrictions (at home and at school) that limit her/his activity. In *The Secret of Childhood* (New York, 1966), Montessori puts this last point in the following manner, 'A child cannot develop and expand as it should because an adult "represses" it' (p. 13). Her approach on this point can be summed up quite simply:

⁴ Since her passing, her work has been passionately continued by the flagbearer of the Montessori movement, the Association Montessori Internationale (AMI), which she founded in 1929.

1. We do not fully understand what is developing naturally within a child⁵; therefore, throw aside our prejudices and let the child teach us how to teach her/him.
2. Every child is propelled by a natural drive to develop and grow, and only freedom of action will allow the child to develop in as normal (natural) a manner as possible.
3. In the process of this development, the child's personality is formed, which means an adult is formed. In this sense, 'the child is the father of the man' (ibid., p. 36).

Obstacles, or barriers, have a profound impact on the child's development as they negatively impact on the child's need to 'secretly perfect his inner life over a long period of time' (ibid., p. 34).

In fact, it is a strong belief of hers that this freedom is an 'innate' (natural) requirement (ibid., p. 31). The child's 'great mission' is to grow up and become an adult (ibid., p. 62). The child is filled with the potentialities of life, which are the sources of growth (ibid., p. 61).

It is in this context that we need to understand that spontaneous action is the truest form of expression of the child's normal development; and for this spontaneity, freedom is a *sine qua non*. An adult imposing her/his will on that of a child is a travesty. Therefore, 'we should not corrupt or suffocate his mysterious potentialities but wait for their successive manifestations' (p. 61). Crucial elements in the Montessorian concept of the freedom of the child are to allow the child to repeat activities as many times as her/his little heart may desire and to refrain from correcting the child when s/he makes 'mistakes' whilst working.

5 In this context, she frequently wrote of the 'secrets' of the child: 'There is in the soul of a child an impenetrable secret that is gradually revealed as it develops' (*The Secret of Childhood*, p. 20).

In the former case, the understanding is that repetition is a specific focus of a child, driven by natural urges to perfect a certain skill or group of skills. We as adults cannot understand this, let alone control it; but we should not interfere with the child's process as this is an important aspect of natural development. Observations reveal that as soon as a child achieves the objective, s/he simply moves on.

A child can also not develop freely if an adult keeps on pointing out 'mistakes'. These are not mistakes but experiences on the road to success, and the child should be guided along the correct path in a manner that promotes independence. Constant corrections have a 'lowering effect' on the child's 'energies and interests' (*The Absorbent Mind*, New York, 1995 p. 245). Madame Montessori believed that corrections did not improve the child, who required additional skills; 'and how can he do this if, being already below standard, he is also discouraged?'⁶ (*ibid.*, p. 245). She recommends exercise and experience with long practice, but the child must do so voluntarily (*ibid.*, p. 246). In a different context, but very relevant to our discussion, Montessori states, 'What are the interests of education centred on today? On the child's mistakes! These small errors hide the true greatness of man' (*The 1946 London Lectures*, p. 5).

Montessori's method of dealing with mistakes is the introduction of a rule called the control of error: 'We need this rule as part of school life' (*ibid.*, p. 247). This rule allows the child to be able to independently ascertain whether a mistake is in the making and to be able to make the necessary correction or corrections. She compares the rule of the control of error with a map and signposts that are needed on a journey. She goes into

6 A few pages later, she avers that if a child always needs someone else to correct her/him, this 'begets a discouraging sense of inferiority and a lack of confidence in one's self' (p. 248).

very interesting details about the function of errors in life and in education and our baseless fears of them, but that is beyond our requirement.

This freedom is not to be equated with *carte blanche*: ‘Therefore, when we speak of the freedom of a small child, we do not mean to countenance the external disorderly actions which children left to themselves engage in as a relief from their aimless activity, but we understand by this the freeing of his life from the obstacles which can impede his normal development’ (*The Discovery of the Child*, p. 62). The limits of a child’s freedom should be the interests of the group and appropriate behaviour (pp. 49–50). ‘We should therefore prevent a child from doing anything which may offend or hurt others, or which is impolite or unbecoming’ (pp. 49–50). Useless or harmful activities and behaviour must be checked and repressed.

Madame Montessori’s perspectives on the pertinence of the liberty of the child as the foundation stone of her/his education arose from a deep understanding of the nature of the child and her/his deepest needs. From this simple yet original and innovative conclusion of the quintessence of freedom in the education of the child, everything else in the classroom flows, like rays of light from a radiant sun.

Independence

Education for independence follows directly from the principle of liberty because ‘no one can be free if he is not independent’ (*The Discovery of the Child*, p. 56); this starts from earliest infancy. The child must be taught to do for herself/himself what is possible. Montessori is quite scathing of those who serve children hand and foot instead of guiding them to do things for themselves; ‘adults look upon a child as *something empty* that is to be filled through

their own efforts, as *something inert and helpless* for which they must do everything, as *something lacking an inner guide* and in constant need of direction. . . . The adult looks upon himself as the child's creator' (all italics as per the original) (*The Secret of Childhood*, p. 16). She extends her criticism to focus on adults as well by laying bare the limitations created by the mindset that extolls the culture in which being served is regarded as beneficial or even a luxury. 'A man who acts by himself, who expends his strength on his own actions, conquers himself, increases his strength, and perfects himself. If men of the future are to be strong, they must be independent and free' (ibid., p. 58). Freedom and independence are two sides of the same coin.

The Environment

The environment is given the highest level of consideration in Montessori education and has to be set up in such a manner that children can manifest their 'natural traits' freely (and spontaneously) in it; it is the infrastructure within which all the other Montessori principles are to be actualised. For the Children's Houses, Montessori had classroom furniture made proportionate to the sizes of the children (which was a novel idea at the time and has since become standard practice worldwide):

- Tables and chairs were light enough to be moved around.
- Tables or chairs were not uniform.
- Children were able to lock and unlock cupboards themselves.
- There was an accessible washstand in each classroom.
- Tables were adorned with tablecloths and flowers/plants in vases.
- There were ornaments and even a live fish.

- All around the walls were blackboards for the children to write on.
- There were small pictures of pleasant family scenes and natural objects.

There were also historical and/or religious pictures that could be changed from day to day; every Children's House had a mounted emblem, *The Madonna* by Raphael, to exalt the mother-infant relationship to the highest degree (*The Discovery of the Child*, p. 47). This physical environment has been meticulously prepared, based on fifty years' worth of groundbreaking work in the field of education, aimed at allowing the child to grow and develop her/ his personality as naturally as possible. It allows the child to 'pursue a series of interesting objectives and thus channel his random energies into orderly and well-executed actions' (ibid., p. 62).

The Montessori Method is renowned for its collection of celebrated educational objects and materials that are intrinsic parts of the educational system, much like the tools needed by a workman/woman to get a job done. These objects and materials that the child is free to choose and use are part of the environment. The Children's Houses had objects that directed the children to the completion of real tasks, such as buttoning, tying, hooking, lacing, washing their hands, sweeping the floor, dusting furniture, brushing shoes or clothes, spreading out carpets and rolling them up afterwards, spreading a tablecloth for dinner and folding it up afterwards, setting the table, removing dishes after a meal and washing them, and placing objects in their proper places.

These activities called exercises in practical life increased the children's skills, provided them with attainable goals, and facilitated the gradual development of character 'and a sense of responsibility for their successful accomplishment' (ibid., pp. 62–63). Other objects were also used called materials for development, which

develop the child's intellect. They include materials used 'for the education of the senses, for learning the alphabet, numbers, and reading, writing, and arithmetic' (ibid., p. 63).

The materials have a profound and interesting history: '[They have] been drawn partly from the material used by Itard and Seguin in their attempts to educate retarded and mentally deficient children, partly from objects used in psychological tests, and partly from the materials which I earlier designed in my own experimental work' (*The Discovery of the Child*, p. 99). The materials were refined based on practice.

Another key component of the environment is the teacher. 'An educational influence is diffused throughout the whole environment, and both children and teacher have their roles to play in it' (ibid., p. 63). The teacher is the most important part of the environment and deserves dedicated treatment.

The Teacher

A true Montessori teacher is an astute and active observer of children, always assessing where the child is at in her/his level of development in order to understand the child's needs and how to relate to those needs as a teacher. This is a repeated refrain in Montessori's works: the teacher should act as a scientific observer of the child and be a more passive guide (directress) than in the traditional teaching sense. The teacher must be humble and rid of prejudices about children as well as about her/himself. Teachers 'should strive to rid themselves of their basic defect composed of pride and anger. Anger is the principle defect, but it is cloaked by pride which lends it a certain dignity that can even demand respect' (*The Secrets of Childhood*, p. 151).

'In its simplest form anger with a child is irritation at a child's resistance, but it soon becomes mingled with pride and develops

into a kind of tyranny when confronted by the child's feeble attempts to express himself' (ibid., p. 152).

'One who would become a teacher according to our system must examine himself and forgo this tyranny. He must rid his heart of pride and anger. He must learn how to humble himself and be clothed with charity' (ibid., p. 153).

This is the 'inner preparation' required of the teacher. What the child sees when s/he looks at the teacher is very important. The teacher should be well-dressed, clean, tidy, and neat and be admired by the children. 'We cannot have teachers who are like marionettes. The teachers must be warm, caring and understanding' (*The 1946 London Lectures*, 2013, p. 114).

The Montessori teacher has no truck with the traditional teacher-led way of teaching. S/he must measure what is needed and limit all work to that, like a good servant who carefully prepares a drink for her/his master and then leaves it for the latter to complete the work, i.e. drinking it (*The Absorbent Mind*, p. 9).

The educational objects are not a help to the teacher but to the child. The principal agent is the object itself and not the instruction given by the teacher. It is the child who is active, not the teacher (*The Discovery of the Child*, p. 149). At first the teacher is very active. As the child learns and grows, the roles of teacher and child change. Now the teacher becomes more and more passive and the child the active learner. At first, when the teacher is the active force, she/he is very visible, teaching and roaming around in the class, presenting, telling stories, and helping the children to settle into the routine of the classroom. Even interfering with the children's work and establishing a mode of appropriate behaviour, 'the more active he is the less active will be the teacher; in fact, she may end by standing almost completely aside' (*The Absorbent Mind*, p. 244).

“Her cooperation is not at all excluded, but it becomes prudent, delicate and manifold’ (*The Discovery of the Child*, p. 150). ‘She does not have need of words, or energy, or severity; but she must be able to make prudent observations, to assist a child by going up to, or withdrawing from, him, and by speaking or keeping silence in accordance with his needs’ (ibid., p. 150). The teacher displays calm, patience, generosity, and humility. ‘Not words, but virtues, are her main qualifications’ (ibid., p. 150).

Her main purpose is to ‘explain the use of the material. She is the main connecting link between the material, that is, the objects, and the child’ (*The Discovery of the Child*, p. 150). The teacher should ‘place a child in contact with the objects to which he reacts. She must be able to choose an object suitable for a particular child and place it before him in such a way that he understands it and takes a keen interest in it’ (ibid., p. 151). The teacher makes sure that a child absorbed in his work is not disturbed.

Not only is the teacher the creator of the environment and the one who gives energy to the educational principles through the environment, but also s/he ‘is “the catalyst” between a child, who may be disturbed, sleepy, or repressed, and the environment prepared for his education’ (*The Discovery of the Child*, p. 30). In addition, s/he brings the child into contact with the order in the environment, teaches her/him the following rule: all objects have their specific places, and a child may take an object only from its specific place and must return it there (in the same condition) after use. ‘Our educational system esteems a child’s environment so highly that it makes it the center of instruction’ (*The Secret of Childhood*, p. 60).

Teaching According to the Sensitive Periods of Development

See chapter 12 for extensive elaboration.

Work

Madame Montessori adapted the famous use of the term *work* from the Marxist playbook as can be seen from her reference in *The Absorbent Mind*, p. 16: ‘The picture of the laborer, extolled by Marxist theory, has now become a part of the modern conscience. He is seen as the producer of wealth and well-being, an essential partner in the great work of civilized living. Society has come to recognize his moral and economic value, and to accord to him the means and conditions needed for his work, as a matter of right.’

She found within this conception of work a valuable resonance for what she was recognising in the life of children. ‘Suppose we carry this idea over to the child. He too, is a toiler, and the aim of his work is to make a man’ (pp. 16–17). The ‘fruits of his labor’ are ‘the whole of mankind’; this is the child’s product (ibid., p. 17). ‘A child is also a worker and a producer’ (*The Secret of Childhood*, p. 193). His product is that he is producing mankind.

But what is the work of the child? It is all those activities that spur on development. ‘The child can only develop fully by means of experience on his environment. We call such experience “work”’ (*The Absorbent Mind*, p. 88). The child’s work takes the form of actions on real objects in the environment (*The Secret of Childhood*, p. 195). ‘Active work’ by the child is a necessity for her/him to develop into an adult. A child grows through exercise. ‘By means of his constant efforts, experiences, sorrows, and conquests of difficult trials and struggles, a child slowly perfects his activities’ (*The Secret of Childhood*, pp. 194–5).

Even constructive play is work. 'When a child works, he does not do so to attain some further goal. His objective in working is the work itself' (ibid., p. 196). She sees work as occupying a natural position within the life of a child. 'A child's desire to work represents a vital instinct since he cannot organize his personality without working: *a man builds himself through working*. . . . There can be no substitute for work' (emphasis in the original) (ibid., p. 186). The purpose of work, and play is 'the construction of the personality'. Work is also crucial for the normalisation⁷ of children. (*The Secret of Childhood*, p. 185).

She brings out many differences between the work of adults and the work of children, but there are important similarities too. Like the adult worker, the child's work is essential in that it is creating wealth (by creating mankind) and well-being; its role in the creation of civilisation cannot be denied. Moreover, through work, the child creates himself as people create themselves through labour. Unlike in the case of the adult worker, society is yet to give the child proper recognition.

In her point of view on childhood work, Madame Montessori makes some truly profound generalisations about work, namely that humanity (and children in their own way) has a natural instinct to work, that work should be a great source of satisfaction, and that work has become a drag for many adults due to the fact that it has lost its proper motives in favour of a desire for possessions and power (*The Secret of Childhood*, p. 186). However, children still gain tremendous satisfaction from work. If children do not get great joy from their work, it means that they are being oppressed, whether knowingly or unknowingly. Whereas Karl Marx has refined and popularised the labour theory of value, Montessori has created the labour theory of childhood.

⁷ Elaborated later.

Concentration and Repetition

Concentration develops hand in hand with work. ‘The first essential for the child’s development is concentration. It lays the whole basis for his character and social behavior’ (*The Absorbent Mind*, p. 222). Through concentration, the child masters her/his environment and can ‘exert control over his world’ (ibid., p. 217). Montessori mentions that the child’s power to concentrate was first discovered in the Children’s Houses. She realised that it is an innate drive spurring the child’s development on. Concentration, with work, constructs the child’s personality. She gives it the highest importance, stating that a concentrating child has to be protected from disturbances. From *The 1946 London Lectures*, ‘I have spoken about how children learn to concentrate and how a teacher must not interfere with her children at the moment of concentration. At other times, a teacher must use her common sense—she can interfere, but she must not interfere and break concentration’ (ibid., p. 232). We commented on repetition under freedom, but a few additional remarks should be in order here.

Having observed the general predisposition of children to repeat activities, in some cases many, many times, Montessori believed that repetition is not a deviant behaviour but fulfils an extremely important internal function (because they clearly do not have an ‘external purpose’). This repetition, which begins after the first concentration, produces a kind of consolidation (*Absorbent Mind*, p. 217). Montessori states that ‘the child’s repetition was laying down in his nervous system an entirely new system of controls, in other words, establishing fresh co-ordinations between his muscles’ (*The Absorbent Mind*, p. 180).

Training of the Senses

This is a very important central theme in Montessori education for 3- to 6-year-olds and was written about extensively by Montessori. The importance attached to it is because sense development precedes the development of 'higher intellectual faculties' (*The Discovery of the Child*, p. 143). The stronger the child's sense development is, the better is the springboard for intellectual development. She argues for assisting the development of the senses by 'graduating and adapting' the stimuli to which a child is exposed (*ibid.*, p. 143). 'The training and sharpening of the senses has the obvious advantage of enlarging the field of perception, and of offering an ever more solid foundation for intellectual growth' (*The Discovery of the Child*, p. 99). A special branch of Montessori materials is dedicated to this purpose, namely sensorial materials.

Development of the Hand

Montessori sees the hands as instruments of human intelligence. The hand 'not only allows the mind to reveal itself but it enables the whole being to enter into special relationships with its environment' (*The Secret of Childhood*, p. 81). With their hands, people transform their environment; and in the process, they affirm themselves as members of the species. Due to this dual importance of the hand in human existence, she calls it a manifestation of the inner ego (*ibid.*, p. 82). From this fundamental purpose of the hand, Montessori deduces that the development of the hand must be of vital importance in the development of the child.

We already noted the profound importance of the work of the child, considering that this work is done with the hands; it

follows that the more the hand is developed, the more efficient and satisfying this work would be. The development of the hand and work therefore go hand in hand (so to speak). ‘Since he must develop himself through his movements, through the work of his hands, he has need of objects with which he can work that provide motivation for his activity’ (ibid., p. 82). Never underestimate the stimulation given to intellectual development during activities conducted with the hands, as stated by Montessori, because the development of the hand and of the intellect reinforce each other. ‘The hands of man express his thoughts’ (*The Absorbent Mind*, p. 150); ‘hence, the development of manual skill keeps pace with mental development’ (ibid., p. 150). ‘Little children revealed that the development of the mind is stimulated by the movement of the hands’ (*The 1946 London Lectures*, p. 16).

Social Development

This is a very pertinent tenet of the Montessori tapestry. It is seen in the broader philosophy of Madame Montessori as she reminds us constantly of the child’s role in producing ‘man’ and civilisation and in taking society to a higher level. The centrality of social development is established in the importance of the ‘activities of everyday life’, which is on the daily menu of the little ones. Montessori teachers are trained to always indicate social skills as objectives of their lessons. Finally, the importance of social development is seen in the very structure of Montessori classrooms, namely the three-year vertical classes. Younger children learn from older ones, and older children get opportunities to care and guide younger ones.

Discipline and Normalisation

According to the *Oxford Dictionaries* (undated),⁸ discipline is ‘the practice of training people to obey rules or a code of behaviour, using punishment to correct disobedience’ and ‘the controlled behaviour resulting from such training’. This is the traditional approach on the matter. Some schools add rewards to encourage good conduct, but this does not change the repressive nature of the traditional concept of discipline.

Discipline is one of the basic features of all schools, and the disciplinary procedures followed are normally drilled into the students at the beginning of each school year and followed up on throughout the year. Madame Montessori rejects the approach, according to which ‘discipline is made to rest on threats and fear’ (*The Absorbent Mind*, p. 256). She sees the child as inherently good and naturally geared to ‘make progress and to develop his powers’. Where the child engages in disorderly and violent conduct, such behaviour are signs of ‘emotional disturbance and suffering’; and if treated as such, the teacher should be in a position to help the child to come into her/his own. Montessori argues in *The Absorbent Mind* that the child possesses the inner powers required for disciplined conduct, but that these may be slumbering and waiting to be awakened.

If these powers are properly developed and aided by the environment, the result will be ‘spontaneous discipline’, meaning true and lasting discipline—true meaning discipline coming from within. Montessori juxtaposes discipline (including rewards and punishments) in traditional schools with that in the Children’s Houses. She vehemently opposes the notion that a disciplined

8 Oxford Dictionaries (undated) *English Oxford Living Dictionaries [online]* available at: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/discipline> (date accessed: 25/07/2018)

child sits still and is totally quiet. For even discipline must have as its aim the assistance of the free personal development of the child. 'The discipline that we are looking for is active. We do not believe that one is disciplined only when he is artificially made as silent as a mute and as motionless as a paralytic. Such a one is not disciplined but annihilated' (*The Discovery of the Child*, p. 49).

According to the Montessori Method, the child 'is disciplined when he is the master of himself and when he can, as a consequence, control himself when he must follow a rule of life'. Attention needs to be paid to the term *life*; discipline is regarded as much broader than the needs of the teacher or the school at a particular moment. The starting point of discipline is educating the child so that s/he can independently distinguish between right and wrong and follow the correct path of her/his own free will. This is facilitated by checking and eradicating actions that should be avoided.

This is also the most trying time for the teacher. In *The 1946 London Lectures*, she puts the matter as follows, 'There are people who believe in being sweet and patient and never correcting a child. This treatment has no results, the child will only feel more awkward. . . . Why is it such a terrible thing to tell a child not to break things? . . . Don't ignore wrong actions, as the child may only become worse and worse. We must find a remedy; these wrong things are not natural. They are symptoms of a wrongly developed child. . . . The only thing we can do to help these children is to give them *the opportunity to begin again in the right way*. To give them order, activity, and opportunities to have the right experience in the environment' (emphasis added) (*ibid.*, p. 140).

It is not about the teacher protecting her/his energies or about punishment per se or about making the child pay. It is about finding the way back to the default position so that the child can try again. The focus should be on directing students gently in their work as opposed to rewards and punishments.

In the Children's Houses, punishment could not be avoided, but it flowed directly from the child's needs as opposed to the teacher's. They isolated children who interrupted others and who would not listen to their entreaties. The place of isolation allowed the child to see all the other students and how they behaved. Such a child was given special treatment and was given all the objects s/he desired (ibid., pp. 60–61). Isolation was more a lesson than a punishment. Such children's conversions were always true and lasting. Discipline in the form of collective order, as in sitting quietly in the theatre or walking in a line, is positive and has to be learnt and assimilated.

In the early pages of *The Discovery of the Child*, she is totally scathing of rewards and punishments and describes them as 'a means of enslaving a child's spirit and better suited to provoke than to prevent deformities', generating pride, envy, and rivalries. In a footnote on p. 15, Dr. Montessori pulls back a little by acknowledging the 'basic, educational import' of rewards and punishments 'instead of being means, they become as it were an end'. In the same footnote, she then extolls rewards and punishments as follows, 'As a matter of fact, common sense tells us that rewards and punishments are a means for knowing practically, especially when minds are darkened by passion, that a work is good or evil, praiseworthy or reprehensible. Thus in a certain sense they are inseparable from work as effect is from cause.' She continues, 'As far as punishment is concerned, we do not mean to deny its social function and individual efficacy but merely its moral value and general necessity' (ibid., p. 16).

In this sense, rewards and punishment can be seen as part of normalisation. By the time they come to school, most children display inappropriate behaviours that result from their previous experiences. *Normalisation* is the process of remedying such behaviours. 'Frequently this contact between a child and his

environment cannot be established until he has first been freed from the burden of a previous repression and its harmful effects. In such a case, an attempt must be made to cure, or, as we say, “to normalize” the child before he is given the means for his Development’ (ibid., p. 30). Normalisation is achieved through work and concentration.

CHAPTER 2

Montessori: A Classroom View

Early Years' Setup a la Montessori

No two Montessori schools are the same. As the Montessori name has never been trademarked or copyrighted, it is sometimes used too glibly by nurseries/schools. The establishments calling themselves Montessori have a wide-ranging pedigree, from pure charlatans, to full-fidelity institutions and lots of variations in between. The summary below follows Ms Grace's experiences at two different schools, both falling between the two extremes but towards the upper end. She also has experience as a teacher of kindergarten in a mainstream school.

- A normal day starts with circle time, which is similar to the mainstream system, except no math is done at this time; the children's work, including math, is individualised. This is the time for greeting all round; doing the register; discussing the day, date, and weather; doing a recap of the previous day and discussing the theme.
- The Montessori work period follows for one and a half hours. (It is supposed to be three hours). The teacher guides the students to choose work from the shelves (if they

want to), which they do on tables or on the floor. Some students may observe others; some may just walk around in the class. They are encouraged to take work but never forced. 'The free choices made by the children enabled us to observe their psychic needs and tendencies' (*The Secret of Childhood*, p. 121). Great care is taken for students not to be interrupted whilst working, and they are allowed to work for as long as they want. This session is the core of Montessori education for the young ones.

- After tidying up, tables are set by the students for snack time later. Outside, playtime takes place in a conscientiously equipped play area that encourages activities that assist with physical development. Playtime is structured on two occasions per week; otherwise, the students are allowed to find their own structure in their play.
- Back in class, the students are encouraged to handle the entire snacking process by themselves from taking out their food to eating by themselves, tidying up, and packing everything away afterwards; adult supervision serves only as a backup (for example, to ensure that water bottles are closed properly before being put in bags).
- In the ensuing phonics period, reading is done to give context to the sounds; phonics should not be done collectively, but it is done like this as children are being prepared for regular school at an early age. Common lessons were certainly conducted in the Children's Houses, but they were not the chief means of instruction but used as introductions to special 'problems and activities' (*The Secret of Childhood*, p. 139).
- The craft lesson follows based on the theme current at the time.
- The tables are set for the second snack time.

- Playtime again
- After the second snack time, the children go home. School is in from 8a.m. to 1 p.m., which is pretty much the same as in the mainstream system. In the Children's Houses, school lasted for about twice as long.

In Kuwait, students are prepared for regular school at a very early age. This leads to Montessori nurseries feeling that they are forced to make compromises as their students need to pass entrance exams at regular schools at a tender age.

The Montessori Work Period Explained

The engine room of the Montessori work period is the shelves. Every Montessori classroom has a set of shelves for trays with materials for specific activities, ready to be chosen by a child in order to do 'work'. Shelves are at the child's eye level. The child chooses a tray or educational equipment (if s/he wishes), carries it to a table, does the activity, tidies up, and returns the tray. Any new activity is demonstrated to the child either individually or in small groups. Thereafter, the child continues independently under the observant eye of the teacher. These trays cover four learning areas, namely literacy, math, Activities of Everyday Life (AEL), and Knowing and Understanding Your World (KUW); a fifth category, sensorial equipment, is placed directly on the shelves (i.e. without trays due to bulkiness). Creativity does not always lend itself to the confines of a tray; therefore, there can be a few trays on the shelves and a special area for creative work.

AEL/ Activities of Everyday Life

(Called exercises in practical life in the Children's Houses)

This has been elaborated above in the section on the environment. An example of such an activity is a tray on dry pouring (ages 2.6 to 3); on the tray, there can be two small jugs: one empty and one quarter-filled with pebbles or rice. There are some items that do not fit on a tray. These are allocated a special area in the classroom.

Sensorial Activities

These allow the child to explore with all the senses.

Sensorial Montessori equipment targets the olfactory, gustatory, auditory, visual, chromatic, tactile, baric, thermic, and stereognostic senses. Teachers add to the sensorial equipment with imaginative sensory bins.

Knowing and Understanding Your World

In this learning area, the topics covered are zoology, biology/botany, and geography.

An example is a tray on air, water, and land (ages 2.6 to 6); there are three closed bottles: one filled halfway with soil, one filled halfway with water, the last one filled with air. The soil bottle has a brown sticker on the lid, water has a blue one, and air has a white one.

Creativity

The child gets opportunities to explore by following samples made by the teacher. Activities include but are not limited to painting, ripping and pasting, sticking, and other open-ended options. For example, a tray on creating a noisemaker will have the sample made by the teacher and the materials necessary for creating a new one.

Math

Besides Montessori equipment, many math activities can be organised on trays. One example is a tray on recognising quantities. On the tray, there can be buttons of different colours and number cards 1 to 10, with the numbers the same colour as the corresponding number of buttons (e.g. if number 3 is blue, there must be three blue buttons—this is the control of error).

Literacy

Several objects of Montessori equipment cover this learning area, yet many activities can be organised on trays. One example is a tray on beginning sounds. The tray can have small 3D objects with three-letter names, e.g. *cat*, *bag*, *hat*, etc. Cards with the beginning sound of each name should also be on the tray.

Montessori Equipment

This is one area in which Montessori education is leaps and bounds ahead of traditional schooling. Equipment covers the areas of sensorial, KUW, math, and literacy. Equipment is put

on shelves, according to the theme of the moment. Each item has different objectives. They lead to concentration, critical thinking, problem solving, and practice in the targeted skills.

Equipment is introduced systematically from day one as part of the Montessori work period. The teacher introduces an object to a child or a small group as soon as s/he thinks the child or group is ready for it.



P A R T I I

Follow The Child Like You Mean It: Implementation And Results

CHAPTER 3

'Follow The Child' and See How They Bloom

'Follow the child' is quite a simple maxim and believed far and wide; however, it was felt very deeply by Madame Montessori, who developed it as a meaningful doctrine and enshrined it at the heart of the Montessori Method. In the second chapter of *The 1946 London Lectures* titled 'Scientific Pedagogy', she states, 'Our study has its origins in the child. The method has been achieved by following the child and his psychology. . . . It is always based on our ability to interpret our observations of those phenomena which originate in the child himself' (ibid., p. 7).

The theoretical and practical application of these revelations have turned this simple maxim into a powerful pedagogical tool that all parents and teachers will do well to assimilate. We now look at some case studies, observations, and lesson plans (with implementation) to shed more light on this approach directly at the coalface. All these experiences are narrated by Ms Grace.

Lama (4.2 Years)

AN ART LESSON I OBSERVED AS PART OF MY TRAINING

Stage of Development: Montessori—conscious, absorbent mind/
social embryonic stage **Erikson:** initiative versus guilt

Learning Area: Creativity

THE STRUGGLE OF THE BOWL

The teacher was coming around, squirting paint on the worksheets of the students. Lama told the teacher that she wanted the paint to be squirted in a bowl instead. The teacher was not happy with her idea and stated that she did not like the fact that Lama always wanted to do things her own way; although the teacher said no, Lama continued by taking some bowls, handed a few out, and crossed her arms protectively over her worksheet and indicated where the teacher should squirt the paint. The teacher did not seem to have any option but to comply; then Lama started to paint and was quite pleased with herself. Her classmates, noticing the contest between Lama and the teacher and seeing how sad their friend looked, came up to her and gave her hug after hug with encouraging words. She sheepishly asked them if they liked her painting, and they were very supportive.

ANALYSIS

At her age, Lama has acquired many manipulative skills, allowing her greater independence. She is more than halfway on the plane of development during which her individual personality is being formed. The period in which the *horme*⁹ controlled her actions is now mostly behind her, and her actions are mostly based

9 The child's inner drive to develop, which Montessori (*The Absorbent Mind*) borrowed from Sir Percy Nunn.

on her will. Lama knew what she wanted; she was not in the wrong to communicate her desire. She needed to be given the freedom she required through encouragement, enhancement, and nurturing.

According to Lama's age, she has just moved into the 'initiative versus guilt'¹⁰ stage that takes place between the ages of 3 and 6 and adults have to take great care of the child's developmental needs in this fragile period. Based on her level of confidence and independence displayed, it seems that Lama has come out of the previous stage of 'autonomy versus shame/doubt'¹¹ (2–3 years) with a strong and independent manner.

Little Lama is our first case study, but an expanded version of this same observation will also be our last.

Girl in the Park (about 2 Years of Age)

FEARLESS IN SALMIYA

Stage of Development: Montessori—unconscious, absorbent mind/spiritual embryonic stage

Erikson: autonomy versus shame/doubt

I was sitting on a bench in a park in Salmiya, Kuwait, to relax for a while and noticed how a parent became overprotective when her daughter wanted to use the slide that was meant for bigger children. Whilst she carefully climbed the steps, the mother

10 This is the third of Erik Erikson's stages of development that cover the entire lifespan. In this stage, children learn to have confidence in their abilities; and if things do not go according to plan, they will likely be affected by a sense of guilt. Erikson was a psychoanalyst and a qualified Montessori teacher (<https://courses.lumenlearning.com/teachereducationx92x1/chapter/eriksons-stages-of-psychosocial-development/>).

11 This is Erikson's second stage, in which the two critical conquests of the child are independence and awareness of boundaries. If hampered during this stage, children can lose confidence in their own abilities (ibid).

grabbed her, put her on the ground, and scolded her for using this slide and she was summarily taken to the age-appropriate one. After a while, the mother stopped paying attention only to be startled when hearing her daughter gleefully clapping her hands as she came down the big slide. The mother was not impressed at all.

ANALYSIS

This little girl's greatest occupation is to live out all her natural urges of development. Her actions are controlled by the hormone, which compelled her to act out these unstoppable impulses whether adults understood what might be going on with her or not. No one can know what marvellous interplay of impulses and thoughts brought themselves to bear on that little girl's mind and soul, which were so powerful that she defied a dragon! Yet as she came down that slide, there was no fear for the repercussions because these were of no significance in comparison to the natural urge of development that was compelling her.

'Develop! Develop!'—that is Moses and the prophets. It was quite possible for the mom to allow the child to live out her desire and to protect her from injury. Regrettably, and probably due to ignorance, this parent did not give due importance to how her daughter's development would be best enhanced by giving her the freedom she had demanded. Had the little girl not found her own way to achieve her desire, she might have left the park that day unsure of her abilities. But she had overcome that crisis successfully, no thanks to Mom! I sometimes think about her. Where are you now, little girl? But wherever she is, may that indomitable spirit continue to triumph.

CHAPTER 4

Bayan The Indomitable

LESSON PLAN: Squeezing Water Out of Sponges with Tongs

Learning Area: Activities of Everyday Life (AEL)

Materials:

- A tray for all the materials
- Two small bowls: one halfway filled with water, with six small sponges (cube shaped) in it, whilst the other bowl is empty for transferring the squeezed sponges
- A pair of steel tongs and a cloth for wiping spills

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Direct Objective

To refine the use of tongs

Indirect Objectives

- To further develop the child's pincer grip by strengthening the hand and wrist
- To increase the child's quest for independence
- To enhance the child's need for order
- To further develop the ability to concentrate
- To develop social skills

Control of Error: None

Age Range: 3 to 4 years

Prerequisites

- Student knows how to clean up when spilling water.
- Student can transfer with a spoon.

Prepare the Materials as Follows

- Put the two bowls on a tray with the soaked sponges in one of the bowls and the empty bowl on the right-hand side.
- Put the tongs on the tray between the bowls.
- Put the cloth on the tray to the right of the empty bowl.
- All the above must be on a shelf /table accessible to the student and the shelf/table must be close to the worktable that will be used.

Differentiation

For bigger children, make the activity more challenging by using bigger tongs, one size bigger, and the size of the sponges would then remain the same. For children who have difficulty concentrating, reduce the number of sponges.

IMPLEMENTATION

Child's Name: Rayan

Child's Age: 3.2

Stage of Development: Montessori—conscious, absorbent mind/
social embryonic stage **Erikson:** initiative versus guilt

The morning of the activity, I noticed Rayan standing in front of the shelf looking at all the activities, still deciding what

she wanted to do. I approached her and asked if she would like to work with me on an activity, and she agreed with a smile. We moved towards the new activity, and I told her that this activity is ‘squeezing water out of sponges with tongs’. I then asked her to carry the tray to the table where she was sitting before she had gotten up as there was an empty chair next to that one where I could sit. As she took the tray off the shelf, the bowl with the sponges wobbled a little – causing her to stand still – waiting a few seconds for it to settle, and then continued walking (slowly and carefully) to the table and placed the tray on it. Rayan sat down on my right (non-dominant) side, took the cloth, dried the spot where a little water had spilled, and then put it back on the tray. I then moved the tray in the middle between us.

I explained to her that I was going to demonstrate how to use the tongs to squeeze out the water from the sponges and how to transfer the sponges to the empty bowl. I picked up the tongs with my left hand and took a look at it, moving my hand so I could see all parts of it. I showed which fingers I would be using by opening and closing the tongs with my thumb and my first two fingers. Using the tongs, I picked up one sponge and held it up over the bowl. I squeezed out the water with the tongs. I moved my hand over to the empty bowl and transferred the sponge there by slackening my grip. I continued this until all the sponges were squeezed and transferred.

I moved my hand with the tongs to the bowl that now had the sponges in it. Using the tongs, I picked up one sponge and then transferred it back to the other bowl. I repeated this until all the sponges were transferred and put the tongs on the tray between the bowls. I used both hands to pick up the sponge-less bowl, moved it over the other bowl, and poured the water over the sponges by tipping the bowl slowly with my hands. Then I put the bowl back in its place. A few drops had spilt, so I took the cloth to dab the

water up, and I put the cloth back on the tray. I then asked Rayan, who by now was bursting to have a turn, if she would like to try now. She agreed, and she then moved the tray right in front of her.

She proceeded to confidently pick up the tongs, with the prescribed fingers and in the correct manner, squeezed and opened it. Picking up the first sponge was a little difficult as another one was sticking to it. After struggling to pick one up for a few minutes, she used the closed tongs to separate the sponges. Then she picked one up with the tongs but could not squeeze out all the water as she had gripped only the one corner. She then dropped it back in the bowl. When she picked it up the second time, she had managed to grab it properly, squeezed out the water, and transferred the sponge to the empty bowl. The second sponge was also clinging to another.

She tried to hold the tongs using her thumb and first two fingers as I had demonstrated but quickly used her whole hand. She slowly tipped the tongs in the water but struggled to grab a sponge because it was also clinging to another one. As she tried to lift the sponge, the other one came with; then she dropped both. After doing it a second time, she took the sponge—she was trying to lift before—with her left hand and kept it above the bowl, opened the tongs with her right hand, put the sponge into the clams, and squeezed.

With a big smile, she lifted her catch and without looking at me, she asked me if she got it right. I answered in the affirmative. She then continued squeezing out the water with the tongs, moved her hand over to the other bowl, relaxed her grip, and the sponge dropped into the bowl. She dried her left hand with the cloth and dabbed up the few drops of water that she had spilled on the tray. Picking up the third sponge, she had absolutely no problem this time. She put the tongs into the water, picked up a sponge, squeezed out the water as she lifted it, and then completed the

transfer. This she did with a huge smile. She picked up, squeezed, and transferred the remaining three sponges without any problems.

With all the sponges now in the second bowl, she picked up a sponge with the tongs from that bowl again, moved her hand over to the other bowl, released her grip on the tongs, and the sponge dropped into the bowl. She transferred the rest of the sponges in exactly the same manner. She then put the tongs on the tray between the two bowls. She picked up the bowl without the sponges with both hands, moved it to the other bowl, and slowly poured the water over the sponges. She took the wet cloth and put it in the bucket kept for that purpose. Then she took a dry cloth from the dry cloth shelf and put it on the tray in the original cloth's place. She then stood up, pushed in her chair, picked up the tray, put it back on the shelf, and said, 'Thank you, Ms Grace.' She smiled and went off to find something else to do.

Evaluation

The direct objective was adequately met. At first, Rayan struggled with the activity due to the clinginess of the sponges. After she removed the first two sponges, she no longer struggled to pick up or squeeze the water from the remaining sponges or to transfer them to the other bowl.

She struggled to grip the sponges at first; but throughout the activity, she found ways to improve her handling of the tongs. When she picked up the first sponge, she used the prescribed fingers—thumb at the bottom and first two fingers on top—but afterwards, she used her whole hand, thumb at the bottom, and four fingers on top. Even though she did not use the prescribed fingers most of the time, the way she handled the tongs was a step towards this aim. She clearly refined her use of tongs, but more opportunities for practice need to be given.

The indirect objective regarding the pincer grip was also met because she still got the practice with those fingers needed for the pincer grip—just with all of them together. This should still be refined later. Throughout the activity, the muscles and dexterity of her dominant hand and wrist were put through excellent exercises.

Rayan's independence was developed during this activity as she carried the tray to (and from) the table, conducted the activity entirely on her own, and cleared the table afterwards. She was in complete control of her actions and results. Now that she has a more refined skill of how to use tongs, her independence as a growing child has been enhanced. The activity enhanced the child's need for order as it was extremely structured (ordered) and had to be followed step by step. By following all the steps, she could live out her need for order, which is typical of her age group.

The indirect objective of concentration was met because the child was clearly concentrating very hard throughout the activity as she was always on task. When things did not go according to her plan, she made adjustments (using her whole hand to grip the tongs, using the closed tongs to separate the sponges, and using her left hand to put a sponge in the tongs) in order to get the outcomes she wanted. This showed concentration and the application of problem-solving skills.

The indirect objective for social skills was met in a number of ways. By drying up the spilt drops of water, she was taking care of the immediate environment for herself and others. By replacing the wet cloth after she was done, she showed a caring attitude for the next child. Her refined skill of using tongs will help her in the future when she has to, for instance, use tongs to dish salads at a barbecue.

Reflection

The sponges were too many. Four sponges would have been enough for the size of the bowl. The sponges themselves should be a little smaller to fit easier between the clams, making the activity more manageable and more enjoyable for the child. The teacher should always link the child's physical abilities with the materials to be used, which is part of creating a favourable environment.

I missed a good opportunity to guide her better when she asked me if she got the activity right, and I said yes because I did not want to disturb her. However, she did not do it correctly, and her question was a missed opportunity for me to ask her if I could show her again how to work the tongs.

CHAPTER 5

Anthrah The Organised

LESSON PLAN: Creating Noisemakers

Learning Area: Creativity

Materials:

- Two small Pringles chip containers
- Sellotape (transparent)
- White school glue
- Colour paper (red, purple, blue, yellow, and orange)
- A small packet of rice
- A small packet of corn
- A small packet of split peas
- Three teaspoons
- A small plate
- Three bowls
- A pair of scissors
- A few paintbrushes
- A roll of gift paper ribbon
- Some stars

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Direct Objective

To create noisemakers

Indirect Objectives

- To encourage concentration
- To provide opportunities to develop problem-solving skills
- To increase independence by allowing students to choose their materials
- To enhance the need for order
- To develop physical skills by means of the handling of the materials
- To exercise creative-thinking skills
- To further develop social skills

Control of Error: None

Age Range: 3.10 to 6

Prerequisites

Child knows how to do the following:

- paint with a brush
- use a spoon
- discriminate between colours
- apply liquid glue

Prepare the Materials as Follows

- Cut out squares in different colours to cover the top and bottom of the containers.

- Cut out rectangular pieces, 9.5cm by 5cm in different colours, to cover the cylindrical part of the containers.
- Fill the bowls as follows: one with corn, one with rice, and one with split peas.
- Put a teaspoon in each bowl.
- Squirt glue on the small plate.
- Put paintbrushes on the plate to spread the glue with.
- Cut out 5 to 10 big stars and the same amount of small stars.
- Put the Sellotape in a dispenser.
- Cut ribbon into strips of 10cm and frill one end of each strip.
- Make three samples: one with corn, one with split peas, and one with rice.
- Lay out all items on the table, in no particular order.

Differentiation

For older children, use a different container as the container used here is sturdy and easy to work with. Toilet paper roll would do just fine as it would challenge them more. More complex decorations can also be encouraged with older children, such as using glitter glue. For younger children, simplify by reducing the variables.

IMPLEMENTATION

Child's Name: Anthrah

Age: 3.10

Stage of Development: Montessori—conscious, absorbent mind/
social embryonic stage

Erikson: initiative versus guilt

I invited Anthrah to come and join me at the table. She came, and we both sat on the pillows on the floor opposite each other. I showed her one noisemaker and asked her if she knew what it was, and she just said it looked nice. I picked it up and shook it, and it made a noise, and then she said it sounded like a baby toy. I told her that was a nice observation, and she smiled. I asked if she knew when it was used. She did not answer, and I explained that it is called a noisemaker and that it is used in many countries when people celebrated important events such as New Year's Day.

I shook the samples one by one, so the child could hear the different sounds. She did not say anything, so I prompted her by shaking the samples close to my ear and pretended to concentrate on the sounds. She still did not say anything, and I asked her if they all sounded the same. She said no, and I asked if she knew why they sounded different. She pointed to the bowls and said the different things made different sounds. I told her that was a great answer and explained that one noisemaker had corn in it and pointed to the corn. Another one had rice in it (I pointed to the rice bowl), and I explained that the last one had split peas in it (I pointed to the split peas bowl).

I picked up the corn one, shook it, and asked her if she could guess what was inside. She did not respond, so I told her. I put the noisemaker in the corn bowl. Then I shook the rice one and asked if she could guess what was inside. She then guessed correctly and said that she wanted to use the rice noisemaker because she liked the sound. I put it in the rice bowl. She took it and put it in front of her. I then shook the split peas one and asked her if she knew what was inside this one. She pointed to the split peas bowl, and I congratulated her on her answer and repeated the term *split peas*.

I then told her that I was going to make another one and afterwards, she would get an opportunity to make one. I started by taking a container and looking at the three bowls. I made my decision to use the split peas. I then spooned in eight heaps. I took a square piece of blue paper, folded it over the opening of the container, and used Sellotape to keep it in place. I did the same on the other (closed) side so that both sides looked the same. I took a rectangular piece of blue paper and put it in a vertical position in front of me on the table and put the container across the paper. I rolled the paper around the container and used Sellotape to keep it in place.

I took a cut-out star and picked up a paintbrush. I dipped it in the glue and spread it on the star, which I pasted on the noisemaker. I randomly glued on a few more stars. I took a ribbon, put glue on one end, and pasted it on the noisemaker in such a way that the ribbon hung like a frill. This I did with two more ribbons as well. I shook the noisemaker and smiled. Anthrah clapped her hands and asked if she could start. I told her she could and sat back to observe her attempt.

Anthrah stood up (and only sat down again when she had finished), looked at the paper, chose purple squares and a yellow rectangle, and put them in front of her. Then she looked at the stars and chose five big and five small ones, taking colours other than purple. She then put the stars on the table right in front of her, separating the big ones from the small ones. Then she looked at the ribbons and took three strips. Everything she had chosen was now in a row in front of her, leaving just enough space for her to work. After taking the ribbons, she took the rice without looking at the other bowls and started to scoop rice into the container. She spooned until almost all the rice was in the container. She could not get the last bit of the rice on the spoon and picked up the bowl and tipped it over the container, pouring the rest of the rice into it.

She spilt some and swept it with her right hand into the container that she was holding in her left hand.

She then picked up the squares and decided to change her papers from purple to yellow. She took both squares and put some glue on them with a paintbrush. She proceeded to pick up one and pasted it over the opening of the container, which she then put upside down to cover the other side in the same way. She took the rectangular piece of paper, which was yellow, and placed it horizontally in front of her and spread glue on it with her brush. She then picked up the container and rolled the paper around it and went to the bathroom, which was in view from where we were working. She washed her hands and came back to her work.

Upon return, she took one star, a big one; put some glue on it and pasted it on the now-covered container. She then looked at the stars in front of her and placed the big ones in a row and the small ones right behind them. Once she was done, she picked up all the big yellow stars and exchanged them for purple ones, and she did the same with the small ones. After that, she took another one, brushed some glue on it, and pasted it on the container. She continued doing this until all of them were done.

When all the stars were on, she picked up her new noisemaker, turning it in her hands as she looked at it; smiled and said that it was almost lovely. I was going to respond to that to enquire why she was saying that, but then I saw her picking up a piece of ribbon very quickly and then put it down again. Then she picked up the brush, put some glue on it, and spread the glue on the noisemaker in the form of a line on the long side of the container. She then pasted the ribbon on the line. She finally said, 'I am finished, and it is lovely.' She then started to dance as she shook it.

Evaluation

The direct objective was fully met because the child created a noisemaker successfully. The need for order was enhanced throughout the activity; hence, this indirect objective was successfully met. Anthrah first had to order the materials she wanted before she could start by first putting on one side what she wanted to use before starting to make her artwork. She even put the stars that she was using in rows. When pasting glue on the stars, she first selected the big stars and pasted them and then did the small ones. She also used the same amount of big and small stars. This is what is being referred to by the statement that 'order produces a natural pleasure' (*The Secret of Childhood*, p. 53).

The lesson provided ample opportunities to develop creative thinking; hence, this indirect objective was successfully met. Anthrah made a decision on how she wanted to cover the two sides of the container and used the glue and not the Sellotape as I did. She had her own pattern in mind when she put only one ribbon on whilst I put on three of them. She also pasted it on the long side of the container, showing creative thinking in response to the opportunities provided by the materials.

The indirect objective regarding independence was successfully met. The child took her own decisions regarding which materials she would use and how she would use them. The indirect objective of problem solving was also met successfully. As the child was not guided through the activity by the teacher, the entire activity was a set of problems and she had to figure out how to solve each one (which item to put in the container, how to cover and decorate, and whether to use glue and/or Sellotape). Furthermore, when Anthrah changed the colour of the paper, she realised that she also had to make a change in the colour of the stars.

The indirect objective of concentration was also met with success. Anthrah was concentrating very hard on what she was busy with and did not speak even once while she was working. Even after washing her hands, she came straight back and continued the activity, showing how focused she was. The indirect objective relating to social skills was met successfully. The child's social skills had been further developed by practising using a spoon. This skill can be used when eating or dishing food.

The indirect objective regarding the development of physical skills was also met. Anthrah developed her physical skills by handling the materials: rolling the container with the upwards-and-backwards or side-to-side movements of the hand whilst spreading the glue, cutting, pasting, Sellotaping, as well as shaking the noisemakers.

It can be argued that the creative aspect of the activity was extremely curtailed by the fact that the child was shown how to make the item. However, this would be a big mistake as creativity in small children should not be confused with creativity in adults. In children, it has a lot to do with learning as opposed to creation, as we see from Anthrah's various reactions.

Reflection

Anthrah could not answer most of the questions that I asked her in the beginning. This was a miscalculation on my part and particularly bad because she already has a shy disposition. I put more pressure on her by asking more questions. I was also too slow to adapt to this situation as I should have stopped with the questions in favour of a discussion with her at the end. More effort should have been put in creating a better atmosphere. For example, I could have based my questions on pictures or a short video clip that would have helped her answer the questions. The biggest

lesson I took from this situation is that I should have been more aware that given the age of the child, I should have been prepared to make rapid adaptations. I was very surprised that she did not use the Sellotape at all, but the glue worked quite fine.

CHAPTER 6

Jackson The Eager Beaver

LESSON PLAN: Counting from 1 to 15

Learning Area: Mathematics

Materials

- 15 small folded pieces of paper with the numbers 1–15 written on them in the same colours as the corresponding number of buttons/button
- 120 buttons, coloured as follows:
 - 1 blue one
 - 2 green ones
 - 3 purple ones
 - 4 red ones
 - 5 yellow ones
 - 6 orange ones
 - 7 yellow ones
 - 8 green ones
 - 9 blue ones
 - 10 purple ones
 - 11 yellow ones
 - 12 orange ones

- 13 red ones
- 14 pink ones and
- 15 purple ones
- A holder for the folded numbers
- Numerals (large) 1 to 15
- A container for the numerals
- A container for the buttons, big enough so that the buttons are flat and spread out
- 1 tray

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Direct Objective

To count the buttons from 1 to 15 and to place the correct number of buttons below the correct numeral.

Indirect Objectives

- To give the child practice in counting
- To recognise the numbers from 1 to 15
- To associate the correct quantity with the correct numeral
- To memorise the number, colour, and quantity required for that number
- To sequence numbers and quantities from 1 to 15
- To increase independence
- To enhance the child's need for order
- To develop concentration skills
- To further reinforce the recognition of colours
- To further develop the student's pincer grip by strengthening the hand and wrist

Control of Error: the colour schemes. The child should be able to work out if something is amiss if a button is not with the numeral of its colour.

Age Range: 3.6 to 5 years

Prerequisites

- The child has prior knowledge of numbers up to 20.
- The child has mastered the Seguin Board A with the beads. (This object teaches the child to count from 11 to 19 with quantities.)
- The child has mastered the Seguin Board A without the beads. (This object teaches the child to count from 11 to 19 and to recognise the numbers.)
- The child can identify and name colours.

Prepare the Materials as Follows

- Put the numerals in a holder.
- Put the buttons according to the required numbers and colours in their container.
- Write numbers in different colours according to the buttons, fold the papers, and place them in a holder.
- Place all the above on the tray.
- Ensure there is a large-enough working area for laying out the numerals from 1 to 15.
- Have a place on the floor or on a low table a short distance away from the working area, where the holder with the buttons will be stationed.

Differentiation

For older children, the numbering can go up to 20 and they can be expected to indicate odd and even numbers. For younger children, the numbers should be from 1 to 10.

IMPLEMENTATION

Child's Name: Jackson

Age: 4.2

Stage of Development: Montessori—conscious, absorbent mind/
social embryonic stage

Erikson: initiative versus guilt

I called Jackson to the table where the tray was, pointed to the tray, and said that this activity was counting buttons. I asked if he would like to do this activity with me. He smiled broadly and said with his normal affability, 'Of course, Ms Grace!' I then asked him to carry the tray to our work area on the floor, which I pointed out.

We both sat on the floor with the tray between us. He was sitting on my right side. Pointing out the buttons, I informed him that he was going to count buttons. He replied that he loved the colours of the buttons. I then asked him what his favourite colour was. He replied that he liked yellow most, then green, then blue, and then red in that order but that yellow was actually his favourite. He also said that he liked that the buttons had different shapes. Then I pointed to the holder with the numerals, stating that here we had numbers 1 to 15 and that later on I would love it if he could put them in order from 1 to 15. Then I pointed to the last holder, asking if he could see that the pieces of paper were folded. He called it the secret numbers. I opened one paper and showed him the number.

Before I could ask him what number it was, he said it was number 8 and that it was green. He opened another one and another one and saw that they had different colours. He then asked me if we could start now and before I could say anything, he took the holder with the numerals from the tray, threw out the numbers, turned all the numbers face up, and then laid them in a sequence from 1 to 15. As he arranged the numbers in order, he read them loudly. After emptying the holder, he gave it to me and asked me to put it back on the tray, which I did.

When he was done, I asked him to take the container with the buttons and place it on the table that was about three of his steps away from us. He did so. Then he said, 'Now we can start with the secret numbers.' I picked up one folded piece of paper and before unfolding it, I asked him to look at the number and the colour and to bring me that number of buttons in the colour he saw on the paper. With all smiles, he went to the buttons and counted four red ones by picking them up one by one with his left hand and putting them in his right hand. In the meantime, I had placed the 'secret number' face up on the tray.

After counting them, he came to the tray and counted them again by taking them one by one out of his hand and putting them on the tray. He then picked them all up with both hands and put them down on the floor close to the numbers. He then picked the buttons up one by one, counting them loudly, and placed them under the correct numeral. Then he came back to me for the next number.

I opened the piece of paper. He put his finger on his lips and said, 'Ssshhh.' He went to the buttons and took out the correct number and colour. Again, he picked them up one by one with the left hand and put them in his right. Again, he came to the tray and counted them on the tray. He scooped them up with both hands and put them close to the numbers, after which he picked

them up one by one, counting as he did and placing them under the correct numeral, which was number 8 and green.

Suddenly he told me that there were two numbers that had buttons. He then counted those without buttons and told me that there were thirteen numbers without buttons. After counting the sixth number, he asked me if he could open the secret numbers and I agreed. He opened the next number, looked at it, kissed the paper, went to the buttons container, and counted the buttons exactly as he did before. After he had counted and placed nine sets of buttons, he counted the numbers with the buttons again and told me that he had completed nine numbers. He counted those not done and told me that only six numbers did not have any buttons. He continued counting and placing the buttons until only three numbers were left. Then he told me that it was my turn again to open the secret numbers.

He explained that I had six turns; then he got six turns, and that was fair. He said that I could do the rest of them, and I agreed and thanked him for being fair. After he counted the last number, which was number 15, he told me that there were no more buttons left. I replied that he was correct because all the numbers had buttons now. He continued by asking me if he could tell me something and went right into it before I could answer. He said he would count how many numbers had the same colour. Then he said that we should start with the colour from number 1. He stated, 'We have two blue groups, two green groups, three purple groups, two red groups, two orange groups, three yellow groups, and only one pink group.' He clapped his hands and said we were done. Then he offered to tidy up the work area, and he put everything back properly and put the buttons container back on the tray.

Evaluation

The direct objective, counting buttons, was successfully met. Jackson correctly sequenced the numbers, read them aloud, and selected and counted the buttons and placed them under the correct numerals. The child even went as far as counting them according to groups of the same colour after all the numbers were done.

He got a lot of practice with counting, especially seeing that he counted the buttons twice each time. He also counted the numerals and the colour groups.

He clearly recognised the numbers from 1 to 15 as he sequenced them correctly and called them out loudly. He associated the correct quantity with the correct numeral very well as he did not make a single mistake. He was careful, though, as he counted the buttons twice. His memory received good exercise during this activity as he had to remember the number that he was shown as well as the colour that the number had been written in. The sequencing of the numbers and quantities from 1 to 15 did not present him with any difficulties, and this objective was successfully met as well.

The child showed independence as he was working completely on his own and added extensions to the activity, even coining an apt name for the folded numbers! He also never asked me for anything but instead gave me instructions. The child formed his own order, counting the buttons first in his hand, then counting them again on the tray, and then placing them under the correct numerals. He showed excellent concentration throughout the activity. He was never distracted, always on task, and enjoyed the entire activity.

Jackson also got the correctly coloured buttons for every piece of paper that was unfolded. His pincer grip was also exercised as

he picked the buttons up one by one with his right hand to place them under the correct numeral.

Reflection

The lesson went very well—too well, in fact. The child was very enthusiastic every step of the way, and he was also engaging by telling me what he observed and what he had done at a particular stage and what still needed to be done. He also took the liberty of asking if he could open the secret numbers; after opening the equal amount of secret numbers as I had done, he expressed that we shared an equal number of secret numbers and that I should continue opening the rest. This means he made additional calculations all on his own. I should have invited the child to continue on his own from the third secret number onwards as it was crystal clear to him what was expected.

I have to admit that even though the lesson was very satisfying and enjoyable, Jackson was the wrong choice. His knowledge stretched beyond the objectives, and he practically ran away with the lesson. This goes back to my preparation: I thought I was following the child but clearly did not assess him properly. I thought the colours would give him cause to ponder, but this did not happen. I have to learn from it. Even so, I had tremendous fun with him during that lesson.

The activity could be improved by making a sequencing pattern with the colours as well—for example, blue, green, purple, red, orange, yellow, and pink—and then repeat the colours in that order until number 15, instead of just having the colours randomly. The lesson can also be extended for other arithmetic questions such as ‘Which numbers have blue buttons? How many numbers have blue buttons? How much do you get if you add the blue and green ones?’

CHAPTER 7

Jackson Round 2

LESSON PLAN: Reading Sentences with Rhyming Words and Matching the Sentences with Picture Cards

Learning Area: Literacy

Materials

- Five pink strips of cards with sentences on them
- Five pictures (reflecting the sentences) pasted on pink cards
- Holder for picture cards
- Tray to place all of the above

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Direct Objective

To read sentences and match them with the correct pictures

Indirect Objectives

- To increase the child's quest for independence
- To enhance the child's need for order

- To further develop the ability to concentrate
- To refine the visual sense
- To increase the use of vocabulary

Control of Error

The sentences are self-explanatory as words in the sentences tell you what the picture should look like.

Age Range: 2.6 to 5

Prerequisites

- The child had practice building three-letter words.
- The child had practice with looking at pictures and matching them with the appropriate phrases.
- The child has knowledge that a sentence starts with a capital letter and ends with a full stop.
- The child had practice blending and reading three-letter words.
- The child had been introduced to most of the sight words in this exercise.

Prepare the Materials as Follows

- The sentences on the reading cards must be comprised of three-letter sight words: consonant, vowel, and consonant (CVC). Make the cards 20cm wide and 12cm long.
- The picture cards should be 12cm squares. Paste the pictures on the cards and place them in a holder.
- Put the reading cards and holder with the picture cards neatly on the tray.
- Clear a table for the working area.

- Situate another table a few feet from the working area and put the tray on it.

Differentiation

For children with English as an additional language, reduce the sentences to three.

For older children, use slightly longer sentences.

IMPLEMENTATION

Child's Name: Jackson

Age: 4.2

Stage of Development: Montessori—conscious, absorbent mind/
social embryonic stage

Erikson: initiative versus guilt

I invited Jackson to the second table, showed him the tray, and explained that this activity was called reading sentences with rhyming words and matching the sentences with picture cards. I asked him if he would like to do the activity with me, and he agreed enthusiastically. On my request, he carried the tray to the working area and placed it on the table. I sat down and asked him to sit next to me. When he sat down, I asked him to put the tray in the middle between us; he did so.

I asked him to take the picture cards from the holder and place them in front of him, which he did in silence. I then asked him to look at the first one and to tell me what he saw. He picked one up and replied that he saw a cat wearing a hat. On my request, he proceeded to place it on his left on the table. Without waiting for me, he started with the next one, picking it up and looking at it

for a few seconds. Then he said he saw a pig with a spade and the pig was digging. I then asked him to place the picture card below the previous one with a little space between them.

He again picked up the next one without my prompting and said that he saw a red bed. He placed it below the last one without waiting for me to tell him to. He continued independently and described the next picture as a hen and said that she was holding a pen. Then he placed it below the previous card. He described the fifth card as a bag and said there was a label on it and placed that picture below the last one. I told him another name for *label* is *tag* and asked him to repeat the word for me, which he did. He then said that there were five pictures below one another. I told him that he did a brilliant job and asked him if he was ready to start with the sentence cards, to which he answered in the affirmative.

I asked him to pick up a sentence card and to read it to me. Then he asked me if he could choose anyone from the pile, and I agreed. He picked all of them up and glanced at the pictures. He looked at the bottom picture and then at the sentence card that was on top. He pointed to the second word and sounded it out in silence. I only saw his lips moving. It was *bag*, and he placed the sentence card in front of him, facing up. He looked at the next picture, which was the one of the red bed. Then he looked at the next sentence card in his hand. Again, he pointed to the second word but realised that it did not correspond to the picture, and he put the sentence card back at the bottom of the pile in his hand.

As he found sentences that corresponded with the pictures, he put them on top of the pile in front of him. When he finished, the sentence cards were stacked in a pile, matching the picture cards from top to bottom. This took him about five minutes. Then he started to read the first sentence that was on top of his pile, pointing his finger at each word as he read. The sentence was 'The hat is on the cat.' First, he read *the* easily and after sounding

out the word *hat* quietly - I could just see his lips moving - he pronounced it aloud. He went on reading *is on* easily, but the second *the* he just could not make out. He tried to sound it, but it did not work. Then he asked me what the word was. I said *the* and pointed out to him that the first word was also *the* and that he had read it with ease before. He then replied that the second one was difficult because the first one had a capital letter.

I then reminded him that a sentence starts with a capital letter and that the second *the* is in the middle of the sentence and therefore did not have a capital letter. I further explained that a sentence ends with a full stop, and then I asked him to show me the full stop, and he pointed to it. He then sounded *cat* silently before pronouncing it. After that, he read the whole sentence once without any difficulty. Then he put the sentence card next to the first picture.

Next, he read the new sentence on top of his pile, 'The pig can dig.' He matched it with the correct picture. He only sounded out *pig* and *dig* quietly. The rest he read fluently. The next sentence was 'The bed is red', and he read it fluently and matched it with the correct picture. The next sentence he read was 'The hen has a pen.' He read fluently, and he matched that sentence with the picture as well.

The last sentence he read was 'The tag is on the bag.' He read the first *the* fine but had to sound *tag* first. Reading *is on* presented him with no difficulty, but he could not read the next *the*. He looked at the first sentence, pointed to the first *the* and then also to the capitalised *the* on the one he was then reading and said *the* and *the* as he pointed to them on each card. He ran his fingers over the words in the first sentence again until he got to the second *the* and did the same on the sentence that he was now reading but again could not get to the word. He looked at them for a while, tried to sound it again, but could not get to the word. Then he asked

me again if I could help him with this word and said that he did not understand why he did not know this word, that it looked so easy, and that it had only three letters. I told him the word, and he continued reading the sentence and then repeated the whole sentence. I asked him to repeat the first sentence, and he read it fluently. I pointed again to the last sentence and asked him to read it again, and then he read the complete sentence fluently. I thanked him for working with me and asked him if he wanted to do it again, but he declined. I then asked him to tidy up by placing everything back on the tray.

Evaluation

The direct objective was fully met, and the student did very well. His quest for independence was enhanced as the activity allowed him to take initiative as he did not always wait for instructions but picked up what needed to be done and proceeded on his own. He used the activity to enhance his need for order as he first ordered the picture cards in line with the sentence cards before matching them. The child's concentration was clearly developed as all his attention was on the sentence cards as he sounded the words. His visual sense was refined as he used his eyes to do the matching, and he had to make visual comparisons in order to do so. His vocabulary was enlarged as he learnt the new word *tag* and that *tag* and *label* are synonyms.

Reflection

I was taken by surprise when Jackson created his own order by piling the sentence cards in order and when he thrived on taking his own initiative. I did not create these opportunities consciously,

which made me realise that in future lessons I should make a point of creating opportunities where the child could explore her/his independence and sense of order. This is particularly important as many other children would not take independent initiative as strongly as Jackson did. By first sounding the words, it was clear that he understood words 'as a composite of sounds' (*The Discovery of the Child*, p. 230). I had two sentences in which *the* was used twice, capitalised and non-capitalised. If I varied its usage and had one sentence with *the* only in the middle of the sentence, the child may have been able to read it without assistance.

I could have used more rhyming words that were new to him. There was only one word that was new to him, namely *tag*. In this sense, I missed an opportunity to expand his vocabulary more. I could have added more difficult words such as *ram* and *yam*. The child would most probably have identified a ram just as a sheep, and *yam* is not a word that is used often in children's literature.

CHAPTER 8

Fahed The Dinosaur Hunter

LESSON PLAN: Hunting for Dinosaur Eggs and Nests

Learning Area: Knowing and Understanding Your World
Materials

- Sensory bin¹² 1.5m by 0.6m with height about 0.3m
- Sand to fill up about three quarters of the bin
- 3 extra-large potatoes
- 3 rugby balls (small ones that can be covered by the sand)
- 1 ostrich eggshell / or something similar
- A small garden spade for digging
- One ruler, 30cm long
- A firm low table that can support the bin, with extra space next to the bin (use two or three tables together, if necessary)

12 Sensory bins are a common part of Montessori educational aids. These are special theme-based large containers for holding a connected set of materials in a specific environment to exercise targeted sensorial skills.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Direct Objectives

- To compare the different ways dinosaurs laid their eggs
- To explore the different shapes of dinosaur eggs

Indirect Objectives

- To reinforce names of some geometric shapes
- To learn new words
- To enhance the child's quest for independence
- To enhance the child's stereognostic and visual senses by associating the shapes found with geometric solids
- To create firsthand experience through discovery
- Introduction to prehistory

Control of Error

None

Age range: 2.10–4 years

Prerequisites

- Prior knowledge of geometric shapes
- Prior knowledge of dinosaurs
- Mastery in transferring with a spoon and a ladle so the child can now progress to using a spade

Prepare the Materials as Follows

- Put the sensory bin on the table in a quiet area.
- Fill the bin three quarters with sand and then wet the sand with water.

- Hide the potatoes close to one another in the sand. Also, do the same with the rugby balls.
- Place the ostrich egg in the wet sand, leaving a part of it exposed.
- Put the spade on top of the sand.
- Do not place the lid on the bin to prick the child's interest.
- Do not place the ruler inside the bin but keep it with you away from the bin.

Differentiation

For older children, I would go more into how we got to know about this information and bring in what kind of dinosaurs laid each type of egg. I would also add more new vocabulary such as *fossils*, *excavation*, and *palaeontologist*. I would also allow the child to make the discoveries on her/his own in the sensory bin and then enter a discussion with her/him about the discoveries. Prompting the child to come up with her/his own questions and observations would develop higher-order thinking skills.

IMPLEMENTATION

Name of Child: Fahed

Age: 2.11

Stage of Development: Montessori—unconscious, absorbent mind/spiritual embryonic stage

Erikson: autonomy versus shame/doubt

I asked Fahed if he enjoyed learning about dinosaurs. His face lit up as he said he did. I told him that there were some interesting surprises in the sensory bin that I thought he would like, and I asked him if he would like to work with me and discover these

surprises. He agreed readily, and I asked him to stand next to me by the long side of the rectangular sensorial bin. Before I could tell him about the activity, he pointed to the egg that was sticking out of the sand and asked if he could dig it out; I allowed him. He did not use the spade but his hands instead, and he gently moved the sand away from the egg. For a moment, he was just quiet, moving the sand away from the egg. He held the egg in his left hand and wiped off the sand from it with his other hand and said that the egg was very big and he had never seen such a big egg before. He looked at it for a little longer and said that it could definitely not be a chicken that laid that egg because he knew their eggs are much smaller and that a person can eat chicken eggs. I agreed with him and stated that he was right; it was not an egg that came from a chicken.

I then told him that our lesson was about dinosaur nests and what their eggs looked like and that in this activity we must use our imagination. I made the point that all dinosaurs laid eggs. He replied that he did not understand how dinosaurs that were so big would lay eggs, and he asked why they did not come from their mommies' tummies like he did. I exclaimed that his question was brilliant and then asked him if he remembered a lesson from before where we discussed that all dinosaurs were reptiles, and I enquired whether he remembered where reptile babies come from. 'Eggs!' he said excitedly. I asked him to look at the shape of the egg and tell me what shape he thought it was. He answered correctly that it was an ovoid. I asked him to place the egg next to the bin on the table.

Next, I asked him if he wanted to dig some more and told him that he could use the spade if he liked. He picked up the spade and gently poked the wet sand with it. Within a few minutes, he placed the spade outside the bin and started to use his bare hands. He moved slowly through the sand until he felt something. He

lifted out all three potatoes one by one and put them on the table next to the egg, counting them as he placed them down, and asked me why there were potatoes. I confirmed that they were potatoes and told him some dinosaurs laid eggs that were shaped like big potatoes and that what he had found was another nest. He then said that it was an egg but it did not look like an egg. Then I asked him to look for some more eggs in the bin.

He started again, ignoring the spade and whilst he was digging, he asked me if there were only two shapes. I encouraged him to find out. Then he said that he was feeling something. He moved the sand away and as he started to get a vision of the rugby balls, he said very excitedly that they were rugby balls. He then asked me if some of the dinosaur eggs were also shaped like this (meaning the balls), and I answered in the affirmative. I asked him if he could tell me what shape the rugby balls were, and he answered correctly that the shape was an ellipsoid. He wiped off some sand from them with his hands and placed them in a row next to the potatoes, counted them, and stated that we had one big egg, three big potatoes, and three small rugby balls.

He asked if the egg was a real dinosaur egg and why we only had one big egg. I explained that the real dinosaur eggs that had been found were placed in museums so anyone could go and see them and that I used this egg to demonstrate one shape of dinosaur eggs. I also explained that this egg was in actual fact the egg of an ostrich and that I could only find this one. He nodded. I then asked him if he remembered where he found the potatoes, and he replied under the ground and picked up the rugby balls, stating that he found them under the ground as well. I then said all these eggs he had found were in different kinds of dinosaur nests: the potato-shaped eggs were in one nest, the ellipsoid-shaped eggs were in one, and the ovoid-shaped egg was in another nest. I told him that the potatoes and the rugby balls were actually in burrows

and that most dinosaurs laid their eggs in burrows. I asked him if he knew what a burrow was, and he replied that he thinks that it must be under the ground.

I praised him for his answer and explained further that they are holes or tunnels made in the ground. I then clarified that some dinosaurs also laid their eggs not as deep in the ground and that these eggs could still be seen sticking out a little. He then pointed to the ostrich egg, asking if they were like this one as it was not completely covered by the sand.

I agreed and then asked him if he enjoyed the lesson, and he said yes because he liked the fact that not all the dinosaurs' eggs looked the same. He then started to place all the 'eggs' the way they were at the beginning of the activity.

Evaluation

The lesson went well as all the objectives had been met. The child could name the shapes of the eggs when I asked him; thus, some names of geometric shapes were reinforced. At the same time, the child's stereognostic and visual senses were enhanced by digging and the handling of the eggs. The new vocabulary term *burrows* was introduced, and he developed a deeper understanding of the term from his firsthand experience of having dug up the eggs, making his own discoveries. Fahed brought out his quest for order by placing all those that looked the same in one row. He even questioned why there was only one ovoid egg. Furthermore, his quest for independence was enhanced as he started talking about what he saw even before I could say anything. Although there was a spade available, he used his own way of finding the nests, not minding getting dirty in the process.

It was an unexpected bonus to see counting being reinforced as the child made groups and started to count each shape. He also noticed that although they were all eggs, they were not the same.

It was also satisfying when Fahed explained in his own words what he thought a burrow was and how he figured this out through his own experience of digging out the eggs. Although there was a spade available for the digging, he used his hands, which was a demonstration of what Montessori meant by the child needing simplicity: 'He will readily undertake very simple actions which have an immediate end or which permit him to use some special effort' (*The Discovery of the Child*, p. 74).

Reflection

He found the sensory bin to be very exciting and sort of got carried away. It would have been more enriching had I slowed him down with conversation to test and also add to his dinosaur knowledge. I have not yet met a small child who was not crazy about dinosaurs; therefore, he would have enjoyed such an approach. Especially in the beginning, conversation would have allowed me to establish the scope of his prior knowledge; this would have given me a solid baseline from which to venture and would also have broadened the context of my presentation, which I think would have been a valuable addition. Next time I do this same lesson, I will make sure to bring out knowledge on nests per se more extensively. The focus has been more on the eggs than on the nests, and the relationship between the two was not established strongly enough.

The approach used in this activity made the lesson one of self-discovery, and the child also had to use his imagination by pretending that the samples were dinosaur eggs.

Although the child was happy with his discoveries, I feel that I could have explained the part of the burrows straight after the child made his first discovery instead of at the end of the activity, so he could better associate the digging with the burrows.

CHAPTER 9

Ishrah The Thinker

**LESSON PLAN: To Listen to the First-Letter Sound
and Associate It with the Appropriate Picture**

Learning Area: Literacy

Materials

- Pictures of three-letter words: *can*, *cot*, *pot*, *pen*, *ram*, and *yam*
- Holder for the pictures
- Tray

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Direct Objective

- To identify pictures that start with the same first-letter sounds as demonstrated by the teacher
- To reinforce first-letter sounds

Indirect objectives

- To enhance the sensitive period for language
- To enhance the sensitive period for order
- To refine the visual and auditory senses
- To further develop concentration
- To bring in new vocabulary

Control of Error

As the pictures are all clarified to the student at the outset, s/he should be able to figure out the sounds when associating them with the pictures.

Age Range: 3 to 4

Prerequisites

- The child can describe pictures in books or individual pictures.
- The child has participated in literacy games that focus on beginning sounds, such as I Spy.

Prepare the Materials as Follows

- Laminate pictures of a can, cot, pot, pen, ram, and yam (picture size about 6cm²).
- Place pictures in the holder.
- Place the holder with the pictures on a tray.
- Arrange a separate table to later place cards on.
- Use a work table.

Differentiation

For older children, add another level to the activity, by marking four cards with the letters of the first sounds (*c*, *p*, *r*, and *y*). The added task would be to place the associated pictures next to the respective letters.

Implementation

Child's Name: Ishrah

Age: 3.4

Stage of Development: Montessori—conscious, absorbent mind/
social embryonic stage

Erikson: initiative versus guilt

I invited Ishrah to the shelf and asked her if she was interested in doing a fun activity with me, in which she would work with sounds. When she agreed, I showed her the tray on the shelf and told her that this activity was called listening to the first-letter sound. I asked her to carry the tray to the table where we were going to work. I invited her to sit with me, pointing to the chair on my non-dominant side. I informed her that there were six pictures in the holder and asked her to take one, and she took the top picture. Then I asked her to tell me what she saw in the picture. She answered that it was a cot for a baby. I confirmed her answer and asked her to say *cot*.

When she was done, I asked her to place the picture face down on the tray. Then she took the next picture without prompting, said it was a pen, and placed it face down on the previous one. She followed the same procedure for the next one, which was the can. She told me that she was not allowed to drink the soda that comes in cans as her mom told her that it is not good for her teeth.

I replied that her mom is teaching her very good things. She took out the next picture from the holder and said that it was a kitchen pot. I told her she was right but that we would only say *pot* today. She showed her agreement with a smile. Then she opened yam and said that she did not know what that was. I told her that it was called a yam and explained that it is like a potato but sweet. She replied that she loved sweet things because they are nice. The last one was the ram. She described it as 'a sheep'. I then asked her if she could see the sheep's horns, and she replied that she could. I continued that when a sheep has horns, it is a male sheep and we call it a ram. I asked her to repeat the word *ram*, which she did.

When all the pictures were sorted, I asked her to pick up the pictures again and come with me to the second table. I then asked her to place them randomly, face up on the table. This she did. Then we walked back to the work table and sat down. I then told her that for the next part of the activity she would have to listen very carefully to the sound that I was going to say and that each time she would have to find the picture/s that begins with that sound and show it/them to me.

I asked her to get ready and said the first sound: *c* (*k*). She repeated the sound *k*, stood up, and continued repeating *k* as she walked across to the pictures. Whilst looking at the pictures, she was quiet; as she picked up the two pictures, she said *cot* and then *can*. She brought the pictures to me, and they were the correct ones. I thanked her and asked her to place them next to each other on the table where I was sitting.

Next I said the sound *p*. Again she repeated it continuously as she walked across to the other table. She was quiet again whilst looking at the pictures and picked two up, vocalising *pot* and *pen*. She brought them to me. I praised her. She was very excited and placed them on the table next to the previous pictures. She asked for the next one. I said *y*, and she repeated the strategy that she

had created for herself. She brought the correct picture to me, and I congratulated her. She placed it on the table next to the others.

The last one I said was *r*. Then she replied, 'I know the ram because it has horns.' She walked over to the table, this time without repeating the sound. She picked up the picture and said *ram*, showed it to me, and placed that one on the table as well. When all the pictures were done, the child independently started to name the pictures again. I decided to be quiet and see what she was about to do. Ishrah piled up the pictures and placed them on the tray. Then she picked up *cot* and *can*, named them as she picked them up, and placed them next to each other on the table. Then she picked up *pot* and *pen*, named them as she picked them up, and placed them next to each other underneath the *cot* and *can* pictures.

Then she looked at the last two pictures and then looked at me. She looked back at the pictures and then looked at me again. I asked her if anything was the matter, but she just shook her head. She picked up and named *ram* and placed it at the bottom of one of her piles. Then she picked up the last picture, which was *yam*. She named it and placed it below *ram*. Then she looked at me and said that *ram* did not have a partner and *yam* also did not have a partner. I asked her if she thought it would have been better if they had partners, and she agreed. I promised to add partners for them. I then asked her if she wanted to repeat the activity, but she respectfully declined.

Evaluation

The lesson was successful as the child managed to associate all the pictures with the first-letter sounds that she heard, and she repeated all the initial sounds. Therefore, the direct objectives were met. The indirect objective, enhancing the sensitive period

for language, was also met as the entire activity assisted the development of language. The refinement of visual and auditory senses was also met as the child heard the sound of the letter, repeated it, and could interpret each sound, associating each with the correct picture, thereby using both her ears and eyes in coordination. As only the first-letter sounds were used, the child could learn to distinguish the first letter from the rest of the word, thereby refining her listening skills. Ishrah further developed her concentration by having to remember the sound, walk over to the other table, and get the correct picture without assistance. She never asked me to repeat any sound. The child also learnt new words, namely *ram* and *yam*; so new vocabulary was introduced. The child's need for order was enhanced as she partnered those with the same first-letter sound/s and lamented the fact that there were two that did not have partners. This distinction was part of the order that she imposed.

Reflection

It worked well to have this activity as an interactive game. The constant praise nurtured positive feelings; however, in retrospect, I feel that I overdid it with the praise. The Montessori Method aims to motivate the child to work in order to make achievements to satisfy her/his inner desire for constructive work as opposed to working for the teacher's praise (which is a reward). As stated earlier, rewards (praise in this case) should be used sparingly as a tool to indicate that the child is on the right track. Instead of always praising, I could have reaffirmed the pictures she brought to me by naming them, repeating their initial sounds, and then asking her if I was correct.

The child enjoyed the materials as they were appealing and kept to a minimum; they enhanced and captivated her eagerness

to participate throughout. Most of the pictures were also things that were familiar to her with the exception of the ram and the yam, which I included to build on her vocabulary. As Montessori (*The Discovery of the Child*, p. 230) stated, the first step in reading is to read the names of known objects. This was what I tried to do in this activity, adapted as described above.

The instructions during this activity were kept simple, and the child did not ask me to repeat any sound; instead, she repeated some herself after I verbalised them.

In retrospect, it would have been better to have been consistent with my choice of the three-letter phonetic words, meaning that *ram* and *yam* should also have had beginning sound partners. This clearly disturbed Ishrah's sense for order.

CHAPTER 10

Learning With All Fours

LESSON PLAN: Tactile Foot and Hand Activity

Learning Area: Knowing and Understanding Your World

Materials:

- Strips of different materials, all 1.5m by 20cm
 1. Sandpaper (not too rough so as not to hurt the feet)
 2. Artificial grass
 3. Real grass
 4. Cork
 5. Bubble wrap
 - Swatches of each material, 10cm by 10cm
 - The Montessori Mystery Box
 - Wooden boards 1.52m by 22cm
 - Wooden strips, 1.52m by 2cm (2); 18cm by 2cm (2)

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Direct Objectives

- Identify different kinds of textures by touch.
- Compare touching with the feet to touching with the hands.
- Refine the stereognostic sense.

Indirect Objectives

- Development of the child's concentration
- Coordination of movement
- Enhancement of social skills as students have to wait patiently for their turn

Control of Error

The child will be able to see afterwards whether s/he correctly identified the material s/he was walking on.

Age Range: 3–4 years

Prerequisites

Previous tactile experience using the touch boards, touch tablets, Baric tablets, and sandpaper numbers. Furthermore, they should have experience in using the Montessori Mystery Box.

Prepare the Materials as Follows

- All the strips and wooden boards can be purchased from a hardware store and the grass from a nursery.

- Use a solid wooden board for each strip. Except for the grass, glue the strips on the boards so that there is a margin of 2cm all around. Raise the margins of the grass board (for watering) by gluing 2cm wooden pieces all around it. Put the grass strip on the board. Do not glue it. Have spare strips available in case any get worn out and need to be replaced.
- Put the swatches in the Montessori Mystery Box.

Step-by-Step Guidelines

- Lay out the five different strips next to each other on the floor, 40cm apart.
- Put the mystery box with the swatches in it in front of the first strip.
- Each child will have an opportunity to do the activity individually.

Introduction

- Invite the children to the area where the strips are.
- Explain the name of the activity.
- Give a demonstration as follows:

Process

1. Point out all the strips one by one, naming each material.
2. Walk to the mystery box, take out the swatches, then show the five swatches, and associate each one with the correct strip.
3. Go back to the first strip.
4. Walk slowly across the first strip.

5. Put one hand in the mystery box and search for the correct swatch (without looking).
6. Take out a wrong one, look at it, hold it up for the students to see, and then put it back.
7. Repeat step 5. This time, take out the correct swatch.
8. Put the swatch on the strip.
9. Push the box to the next strip.
10. Repeat until the end of the activity.
11. After you have tested all five strips with your feet, pick up all the swatches and put them back into the mystery box, which should be placed in front of the first strip again.

Differentiation

For older children, add more textures to the activity. For younger children, use less.

Implementation

The first child went directly to the mystery box, put his hands in, and felt all the swatches, saying nothing. Then he quickly walked across all the strips and ‘left’. The second child walked across the first strip (sandpaper) very quickly and chose the correct swatch. When walking on the grass strip, he chose the correct swatch and said loudly, ‘Grass.’

When he had found the correct swatch, he smiled and put it on the grass strip. The third strip was the fake grass. As he walked on it, he indicated that this did not feel the same as the grass. He went back to the grass to feel it with his feet and then back again to the artificial grass, rubbing his feet on it. Then he walked quickly to the mystery box and took out the correct swatch.

The fourth strip was the cork. He did the same thing with his feet, stating, 'This wood is a little soft. It's not hard like wood. What do we call this? Is it also wood?' I explained what we call it and what it was. Again, he chose the correct swatch. When he walked on the bubble wrap (the fifth and last strip), he enjoyed popping the bubbles with his big toe and got a thrill every time a bubble popped. He again chose the correct swatch. He repeated the activity three more times. This time, he got more enjoyment from the bubble wrap by trying to get more bubbles popped by twisting on his heels. He did not make any comment about the sandpaper, except for naming it and calling it rough.

The third child walked very slowly on the sandpaper and chose the correct swatch from the mystery box. She enjoyed the grass strip because she did not just walk over it but also sat down after the third step, touching it with her hands. She then stood up and completed the walk, choosing the correct swatch. She went over the artificial grass strip quickly and from the mystery box, she took out the correct swatch. After walking across the cork strip, she went towards the mystery box but walked back again. Then she crossed the strip again and chose the correct swatch. With the bubble wrap, she first walked very slowly as if she did not want to burst the bubbles. Then halfway through, she just went down on her knees and started to burst them with her fingers. She chose the correct swatch. She did not talk whilst she was busy. It was only when she was done that she asked me what the cork was, and I explained it to her.

The fourth child started with the bubble wrap. He tried to burst as many bubbles as he could with his feet before finally going to the mystery box and picking out the correct swatch. He first touched the cork with his hands for a while before he stepped onto this strip. He walked across the artificial grass strip quickly and chose the correct swatch. On the grass, he stretched his toes as he

walked across, saying that he loved the feeling of the grass between his toes. Again he chose the correct swatch. He first touched the sandpaper with his hands, then walked over to the touch tablets on the shelves, chose one of them, and brought it to the strip, saying that the tablet was rougher than the sandpaper. He went back and forth until he found the tablet that had the same roughness of the strip. He walked with it to the mystery box, took out the last swatch and placed it on the strip with the touch tablet.

Evaluation

On the whole, judging by the joy of almost all the students and the questions they asked, the activity was a huge success. (The first student was clearly not ready or in the mood for it.) By choosing the correct swatches every time, both direct objectives were successfully met with respect to students two to four (hereinafter called the core group). By exploring the textures with their feet first and then comparing their experiences with what they touched with their hands without looking, they synchronised their sense of touch by hands and feet through the medium of their brains. This activity proved excellent for enhancing the stereognostic sense. Students three and four were not as tuned in to the sense of touch by their feet as student number two was and had to affirm their feet-based stimuli with their hands and fingers first; but in the end, they also got the point.

Comparing what they touched with their feet with what they touched with their hands worked very well to teach them the thinking skill of comparison. Student number four took the learning process to a new dimension when he fetched the touch tablets from the shelf and compared those with the swatches as well. The curiosity of the core group was clearly piqued as they asked many questions about some of the materials, especially the

cork, which was new to them. The questions and answers not only helped them to identify the names of the materials but also deepened their knowledge thereof.

The manner in which the core group explored the textures was much more than simply learning about them; each texture was brought into a practical, sensuous relationship with their bodies through their feet and hands, thereby promoting their physical development (note student four's fun with the grass and his statement that he loved the feeling of the grass).

The indirect objectives were firmly met. The children were forced to concentrate as the various parts of the activity were impossible without concentration. Furthermore, there was a lot of movement in the activity and the children had to coordinate their various movements, for example, transitioning from walking to feeling the swatches and bending to put them on the strips. In addition, some children added their own deviations, such as child number three who sat down at some point.

The activity was conceived as an exercise of gross motor skills; however, when children started to burst the bubbles with their fingers, they added a fine motor skill component. The activity has clearly satisfied one of the main aims of sensorial education, namely having the children discriminate between different types of stimuli.

With all that has been stated before, the activity had been enriched by the students beyond what I could have imagined.

The children created their own learning experiences with the environment provided by the teacher. Some used their hands, some asked questions, and some verbalised names of the materials; in the end, they have grown much more through the activity than would have been the case if the teacher had controlled the learning process more.

Reflection

This activity had many drawbacks, yet it was very rewarding from a pedagogical point of view. The wooden boards used were not user-friendly. They were very bulky and heavy, taking up a lot of space. They could not be moved by the children. Not being able to involve the children in the complete setup of the lesson materials was losing a great opportunity to help them make a connection with the activity. This could have helped child number one especially. Nonetheless, the results obtained by this activity still made it very worthwhile.

A user-friendly substitute for the wooden boards should be worked on: something light yet hard that can be rolled up and stored away. The children can then be given an opportunity to explore the materials as they help with the setup. Given that child number one did not get or enjoy the activity, there was clearly a mistake in the planning that needs to be addressed. This lesson can be followed up with a further stage that can involve exploring the contexts in which these materials are useful, for example, playing on the grass in the park and using sandpaper to make wood smooth.

CHAPTER 11

Lama: The Expanded Version

Event Sample¹³

Child's Name: Lama (Remember her?)

Stage of Development: Montessori—conscious, absorbent mind/
social embryonic stage

Erikson: initiative versus guilt

Aim of Observation

To establish the level of Lama's expressive language skills as she verbalises her needs in the classroom environment and when socialising with others as compared to the norm for a child between 4 and 5 years of age.

Starting Time: 8 a.m.

End time: 11.30 a.m.

13 The event sample method is an observational technique used with children. It observes a very specific behaviour over a period of a school day (or most of it). This technique is very effective because it focuses only on the targeted behaviour, and it does so over a long-enough time to record useful data for drawing solid conclusions.

No. of Children in Class: 11

No. and Role of Adults: 4 (1 teacher, an assistant, a nanny, and me)

Setting: Montessori Nursery

Immediate Context: In the classroom and in the play area

DETAILED RECORD

Event # and Time	Antecedent	Behaviour	Consequence
1 8.00 a.m.	Children and adults are all sitting on chairs around a square carpet. The teacher explains that I will be spending a few hours with them.	Lama responds, 'Stay the whole day, Ms Grace.'	Lama gets up and hugs me.
2 8.02	The teacher starts with a good morning song, as part of which each child's name is called. Then, they have to choose a friend and dance in the square. It is now Lama's turn.	Lama: 'I want to dance with Mc and M, please, miss.'	The teacher says no, and Lama chooses Mc to dance with and then sits down.

<p>3 8.09</p>	<p>Teacher continues to the calendar and weather chart.</p>	<p>Lama interrupts and asks if she can say something, and the teacher agrees. She then tells the teacher, 'Ms Grace is a visitor. Can we sing for her too? Can she also dance?' The teacher sings for me too. Lama says, 'Ms Grace, choose Ms C.'</p>	<p>The teacher, Ms C, agrees. Lama smiles and claps her hands as I am dancing with Ms C, and all the children join her.</p>
<p>4 8.12</p>	<p>Lama, now sitting, is looking at the teacher who asks what day it is today.</p>	<p>Lama responds, 'Today is Tuesday, yesterday was Monday, and tomorrow will be Wednesday!'</p>	<p>The teacher thanks Lama for her reply.</p>
<p>5 8.15</p>	<p>Lama gets up from her chair and goes to the teacher, who is now sitting on the floor. The teacher takes out a basket with a lot of dinosaurs and asks each child to take one dinosaur that they like.</p>	<p>Lama takes a T-Rex and says, 'Ms Grace, do you know what this is? It is called a T-Rex, and they ate other dinosaurs. Ms C told us that his tail was also very strong. There was a meteor that came with a big explosion, and now they are extinct.'</p>	

<p>6 8.40</p>	<p>Lama places the tray that she was working with back on the shelf and chooses a tray with new work. (eggs with dots on for counting, and egg holders with numbers written inside them). Teacher moves around the room.</p>	<p>Lama: ‘Miss, can you sit here next to me, please?’ The teacher complies. Lama gives the teacher an egg and says, ‘You count that one. Then I will count one too. Did you know that I like numbers?’</p>	<p>The teacher just replies by saying, ‘Really?’ No further discussion takes place other than the counting.</p>
<p>7 8.50</p>	<p>Lama busies herself with a scooping activity. After everything is scooped out, she now stirs the empty little bowl with the spoon.</p>	<p>Lama is talking to D (4.3 years of age), another student sitting next to her. ‘I am making cupcakes. Would you like one?’ D is game.</p>	<p>Lama scoops out one and gives it to D. D pretends to eat it, saying that it is delicious.</p>
<p>8 9.00</p>	<p>Lama is still with the same activity.</p>	<p>Lama is still stirring. She says, ‘I am now busy making soup.’ Lama gives D some soup, saying she must taste. D says, ‘This is also delicious.’</p>	
<p>9 9.21</p>	<p>Lama is standing next to D, who is busy with the puzzle of the life cycle of a frog.</p>	<p>D is looking around. Puzzle pieces are spread out in front of her. Lama is just watching D. Lama looks at me and says, ‘I want to work with the frog puzzle.’</p>	<p>I suggest that she takes something else whilst D is busy with it.</p>

<p>10 9.25</p>	<p>Lama takes another puzzle to work with: the horse puzzle.</p>	<p>The teacher asks Lama if she can remember the parts of the horse. Lama picks up a piece and says <i>torso</i> and places it in the correct space. Then I hear her ask, 'Mane?' The rest I could not hear.</p>	
<p>11 9.40</p>	<p>D is still busy with the puzzle. Lama tells me again that she wants to use it.</p>	<p>Lama is now standing next to D. Lama asks D, 'Do you know the different stages of the frog?' D just nods.</p>	<p>They complete the puzzle together.</p>
<p>12 9.45</p>	<p>D gets up and places the puzzle back on the shelf. Teacher says it's time to tidy up and starts singing the tidy-up song.</p>	<p>Lama says, 'It is playtime.'</p>	<p>Lama and the other children tidy up.</p>
<p>13 10.00</p>	<p>Children line up and walk to the play area. Teacher goes on a break and leaves the teaching assistant and me with the children.</p>	<p>Lama walks to the doctor's case and picks it up. Lama asks two children carrying dolls, 'Can I look at your babies?' Lama puts the stethoscope on their chests, saying, 'The babies are all okay.'</p>	

<p>14 10.10</p>	<p>Lama walks around with the doctor's case.</p>	<p>Lama goes to the teaching assistant and asks, 'Miss, can you sit down for me please?' Lama uses one of the instruments to check her eyes and says, 'Your eyes are fine, but I see a lot of lines.' She takes out another instrument and says, 'Let me mark it. Then I will inject it.'</p>	
<p>15 10.20</p>	<p>Lama starts to pack away the instruments she used.</p>	<p>The teaching assistant asks if she is done and what she is supposed to do after the injections. Lama says, 'Just stay in bed and rest.'</p>	
<p>16 11.00</p>	<p>Children are sitting at the tables. It is art time, and the four tables are put in a U shape.</p>	<p>The teacher is explaining that they will do painting. Lama says yes and asks, 'Ms C, are we going to use the sponges or the paintbrushes?' The teacher says the brushes. Lama asks, 'Can I give everyone a paintbrush?' The teacher agrees.</p>	<p>Lama hands out the brushes.</p>

<p>17 11.10</p>	<p>The children are sitting and holding their brushes. The teacher explains what they are going to do and that she will come around and squirt the paint on their worksheets, and then they can start painting.</p>	<p>Lama says, 'I do not want you to do that. Can you put it in a bowl, and then I will take my own paint from the bowl, please?'</p>	<p>Lama looks down on the floor and folds her arms and pouts.</p>
<p>18 11.12</p>	<p>Children start to paint when the teacher squirts the paint on their sheets. It is Lama's turn, and she is still having the same look on her face and spreads her arms to cover her sheet to block the teacher.</p>	<p>Lama: 'No, I do not want you to do it. I want you to give me paint in a bowl.' The teacher was not happy with her idea and stated that she did not like the fact that Lama always wanted to do things her own way; although the teacher said no, Lama continues by taking some bowls, hands a few out, and crosses her arms protectively over her worksheet. She indicates where the teacher should squirt the paint.</p>	<p>The teacher did not seem to have any option but to comply; then Lama started to paint and was quite pleased with herself.</p>

<p>19 11.20</p>	<p>Some children are still busy painting. The teacher is saying that she (the teacher) will make meteors and stick them on their paintings and that they must just say where they want it pasted. Lama frowns and folds her arms again.</p>	<p>Teacher asks her what is wrong now again. She replies, 'I want to paint my own meteor. I do not want you to stick it on my painting.'</p>	
<p>20 11.30</p>	<p>Children are done with their artwork. The teacher is speaking to the class, praising the students but says that she is not happy that Lama was not listening to her and was doing her own thing. Lama looks down at the table. M (4:-1), Mc (4:-2), and Z (4.3) now also stand up and give Lama a hug.</p>	<p>Lama then raises her hand. The teacher allows her to speak. Lama says, 'Miss, I just wanted to do the meteor myself. Did you see it? I have made everything you wanted on our paintings.'</p>	<p>D stands up and goes to Lama, giving her a hug, saying, 'I like it.' Lama asks the class, 'Do you also like it?' They agree. They come to her and hug her with comforting words.</p>

Language Developmental Milestones¹⁴

3–4 YEARS	4–5 YEARS	5–6 YEARS
<p>Uses possessives (E) uses <i>we</i>, <i>she</i>, and <i>they</i> (E) uses <i>some</i>, <i>many</i>, and <i>all</i> (E) uses present progressive: <i>is/are/am</i> + verb <i>-ing</i> (E) Uses some irregular verbs (E) Uses <i>can't</i>, <i>not</i>, and <i>didn't</i> (E) uses <i>hafta</i>, <i>have to</i>, and <i>want to</i> (E) uses third-person singular <i>-s</i> (E) expresses ideas and feelings rather than just talking about the world around him/her (E) begins using analogies and comparisons; can complete opposite analogies ('Sister is a girl. Brother is a ____ .') (E) describes the use of objects such as <i>fork</i> or <i>car</i> (E) enjoys poems and recognises language absurdities such as 'Is that an elephant on your head?' (R) uses <i>do</i> to ask yes-no questions (E) vocabulary 1,500+ words (E)</p>	<p>Asks what/who/where or why questions (E) asks whose (E) uses <i>does</i> to ask yes-no questions (E) converses with longer more complex sentences but still makes grammar errors; MLU 4.5+ (E) uses <i>has</i>, <i>does</i>, <i>had</i> (E) uses <i>because</i>, <i>when</i>, <i>if</i>, and <i>so</i> in clauses (E) uses <i>these</i> and <i>those</i> (E) uses <i>before</i> and <i>after</i> (E) uses comparative adjectives (<i>small</i> or <i>smaller</i>) (E) answers why and how questions; replies to questions like 'What is a house made of?' (E) By age 5, uses 2,500 words (E) ends conversations appropriately</p>	<p>Stabilises correct usage of irregular plurals and past tense/irregular verbs (E). uses pronouns, prepositions, and articles correctly and consistently (E) uses superlative <i>-est</i> (E) uses <i>-er</i> to form nouns (<i>teach/teacher</i>) (E) uses future progressive: <i>will be</i> + verb + <i>-ing</i> (E) asks <i>wh</i> questions with <i>does</i> (E) uses sentences with eight-plus words; uses compound and complex sentences (E) understands time sequences (what happened first, second, etc.) (R) vocabulary: 2,800+ words (R); 2,500+ (E)</p>

(E) Expressive, (R) Receptive, and (MLU) Mean Length of Utterances

14 This chart is the benchmark for comparing Lama's language skills. The information in the chart is accessed from <http://firstyears.org/miles/chart.pdf>.

Over one school day, it is obviously not possible to observe the full gamut of a child's language skills; thus, the fact that certain skills have not been displayed could simply be because the opportunities to do so did not present themselves. During my observation, Lama always articulated very clearly what she wanted and how she wanted it.¹⁵ The prevalence of this type of formulation shows that the richness of her expressions is lagging behind. She used simple infinitives very widely: a total of six times (events 2, 9, 19 [twice], 18, and 20). She asked and answered questions with who, where, when, how in event 4, which is the norm for her age.

Her excellent use of articles, pronouns, and prepositions are evident across the sample and are above her age level. During circle time, Lama was very interactive and initiated the talk about the dinosaurs as she was giving the basket to the teacher in event 5. In doing so, she explained a few things to me, and she expressed herself well and used difficult words, *extinct* and *meteor*, in the correct manner. Even though specific vocabulary is not mentioned in any of the references consulted, these are clearly words that we do not associate with 4- to 5-year-olds.

It was during the scooping exercise in event 7 that Lama started to communicate with D (3.10 years old) by telling her what she was doing. First, she said that she was making cookies and then soup and on both occasions, D had to 'taste' what she was making. In these instances, Lama used language effectively as a means of socialising with D, expressing and recounting the imaginary activities she had done. After she waited for a while, she joined D in completing the puzzle. Even though D told her that she knew the stages of the frog in event 11, Lama still explained

15 In 'Language Development Milestones', Sax and Weston (eds.) situate simple infinitives (e.g. I want to) firmly within the 3- 4-year-old category. <http://www.rehabmed.ualberta.ca/spa/phonology/milestones.pdf>

it to her as they completed each layer of the puzzle together. This showed that she enjoyed socialising. She used long sentences and conjunctions, such as *and*, while explaining the stages of the frog in concise and clear sentences and aided with hand gestures. The length of her sentences conforms to the skills of the 5–6 age group. Her communication or discussion with D was clear, and she used proper adjectives to explain about the stages of the frog.

Lama communicated with the teacher that she wanted the paint to be placed in a bowl from where she could use it in event 17. This entire incident was dealt with as the first case study, and here we will restrict ourselves to Lama's communications. Throughout this event, Lama continuously communicated in very clear language to her teacher what she wanted and how she wanted it, which is appropriate for her age.

Throughout the observation, Lama interacted with the adults on several occasions: circle time and events 1 to 5, working-time events 6 and 10, playtime events 14 and 15, and art in events 16 to 20. She used proper and rich sentences and her expressive language showed a very good understanding of grammatical rules, which is the norm for ages 5 to 6. The grammar and vocabulary she used in event 5 was very good language usage for her age, for example the use of expressions such as 'Your eyes are fine, but I see a lot of lines.'

Her gesture in event 18 is to express a strong emotion in order to back up her words; this falls within the norm for a 4- to 5-year-old (Raising Children Network),¹⁶ Lama displayed language skills above her level with respect to the following milestones:

- She correctly used past tense/irregular verbs, pronouns, prepositions, and articles.

16 http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/child_development_four_to_five_years.html/context/1951

- She used *-er* to form nouns (*teach/teacher*) (E).
- She used sentences with more than eight words, which included compound and complex sentences (E).
- She showed understanding of time sequences.
- She did not make any grammatical errors.

Overall, Lama's language skills fall in the range from the norm to reasonably above the norm, but there is a limitation in the richness of her types of expressions.

Reflection

The aim, to establish how Lama uses language (using her words) to express herself in the classroom environment and when socialising with others, was met. My aim was based on my rationale for the observation.

Her language skills proved to be quite good. It was difficult to hear everything that Lama said and to record at the same time as things sometimes happened quickly. It was even harder just focusing on the use of language or use of words in isolation from other developmental areas such as cognitive development skills as in event 16 and the expression of feelings and emotions as in event 18. In the future, I need to make sure that I stick as close to the child being observed as possible. Using the event sample was a very easy and thorough method for me to analyse a particular skill, and I strongly recommend it to all teachers.

CHAPTER 12

Sensitive Mothering: Firmest Foundation For The Future

A concept that is very dear to the Montessori way, namely sensitive mothering (maternal sensitivity), is discussed in this chapter. You will know how it is essential to the social and emotional development of the child. It also looks at the role of the mother (or main caregiver) in the development of that very social and emotional development. The fruits of various types of research on attachment theories are reflected in this section.

Shin, Park, Ryu, and Seomun trace the original definition of maternal sensitivity¹⁷ to Ainsworth et al (1978) as follows. She ‘defined maternal sensitivity as a mother’s ability to perceive and interpret accurately her infant’s signals and communications and then respond appropriately’. They refer to a number of researchers who rephrased or elaborated on the original definition. Worthy of mention is their reference to Biringen et al (2001), who ‘broadened the view of maternal sensitivity to the quality of mother-infant

17 Paper - *Maternal sensitivity: a concept analysis*, in the journal, The Authors. Journal compilation. Blackwell Publishing Ltd. This paper was supported by a grant from the Korea University. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/j.1365-2648.2008.04814.x?r3_referer=wol

interactions in defining it as the mother's responsiveness to her child; ability to be warm and soothing when the child is distressed; ability to negotiate conflictual moments; ability to find interesting, stimulating and creative ways to play; and the quality of her affective interactions with the child.'

Maternal sensitivity, as a concept, flows naturally from the development of attachment theory. This particular theory refers to the field of study regarding the nature and function of the very first relationship formed by a child, which is a relationship regarded as having the greatest impact of all the relationships formed (present, past, and future) by an individual. It is proven by many researchers that this first relationship can prepare a child for a life in which s/he flourishes, wanes, or settles somewhere in between.

The pioneering work on attachment theory was done by John Bowlby,¹⁸ British psychologist, psychiatrist, and psychoanalyst. Bowlby's major conclusion was that to grow up mentally healthy and secure, 'the infant and young child should experience a warm, intimate, and continuous relationship with his mother (or permanent mother substitute) in which both find satisfaction and enjoyment' (Bowlby, *Maternal Care and Mental Health*, World Health Organization 1952, p. 11). This was a rejection of the then current view in the UK that reduced the role of the mother to sustenance, leading to a lamentable view that children are fine as long as their physical needs are well taken care of. Hospitals and nurseries were totally sterile places for infants with no-touch rules as touching was deemed harmful for their development!

According to Bowlby, 'attachment behaviour is any form of behaviour that results in a person attaining or maintaining proximity to some other clearly identified individual who is

18 At first, he made the focus of attachment the mother only but later extended it to include "any **primary caregiver**" Macleod-Brudenell & Kay, p.100.

conceived as better able to cope with the world. . . . Nevertheless for a person to know that an attachment figure is available and responsive gives him a strong and pervasive feeling of security, and so encourages him to value and continue the relationship'.¹⁹ He sees attachment as originating from an innate source. It becomes firmly established from 6 months to 2 years.

Setting out to build on Bowlby's work, Harry Harlow studied attachment in infant monkeys and thereby made a lasting impression on this debate, resoundingly in favour of Bowlby's view. It was in an attempt to search for empirical support for Bowlby's conclusion that Harlow entered into the fray, with all guns blazing. He took no prisoners.

Harlow's experiments were conducted with infant rhesus monkeys as subjects. He used wire and wood to construct inanimate surrogate mothers and first introduced some infants to their respective 'mothers'. In one experiment, he used bare-wire surrogates for some monkeys and cloth-covered mothers for others. In one scenario, the wire mom held a bottle with milk, and the cloth mom had no nourishment to offer. In another scenario, he switched the bottle around.

The experiments showed that the infants became attached to their respective mothers, recognised them, and preferred them to any other surrogate. Much more time was also spent with the cloth mothers (clinging to them) than with the wire moms. The cloth clearly provided comfort. In the scenario where the wire mom only provided nourishment, she was visited for feeding purposes only. Even though a human baby is no monkey, Harlow was not monkeying about; the fact that the two are both primates allows for general comparisons at a basic level.

Harlow's conclusions in support of Bowlby's work were widely accepted. It could no longer be denied that human infants need

¹⁹ Bowlby, J, *Secure Base*, 1988, London, Routledge, pp. 29–30.

their mothers for much more than sustenance and that the role of a warm and caring mother (or primary caregiver) is vital for the emotional development of the child, which plays a crucial role in her/his overall development.

Mary Ainsworth²⁰ developed Bowlby's studies on attachment, and the direction she took led to investigating different types of mothering styles (attachment styles) and the effects they had on children; hence, it is no coincidence that the term *maternal sensitivity* or *sensitive mothering* is attributed to her. In one elaborate study, she looked at stranger anxiety, safe base, separation protest, and reunion behaviour. Based on her conclusions, she introduced the concepts of secure attachment and two kinds of insecure attachments.

Using what is called the strange situation test, she created eight short episodes in which infants were separated from their mothers for short periods. She introduced strangers in the situation in the presence of the mother, as well as in her absence. The results of this experiment led to the crystallisation of the following attachment scenarios. Bowlby took her work on-board, and we use his summaries of her types of assessment (*Sensitive Mothering*, p. 140). This way, we have the benefit of both pioneers.

- ***Secure Attachment***—The infant is assured that his attachment figure is available and will help as needed. This gives her/him a secure base from which to explore the world, and s/he will do so boldly. *Sensitive Mothering*, in discussing Ainsworth's strange situation tests, adds that infants cry or protest when the main caregiver leaves, will be happy when s/he returns, and will occasionally come

20 In, *Sensitive Mothering. A Brief Exploration of the Attachment Theory* (Hereinafter, referenced as *Sensitive Mothering*. <http://taasot.blogspot.com/2013/09/sensitive-mothering-brief-exploration.html>)

back for reassurance. ‘They are mostly calm and compliant and have rare anger outbursts. The securely attached infant will develop trust in those around him/her and in their environment.’

- ***Anxious Avoidant Attachment***—The infant has no confidence that s/he will be responded to positively and expects to be rebuffed. ‘When . . . such an individual attempts to live his life without the love and support of others, he tries to become emotionally self-sufficient and may later be diagnosed as narcissistic or having a false self’ (ibid., p. 140). According to *Sensitive Mothering*, infants rarely cry when the mother (or primary caregiver) leaves and avoid her upon return. They tend to be angry and do not turn to the caregiver when in need. Over time, this type of attachment may lead to difficulty with establishing close relationships with others.
- ***Anxious Resistant Attachment***²¹—The infant is unsure whether s/he will get the response s/he requires in the moment of need. This uncertainty leads to proneness to separation anxiety and clinginess. Exploring the world, for such a child, leads to anxiety. *Sensitive Mothering* adds that infants become anxious before the departure and very upset with the separation. They conspicuously resist interaction upon the caregiver’s return but clearly want to be comforted. Over time, this type of attachment may lead to the infants becoming ‘self-centered, focusing on their own feeling and needs at the expense of mutual sharing’.

21 insecure ambivalent/resistant to use Ainsworth’s terminology

- ***Disoriented and/or Disorganised Attachment***—Bowlby refers to a fourth type of attachment identified by other researchers. He used the expression *puzzling exceptions* (ibid., p. 141). Based on the examples seen in research, he stipulates as follows: ‘One infant appears dazed; another freezes immobile; a third engages in some stereotypy; a fourth starts a movement then stops unaccountably’ (ibid., p. 141). He continues by looking at the wide range of reasons for these behaviours given by researchers, to mention a few: physical abuse of the infant and/or gross negligence on the part of the parents, certain mental problems suffered by the main caregiver, and effects of physical or sexual abuse suffered by the ‘mother’ during childhood. According to *Sensitive Mothering*, this type of attachment may lead to later problems throughout the school years, aggressive behaviour and mental disorders.

As mothers are by far the main primary caregivers worldwide, it may seem that they are being blamed here for all the woes in the world. But this is not so. We are merely looking at the real situation. Bowlby correctly puts this matter in perspective by stating that ‘it is necessary also to consider what has led a mother to adopt the style of mothering she does. One major influence on this is the amount of emotional support, or lack of it, she herself is receiving at the time. Another is the form of mothering she herself received when a child’ (ibid., p. 142).

Shin et al (p. 309) adds three factors that negatively affect mothering, namely maternal depression, maternal stress, and maternal anxiety. ‘If a community values its children, it must cherish their parents’ (Bowlby, 1951, p. 84; cited by Inge Bretherton, *The Origins of Attachment Theory: John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth*).²²

22 http://www.psychology.sunysb.edu/attachment/online/inge_origins.pdf

There is no blame to be apportioned to individuals; rather, it is society that allows these obstacles in the way of raising the future generations. All adults working closely with children should be alerted to this vitally important issue and should try very hard to be ‘sensitive mothers’. When this is too difficult due to the ‘baggage’ that their lives have thrust upon them, then get the help that they need. The children deserve it.

The outstanding work of these pioneers—and there are many more—has shown us that the mother-infant relationship is the key to the development of a stable, secure, and confident individual. Sensitive mothering is the conscientious approach to deepen that type of attachment in practice as a critical part of the process of raising a healthy human being. This is the power that lies in the hands of all primary caregivers. It is easy to see how this concept fits in with the Montessori approach of following the child and allowing her/him to reach her/his fullest potential by creating the conditions/environment for the natural unfolding of her/his life.



PART III

Stages of Development The Young Child's Needs And A Favourable Environment

CHAPTER 13

The Absorbent Mind and The Sensitive Periods of Development

This chapter deals with the three periods of growth, according to Montessori, with particular focus on the first period of the child's life, namely the absorbent mind. We also deal with six sensitive periods that occur during the early years (zero to six), including the skills or areas of development that are being facilitated during these periods. Thought is given to how to support these sensitive periods through the preparation of the environment according to children's individual needs. The dire consequences of not recognising these periods are dutifully pointed out.

The first period of growth is from birth to 6 and has two subphases: birth to 3 and from 3 to 6 (*The Absorbent Mind*, p. 19). The absorbent mind, to Montessori, is a 'type of mentality', one reflected by the manner in which the knowledge absorbed by a child also forms her/his mind (*The Absorbent Mind*, p. 25).

This mentality exists from birth to 6 but is absolute in the first subphase. 'The first half of the first period of life is a period of growth and creation. The second half, from three to six years, is a continuation of the first—but during this second half, children

do not create anything new, they only enlarge and perfect the acquisitions of the first' (*The 1946 London Lectures*, p. 145).

Montessori has dubbed the first subphase the spiritual embryo. The human embryo is the physical 'formative period' of development before the individual exists as a human being, and Montessori compares the psychological formative stage with it. The first-mentioned embryonic stage is prenatal; the other is postnatal (*The Absorbent Mind*, p. 60). The spiritual embryonic stage, from the age of birth to 3,²³ is the time when the child's learning is unconscious. During this stage, the child has an innate drive to learn from her/his environment. Montessori borrowed the term *horme* from Sir Percy Nunn to describe this natural urge (*The Absorbent Mind*, p. 83). She called it the divine urge, source of all evolution, and vital force (*ibid.*, p. 83).

During this stage, the child learns by veritably absorbing the environment. Madame Montessori shows very patiently that the process of learning during this stage is much more sweeping in its depth and breadth than the normal reception-cognition-memory interplay that constitutes learning in the subsequent stages of development and life. She states about the effect of such absorption, 'The things he sees²⁴ are not just remembered; they form part of his soul' (*The Absorbent Mind*, p. 62). They transform the child (*ibid.*, p. 62). This unconscious stage she calls a period of creation in *The 1946 London Lectures*, 'All the psychic organs of the personality are formed during this time' (*ibid.*, p. 138).

If something is lacking in this creation process—say, due to prevailing conditions—'something will be lacking forever. This first period of life is so tremendously important for this reason' (*ibid.*, p. 138). And 'by absorbing what he finds about him, he

23 Montessori puts the upper-age limit at 3 in *The 1946 London Lectures*, p. 138.

24 And hears (mentioned in the next sentence)

forms his own personality'. It is no wonder that Montessori regards the first growth period as the most important one.

She uses the term *mneme* after Sir Percy Nunn for the kind of memory that does not remember consciously but 'absorbs images into the individual's very life' (*The Absorbent Mind*, p. 62). The *mneme* has the role of creating the special characteristics of a person and keeps them 'alive' during her/his entire life. 'What the child had absorbed, remains, a final ingredient of his personality' (*ibid.*, p. 65). Likewise, negative energies absorbed during this period also remain for life, scarring child and adult alike. It is easy to see how this kind of understanding of development leads to the strong promotion of sensitive mothering.

The social embryonic stage, from the age of 3 to 6, is when the child starts to exist independently, has become mobile, is more aware of other people, can talk, and learns new skills because s/he decides/agrees to. Whilst still absorbing from the environment, the child learns new skills through deliberate effort (through the will), hence the term *conscious²⁵ absorbent mind*. The hormone starts to decrease and is slowly replaced by the will. The child is now ready to leave the family for short periods. S/he is now beginning to make friends, is beginning to demonstrate signs of empathy, and engages with social conventions of her/his culture. By the age of 6, the child has constructed 'his mind step by step till it becomes possessed of memory, the power to understand, the ability to think' (*The Absorbent Mind*, p. 27). 'The result is that the child's character is formed. . . . It is created through the formative activity of the three to six period' (*The 1946 London Lectures*, p. 154). A new personality has arrived!

25 A period of 'conscious development' *The Absorbent Mind*, p. 166.

THE SENSITIVE PERIODS

Amongst the arsenal of Montessori brilliancies is the wisdom that as part of their development, children achieve readiness for specific types of learning on their own time, that these periods should be seized as they become manifest, and that the child should not be forced to learn what s/he is not ready for. Montessori's concept and work on sensitive periods stand out greatly in this regard. Periods of sensitivity are times when the child exhibits a fascination for one or other object or activity (promoting a personal developmental skill) that stems from the home.

'When a particular sensitiveness is aroused in a child, it is like a light that shines on some objects but not on others, making of them his whole world' (*The Secret of Childhood*, p. 42). As this fascination manifests itself through curiosity in the environment and repetition of interactions with the environment, the child develops knowledge and skills. A period lasts for a specific time and does not reoccur. As stated by Montessori, 'a sensitive period refers to a special sensibility which a creature acquires in its infantile state, while it is still in a process of evolution. It is a transient disposition and limited to the acquisition of a particular trait. Once this trait, or characteristic, has been acquired, the special sensibility disappears' (*The Secret of Childhood*, p. 38). The sensitive periods help a child to 'adjust' herself/himself and to make 'acquisitions'; it 'enables a child to come into contact with the external world in a particularly intense manner. At such a time everything is easy' (*ibid.*, p. 40).

Montessori credits Hugo de Vries, a Dutch scientist, for discovering sensitive periods in animals but takes credit for extending it to children and for discovering that these periods can be used in teaching (*The Secret of Childhood*, p. 38). Montessori education was developed with attention to sensitive periods as a

central theme. Standing writes in *Maria Montessori: Her Life and Work*, 'When the education of children is organised in relation to their sensitive periods, they work with a sustained enthusiasm which has to be seen in order to be believed' (Standing, 1984, p. 33). These sensitive periods manifest themselves by a pattern of behaviour demonstrated by the child; for example, a characteristic of such a period is the repeated performance of some actions for no apparent reason, such as an insistence to climb stairs only to need to come down again. During these periods, the child shows vitality and pleasure in performing these actions. They contribute not only to the development of a particular skill but also to a growing sense of achievement and sense of competence. Persistent lack of opportunities to perform these actions leads to frustration and gradual loss of self-esteem and initiative.

Madame Montessori dealt extensively with the general perspectives on this subject and with the period of sensitivity to order, but she refers to one or other only briefly in various writings. It was left to others to put the rest together. But in our experience, there is no wisdom in deciding how many sensitive periods there are. Sometimes individual children display entirely unique interests.

The period of sensitivity for order is when the child needs to categorise perceptions and make sense of her/his world; therefore, they need this order in the external environment. This is the first sensitive period to appear; it appears in the first year (sometimes in the first months) and continues through the second (*The Secret of Childhood*, p. 49). This order also makes the child feel secure as it supports exploration and orientation. The child needs a stable, consistent, and predictable environment for normal development. 'The sight of something out of place seems to represent a kind of stimulus, a call to activity. Order . . . when it is satisfied . . . produces a real happiness' (ibid., p. 52). It is when the child's desire for order is not satisfied that a strong reaction can occur, such as

incessant crying or even more violent forms of anguish such as tantrums.

Montessori believes that obstacles in the way of the child who is in the sensitive period for order can lead to long-lasting and negative developmental effects. Something as simple as rearranging a child's room can be troubling and upsetting for the child, and s/he will have to repeat the steps of internalising the new order. Therefore, for the sensitive period of order, it is important to stick to routines; if changes are made as the child grows, they should be introduced systematically and please consult the child. Montessori compares the sensitivity to order with a compass; in this case it is nature's one to help the child to become orientated in the world (*ibid.*, p. 55). The sensitivity to order has an inner component, namely 'awareness of the different parts of the body and their positions' (*ibid.*, p. 56). For information on other sensitive periods, we will use the website of the Montessori Academy (Australia)²⁶ as it dovetails with our experience and a lot of other readings.

The period of sensitivity to movement occurs from birth to 4.5 years and can be divided into two parts. From birth to 2.5 years, the focus is on gross and fine motor skills and the main activities are crawling, pulling up, and eventually walking. Hand muscles and hand-eye coordination improve during this stage. In the second phase, movements are refined and coordinated. The child begins to use both hands when holding items, pincer grip is developed, and control over movement is strengthened.

One example is a child at Ms Grace's former school, climbing up the wall bracket every day but only up to the fifth bar. He would hold on to those bars very tightly whilst looking at the rest of the children below and then get down. Then one day,

26 <https://montessoriacademy.com.au/how-to-recognise-and-support-sensitive-periods-in-your-childs-development/>

suddenly he called out Ms Grace's name, prancing right on top of the eleventh bar! He was driven to achieve a goal that could only be done by the movements needed to climb those bars, and he repeated his actions as many times as required to achieve his objective. It never occurred to him that he could not do it. Imagine what the impact on him if an overzealous teacher had to stop him from reaching the top due to safety concerns!

The period of sensitivity for the development of sensory skills occurs from birth to 6 years and is the period during which children begin to understand their senses and refine them. Children become fascinated with the results when they exercise their senses. From the age of 1 to 3,²⁷ children can display fixation with small objects (e.g. insects or blades of grass) and details. During this period the basics of observation, concentration, and fine motor skills are developed. 'Sensorial exploration and classification' take place from 2.5 to 6 years.

From the moment of birth to the age of 6, the period of sensitivity for language²⁸ manifests itself, which incorporates the skills required for spoken language (7 months to 3 years), writing (3.5 to 4.5 years),²⁹ and reading (4.5 to 5.5 years). A baby is tuned in to language, above all sounds, even though s/he cannot speak but unconsciously concentrates her/his attention on the structure of language and absorbs it without difficulty no matter how complex it might be. If not exposed to language, depending on the degree of deprivation, the child will suffer limitations in her/his intellectual growth that can never be compensated for. Through this period of sensitivity, the child's development is brought in line with the human tendencies of communication and gregariousness.

27 Montessori put the onset of this interest at the beginning of 2 years, *The Secret of Childhood*, p.64.

28 Montessori puts the age from 2.5 to 5 'or so' *The Absorbent Mind*, p.167.

29 The period of sensitivity for learning how to write occurs between the ages of 3 and 6 (*The 1946 London Lectures*, pp. 26–27).

The period of sensitivity for the learning of social skills lasts from the age of 2.5 to 5 years. Children become aware that they are part of a group, and they become interested in relationships with others. They develop friendships and participate in group play. This is a good time to introduce appropriate conduct with respect to the basic principles of human interaction.

Age ranges, from our experience, should be used as general guides. As stated above, the sensitive periods are not restricted to these categories but can be reflected in numerous more ways, which may differ from child to child.

Jackson Round 3

This wonderful boy always avoided any and all mathematical activities in my class no matter how I tried to entice him. He would flip me off in his charming way with ‘Don’t you think I would like this better?’ or ‘Maybe next time, Ms. Gwace’. Until one day, I saw him working with a mathematical object correctly, but no one had demonstrated it to him before. After that, his focus was exclusively on mathematical activities for quite a while even into his next class.

One day, his new teacher called me to see what he had gotten up to. He had created an entire math universe on the floor! First, he had laid out the Montessori sandpaper numbers 0–9; this was followed by the Montessori numerals and counters, which are from 1–10, which he had laid out with the correct quantities below the correct numerals; next to this was the Seguin board A, which is from 11–19; this was followed by ten packs of 100 beads (gold coloured) and then 9 packs of 1000 beads from the Montessori bead cabinet.

When he saw me, he said, ‘Ms. Gwace, let me explain [pointing]. These are the sandpaper numbers, 0 to 9. These are the numbers, and these are the red counters, and can you see the ones in the middle, Ms. Gwace? They are the odd numbers. You get even, and you get odd numbers.’ He used a different hand when he mentioned odd and even, with his head tilting in coordination with the demonstrating hand.

Pointing to the Seguin board, he stated, ‘These are numbers from 11 to 19.’ Pointing to the beads, he continued, ‘Now, these are the main ones because they are big, big, big numbers.’ He proceeded to count the beads in hundreds and when he finished the first thousand, he stacked them, saying, ‘Now they are a thousand, Ms, Gwace. They look like this when they are stacked.’

He then pointed to the thousands packs and continued counting until the last one: 10,000. Showing with hands opened and eyebrows lifted, he said, ‘And there you have your numbers, Ms. Gwace!’

Needless to say, I was in awe of his demonstration and told him that his numbers world was amazing and that I was happy that he could explain it so well to me. I am narrating this four years later, and I still remember every detail of that out-of-this-world experience.

Montessori is at pains to make sure that her readers properly comprehend the vital importance of the role of adults with respect to the sensitive periods: ‘Failure to follow out these impulses means

that they³⁰ become helpless and inept. . . . If a child has not been able to act according to the directives of his sensitive period, the opportunity of a natural conquest is lost, and is lost for good' (*The Secret of Childhood*, p. 39). Put more strongly, 'if during his sensitive stage a child is confronted with an obstacle to his toil, he suffers a disturbance or even warping of his being, a spiritual martyrdom that is still too little known, but whose scars are borne unconsciously by most adults' (*ibid.*, p. 40).

Understanding the sensitive periods and how we as adults can support the children is clearly very important. So how do we assist the child? Firstly, we should ensure that the environment of the child—we have already dealt with this extensively, but we will add some points relevant to the youngest infants—'adequately corresponds to his inner needs' (*ibid.*, p. 42).

Leaving a child always stretched out and flat out on his back limits her/him in the extreme. (S/he would mostly look at the bare ceiling). Montessori recommends, 'Place a child on a slightly inclined plane so that he could take in the whole of his surroundings. Better still would it be to place the child in a garden where he could see birds and flowers and gently swaying plants. A child should be placed in the same spot on different occasions. He can thus repeatedly see the same things and learn how to recognize them and their relative positions and how to distinguish animate from inanimate objects' (*ibid.*, p. 48).

Once the concept of sensitive periods is understood, what adults can do to support the children in these periods is not rocket science. Mindfulness is all that is needed to come up with strategies; observe the child and let her/him lead you. We stipulate a few general ideas:

30 The children

- **Order:** Everything should have its place. Wall decorations should be simple and should not be changed too frequently. Establish routines for activities, such as eating and bedtimes. Parents and nursery staff should cooperate with respect to routines. Consult the child of changes wherever possible.
- **Movement:** Create opportunities for walking, running, jumping, sliding, pulling, pushing, climbing, and balancing. Adults should take care not to be overprotective to the extent of stifling the child's need for development through movement; of course, safety is always paramount.
- **Language:** Always use clear language, keeping it realistic, and do not use baby language. Get conversations going, and consciously introduce synonyms and adjectives. Allow the child to verbally express herself/himself. Do not force books on the child. Be guided by her/his interests. Read age-appropriate books with illustrations to the child. Make use of language development cards, alphabet puzzles, and sensorial materials such as sandpaper letters. Singing and playing games work very well.
- **Sensory Skills:** Ensure that furniture and other objects fit in the child's visual field. Make her/his environment simple and attractive. Children should be provided sufficient time to explore on their own without interruption. Objects should be clearly differentiated on shelves, which should not be too crowded. There should be ample types of small toys and materials available for exploration. Create opportunities for the use of all the senses and have materials available for this. Create a Montessori shelf in your home, with exciting trays.

- ***The Social Aspects of Life:*** Be aware that you are role models when interacting with others, especially with children. Maximise opportunities for group work, playing together, working together, and learning to share and socialise together. Let the child help out with all sorts of tasks at home without gender bias.

In general, It is clear that the sensitive periods are not only an aspect of the child's inner development but also a crucial part of the learning process. 'When the sensitive period has disappeared, intellectual victories are reported through reasoning processes, voluntary efforts and the toil of research' (*The Secret of Childhood*, p. 40), at which point we, as adults, can woefully say to the child, 'Welcome to the club!'

CHAPTER 14

Play and The Holistic Development of Children

One of the features of the Montessori Method that fascinates many observers is the importance given to play as a medium of development. This chapter discusses the unbreakable bond between play and development of children up to the age of 6. It reviews critical literature by various writers, all of whom praise the extreme importance of play in this regard. The characteristics and types of play are elaborated on by looking at the different aspects of child development and analysing the importance of play in the holistic development of children. The maturation of the child up to the age of 6 is divided into different stages, and the role of play at each stage is discussed from the point of view of the skills it develops. It is shown that forms of play mature with the child. But all children are not the same; hence, the role of play in the development of children with special needs is also considered.

In *The 1946 London Lectures*, Montessori takes issue with psychologists who go as far as to contend that children develop their characters through play. She would have none of it and accuses them of coming up with the kinds of generalisations that

lead to prejudices! She guards against the ‘veneration’ of play as a ‘prejudice’ (ibid., p. 151).

Play, to Montessori, is work without external purpose (ibid., p. 155). She does not approve of this kind of play (if it is useless) and favours the type that is constructive, for example, when a child is given a small broom to sweep alongside the mother. Such play is regarded by the child as work. She explains that the character of the child is constructed in the 3- to 6-year period but through constructive activity, which she calls work, which goes hand in hand with proper concentration (ibid., p. 154).

Children work purposefully, and their aim is to finish what they are doing and to be exact in the process. They ‘will do a thing carefully down to the last detail. They do the exercise with increasing exactness. . . . **This is not play**’ (emphasis added).

She unceremoniously dismissed ‘useless’³¹ play and links it with the kinds of activities (or lack thereof) that might lead to weak, uncoordinated, and inconsistent individuals. She adds another dimension to constructive play, namely that which appears to have no end purpose but leads to something constructive such as exercise through sports and games. Through such play, the child becomes strong and develops abilities. ‘The purpose of sport is to make us stronger and more able’ (ibid., p. 120). The abilities include ‘delicate, fine coordinated movements—agility’ (ibid., p. 120). And ‘organized games, and this is most important, demand an exact use of objects and consequently concentration and a complete control of one’s movements. Games thus lead to a feeling of rivalry and animate the participant with a spirit of competition. And this, in comparison with aimless play, represents moral progress’ (*The Discovery of the Child*, p. 95). She accords the

31 When providing toys to children, ensure that they do not lend themselves to useless activities.

highest powers to constructive play as powerful as the work that constructs the psyche and, as it were, the personality.

Montessori did not subject play to a detailed treatment, and we will delve into the issue some more by referring to others who made contributions in this area. Writers on the subject cannot agree on a single definition of play. Macleod-Brudenell and Kay (2013) provides a useful definition: 'Play is a biological, psychological and a social necessity and is fundamental to the healthy development and well-being of individuals and communities.' Authors who point out the lack of a single definition tend to draw on various definitions to come up with their own, whether unique or a summary of other definitions. For the purposes of this book, play is defined as any freely chosen activity, structured or free flow, through which a child explores his/her environment by using his/her senses and or physical abilities for fun. Whilst play is a biological, psychological, and social necessity, as stated by Macleod-Brudenell and Kay above, one can go further by attesting that play is crucial for the child's holistic development: physical, intellectual, language, emotional, and social.

Bruce (2006) explained that free-flow play is imaginative, creative, and without any outcome or end product as it is a process. She further described free-flow play as open-ended and flexible and with unlimited possibilities, allowing children to adapt, think on their feet, respond to changing situations through problem solving, and make new rules. An example of this is when the child uses blocks to build a castle and then afterwards uses those same blocks to build a cow pen or a fire station, establishing his/her own outcomes. On the opposite side, there is structured play, games that come with rules and have specific preexisting outcomes. Some have directions to follow. An example of this is memory games, puzzles, and group games such as soccer.

Besides the two broadest categories mentioned above, various researchers categorise play further into different types. Researchers such as Bruner, Sylva, Jolly, and Hughes, amongst others, came up with some of the following types of play (Macleod-Brudenell and Kay, 2008). Physical play is when the child is active, using his/her gross motor skills. Such activities—for example, jumping, climbing up a wall bracket or jungle gym, walking on big claw stilts, and walking on a beam—help children to gain more control over their bodies, physical strength, and hand-eye coordination and further build their gross and fine motor skills.

Creative play is when the child uses objects or materials to create something new, for example, creating products from clay, paper, finger paint, and boxes. With creative play, the child plays mostly on his/her own. Symbolic play is when an object is used to represent something else, such as pretend riding on a stick as if it were a horse. Play fighting, which is more to do with touching than fighting, is rough-and-tumble play.

Social play refers to two or a group of children playing a game with rules; but as they play, the rules and criteria change. Sociodramatic play takes place when children are engaged in role play and take any identity based on their experiences, like playing the mom pushing the baby in a pram or the dad carrying the baby's bag. Communication play refers to activities where the child uses words and/or gestures, for example, the fire station captain giving instructions to his/her team. Dramatic play occurs when children dramatise situations and actions that go along with particular roles.

Deep play is risky and even potentially life threatening, for example, somersaulting. Imaginative play refers to situations where no conventional rules governing the physical world apply. Locomotor play is any movement, and in any direction, for its own sake, for example, walking, running, jumping, hopping,

etc. Mastery play is when the child masters abilities through her/his play that s/he no longer needs to focus on and can now shift to another skill. Object play uses hand-eye coordination such as spinning a top.

Recapitulative play allows the child to access play of earlier human evolutionary stages, for example, playing the role of a caveman or Viking. Fantasy play refers to activities where children rearrange the world just for the fun of it. Examples of this are creating stories and acting them out. Exploratory play is where children explore their environment to find out or get facts about why a particular object is the way it is. Role play is where children pretend to be in a particular situation or assume the roles of others.

It is generally accepted that play is important to the child's holistic development. Physical development refers to activities in which the child uses parts of her/his body, such as the hands, arms, and legs, strengthening the muscles. Intellectual development refers to development of understanding and problem-solving skills and the use of memory from previous experiences. The child's thinking abilities and knowledge that s/he develops help her/him to figure out how the world works and how things are organised. As the cognitive skills develop, the child begins to move from where things used to be concrete to abstract thinking.

On the development of language, children communicate by expressing themselves as they play and learn to understand what others are saying. Mothers are verbally responsive in play and are strongly associated with language development (Macleod-Brudenell and Kay, 2008). Brudenell and Kay (2008, p. 198) comment on the available body of literature on play with the following conclusion: 'It is generally agreed that children's play develops through stages that are loosely linked to the child's age and stage of development.' However, these stages of play are not rigid.

Parten's (1932) research looked at the features of a series of five levels of play that increase in their levels of sophistication and important contributions to development of the child. Solitary independent play is her first level of play and appears between the ages of birth to 2 years. In this level of play, the child plays on her/his own even though there are other children around, concentrates only on her/his own play, and is not interested in what other children are doing. Onlooker play (second level) takes place from the age of 2 years and is characterised by the child only being interested in watching and does not become actively involved.

Parallel play (third level) takes place from age 2 to 3 when the child plays on her/his own using the same toys or objects that other children are using, playing alongside the other children but not with them. Associative play (fourth level) takes place at the age of 3 and older and is when children play together, putting the social skills they have learnt into action. These can include board games, puzzle construction, or other group activities. These prepare the child for future interactions as s/he grows. Cooperative play (fifth level) also takes place from 3 years old and older, and this play is not open-ended; the play has a goal or a result, and it takes place in a group.

As seen from the above, at each stage of development, the child needs to develop a different set of skills and play is a natural means to this end. As the child matures, so does the play activities chosen by her/him. Skills developed in a preceding stage become the foundation for new skills, and the forms of play develop with the child.

The centrality of constructive play in the development of young children can never be overstated. It is an innate desire that leads to the satisfaction of extremely basic yet profound needs of the child. This being the case, all children without fail should have ample opportunity to indulge in constructive play in a safe environment.

CHAPTER 15

Discipline, Obedience, and The Will

By the critique she has made of the traditional understandings of will, discipline, and obedience, Montessori has shown how these facets of the child's evolving character have generally been misunderstood. She expounded their proper interrelationships, thereby allowing us to understand how the correct approach to these features will lead to them playing their important roles in the natural development of the child's personality. This chapter juxtaposes the traditional and Montessori perspectives of obedience and the will and explores their interrelationships. It will look at the optimal environment necessary for the best outcomes of their development.³²

According to the *English Oxford Living Dictionaries*, *obedience* means 'compliance with an order, request or law, or submission to another's authority'. According to this definition and common usage, obedience is submission to an external demand or request. For Montessori (*The Absorbent Mind*, p. 256), obedience should arise from the child developing her/his own power of volition and on that basis freely choose to obey. She is at pains to point out that children are not always developmentally ready to obey, leading her

³² Discipline has already been dealt with extensively in chapter 2.

to specify three levels of obedience. Hence, the teacher's task is to cultivate this kind of obedience that comes from within.

Discipline and obedience are two sides of the same coin. If discipline is effective, obedience would follow. Sadly, in a traditional school environment, the obedience observed may very well be the result of a broken will or simply oppression. In a Montessori environment, the obedience observed would be a reflection of the maturation of the child and her/his joyous acceptance to follow rules or instructions/requests as they are for the common good.

Montessori regards the will as man's 'impulses to action' that arise from the hormone (ibid., p. 252), which is the vital force of life itself in the process of evolution. As Montessori so succinctly puts it, 'under proper conditions, the will is a force which impels activities beneficial to life. Nature imposes on the child the task of growing up, and his will leads him to make progress and to develop his powers' (*The Absorbent Mind*, p. 253). The will is exercised through deliberate actions and not by mere desires. Freedom, as practised by the Montessori Method, plays a critical role in the development of the will. Freedom and engagement with real activities lead to the development of the will as they lead the child to adapt his own limits to the limits of others.

By exercising the will, the child's inner discipline (or self-control) is automatically developed as s/he is forced to make choices and to act in accordance with these choices. To name a few examples, the child will repress movements that do not help with the activities and conversely focus on those movements that do; s/he will suppress urges to grab something from a friend and will wait for her/his turn.

As stated previously, during the social embryo sub-phase, the hormone starts to decrease and is slowly replaced by the will. By this time, in the prepared environment, the child has developed a certain amount of self-discipline, which allows him/her to follow

the instruction/s from another even if not in accordance with his/her own needs. The growth of self-control is of a higher quality during the social embryonic phase because the child's actions become more and more driven by conscious decisions. Montessori shows how the traditional mindset can shamelessly set about to break³³ a child's will in order to obtain obedience. She avers, 'We must aim at cultivating the will, not breaking it' (*The Absorbent Mind*, p. 254). Self-control and the will develop side by side, and one of their outcomes is obedience. Obedience develops over a long period of time, and Montessori sees it as 'a natural phenomenon of human life' (*The Absorbent Mind*, p. 257). Obedience becomes possible when a child has developed certain abilities (powers) that allow him/her to subjugate his immediate interests for another's. These powers are developed during the first six years and are nurtured, as explained above, through activities in the proper environment with proper guidance. 'At first it is dictated purely by the *hormic* impulse, then it rises to the level of consciousness, and thereafter it goes on developing, stage by stage, till it comes under control of the conscious will' (*The Absorbent Mind*, p. 257).

There are three levels of obedience (Montessori, 2007). The first level of obedience is the period in which obedience and disobedience seem to be combined (*The Absorbent Mind*, p. 260). During this level, the will is directed or guided by the hormone; this level lasts until around 3 years of age, and the child does not have the ability to obey commands unless what is expected is in agreement with what the child wants or needs to do anyway. The child is not yet in control of her/his movements.

At the ages of 3 to 4, the child no longer has physical or mental obstacles to her/his ability to obey due to the development of her/

33 We have seen this so many times in the domestic setup, where adults appear to feel so small that they need to assert themselves by showing this little infant that s/he has to submit as if in a wrestling match.

his inner powers and consciousness. This is the beginning of the second level of obedience. The hormone is starting to diminish, and the child can follow instructions even if it is not in agreement with her/his own needs as s/he has by now developed a certain amount of self-discipline. During this level, the child is fully capable of obeying another, and Montessori calls this the 'highest form of obedience to which present day education aspires. The ordinary teacher asks only that she be obeyed' (ibid., p. 260).

At the third level of obedience, the child's will is highly developed; the child begins to seek instruction from people s/he admires and trusts; s/he is looking for more and more difficult tasks to test her/his abilities. The wish to obey is spontaneous and brings about a sense of joy. 'The power to obey is the last phase in the development of the will, which in its turn has made obedience possible' (ibid., p. 262). The adult can support the child in this area of development by creating an environment as discussed above, by playing a passive role, and by guiding the child in line with the Montessori philosophy. The adult is the facilitator of the proper development of the child, who is 'constructing' her/his own personality.

Therefore, the will, discipline, and obedience form an interrelated trinity of facets that are at the heart of the 'construction' of the child's personality. The outcome of this construction will show a child who either has developed in line with the natural life force or one who has been stunted in that development. This is why it is so important for adults to have a proper understanding of these issues so that we can become facilitators of this process.

Dr. Maria Montessori has shown the way, and a growing body of Montessori schools around the world is blazing this path. Although progress is slow (but growing), we should have hope for the future as the Montessori Method follows the laws of nature, and nature always wins in the end.



P A R T I V

Montessori and Special Needs Education

CHAPTER 16

Montessori and Special Needs Education

In this day and age, a book on educational methodology that does not seriously deal with special needs education will surely be missing in a major regard.

Interestingly, the Montessori Method actually has its origins in the education of children with special educational needs. In *The Discovery of the Child* (pp. 21–39), Montessori explains at length her journey and experience in this field.

She was an assistant instructor in the psychiatric clinic of the University of Rome and became keenly interested in the education of the children who had been institutionalised in the asylum without any effort made to train them; they were seen as medical cases exclusively. She stated, ‘I differed from my colleagues in that I instinctively felt that mental deficiency was more of an educational than medical problem’ (ibid., p. 21). She became very interested in the education of these children (intellectually challenged) and took this endeavour so seriously that she made an in-depth study of the works of Edward Seguin (who developed the physiological method) and Itard, two pioneers in the education of the mentally

challenged. She went as far as to travel to Paris and the UK in pursuit of her studies.

During her two-year stint teaching mentally retarded children, she followed Seguin's ideas and drew on Itard's experiments. She developed her own teaching materials, the starting point for which she got from Seguin's apparatuses.³⁴ She even named one of her objects after him: the Seguin board. She conducted new experiments and implemented an original method of teaching reading and writing and was so successful that her children learnt to read and write fairly quickly. Some of her students fared so well that they took an exam with mainstream students and performed outstandingly in it! Her method focused a lot on the children's psychic development, an area that Itard and Seguin had neglected.

Her work at the asylum became widely known, and the Italian government asked her to give a series of lectures to teachers on the education of mentally retarded children, which she did. The lectures led to the creation of a state institution for the training of teachers of retarded children. Dr. Montessori directed this institute for more than two years. Linked to this institute was the later development of an educational institute that brought many mentally retarded students together. She pursued a special method of observing and educating these children and she personally taught them, basing herself on the achievements of the above-mentioned gentlemen but adding her own unique contributions.

She was inspired by the success of the methods she employed. 'The credit of having perfected a real educational system for defective children belong to Edward Seguin. He was at first a teacher but later became a physician' (*ibid.*, p. 24). It is safe to say that she was one of the pioneers in the field of special needs education.

34 Seguin was the first to make specifically created educational objects that became one of the pillars of education.

After Montessori shifted her focus to mainstream education, she poured all her time, passion, and energy into that sphere and did not do the same for special needs education. Since then, the Montessori system has diverged from special needs education but is hopefully making a comeback. There is currently a steady trickle of work reconnecting the Montessori Method with special needs education.³⁵

The blog *Montessori for Everyone*³⁶ has a useful focus on this topic titled ‘Montessori and the Child with Special Needs’. This article was spurred on by queries regarding the education of children with special needs in Montessori setups. It starts by listing the pros and cons of the Montessori Method with respect to children with special needs.

The pros are the following:

- Materials and the environment
- Multi-age classrooms
- Consistency that follows from multi-age classrooms
- Approach of following the child
- Philosophy of peace, cooperation, and respect

The cons are the following:

- Large class sizes
- Favouring of independent work
- Lack of information from Montessori training centres
- Lack of special services
- Starting school late on the part of special needs children
- Bogus Montessori schools

35 Various commentators bemoan the dearth of special needs and inclusive experiences in Montessori settings.

36 <http://www.blog.montessoriforeveryone.com/montessori-and-the-special-needs-child.html>

The blog argues that teaching special needs children in the Montessori system can be successful if the following are taken seriously: effective communication between parent and teacher, ‘bring Montessori home’, outside help from qualified professionals, and a very favourable teacher-student ratio. The article also adds homeschooling and Montessori public schools as arenas for success.

The article goes further and proclaims the successful education of children with special needs in Montessori settings, and she highlights the case of the Lane Montessori School for Autism in Canada (‘one great example’ and the first school to combine the Montessori Method with applied behaviour analysis). Based on experience, the article concludes, ‘The most successful programs seem to be those that are geared specifically towards special needs children, where the class sizes are small and the teachers are also credentialed in working with special needs children.’

For a number of years now, a huge focus in special needs education has centred on inclusion (inclusive education)—in other words, teaching mainstream and children with special needs in the same classrooms. Let us turn to a well-researched example of inclusion in a Montessori classroom.

In her master’s dissertation titled *The Benefits and Challenges of Inclusion in an Early Childhood Montessori Classroom*³⁷ (May 2014), Jessica L. Ruud draws conclusions based on research conducted over the period of a year. The participants in her study were her students, twenty in total, aged 3–6 years. ‘Included are my students who have these particular disabilities: Down syndrome, delayed speech, Verbal Apraxia, ADD/ADHD, and Autism.’ Her class had the benefit of three teachers: her co-teacher, Montessori trained and with a degree in early childhood education (as is she, the researcher); one special educator with a degree in special

37 [http://cdmbuntu.lib.utah.edu/utills/getfile/collection/wc-ir/id/74/ filename/72.pdf](http://cdmbuntu.lib.utah.edu/utills/getfile/collection/wc-ir/id/74/filename/72.pdf)

education; and, of course, herself. The interviewees in the study were her two co-workers (*ibid.*, pp. 32–33).

She found many benefits for inclusion in her research. Children gained an ‘enriched education’, acceptance, compassion, and appreciation from peers; individual needs were catered for. The Montessori environment provided the children with a ‘natural setting’ for concrete learning that progressed to abstract thinking. The materials are easy to manipulate, and students gained independence from developing their concentration skills (*ibid.*, p. 61). However, the challenges were many.

‘I anticipated discovering a majority of benefits of having inclusion in an early childhood Montessori setting, but I did find challenges daily’ (*ibid.*, p. 58). She found that inclusive education in a Montessori environment does not work for every child. ‘Certain disabilities, such as Autism, might fail to function effectively in this setting. However, this varies by case and spectrum of the child. When there are too many choices available in the environment it becomes too overwhelming. Sometimes having inclusion in the classroom can become distracting to the other students trying to learn’ (*ibid.*, p. 59).

She posed the following question to her interviewees, ‘Do you think these children will only remain successful if they stay within a Montessori setting for the remainder of their schooling?’ (*ibid.*, p. 59). One answered in the negative but added that it depended on the child. The other was positive and enthusiastic, stating that it can make a huge impact on their lives. Paraphrasing this interviewee, Ruud continues, ‘This type of education is not something that you traditionally receive in public school. There is something so beautiful about Montessori education and every child can find success within it one way or another’ (*ibid.*, p. 60).

On the whole, her research has made Ruud very positive about the possibilities. ‘Even though there are difficulties in this type

of setting, and it does not work for every child, I believe that the progress we continue to see in *all* of our students in an inclusive Montessori setting is nothing short of miraculous' (emphasis in the original) (ibid., p. 60). To make it work, she recommends two Montessori teachers and one special educator in the classroom so that the children with disabilities can receive the attentiveness that they developmentally require to function in the classroom. She further recommends a special needs component of 15 per cent in the class (ibid., p. 64).

Thus, the Montessori movement has strong historical roots in special needs education. The movement has diverted from its original roots, but there are growing attempts to draw special needs students into the Montessori mainstream. A lot of trial and error should be expected for a while until this renewed trend will set off and become synonymous with the Montessori Method.



P A R T V

Results, Critique And Last Words

CHAPTER 17

Results Speak for Themselves

Recent figures accessed for Montessori schools worldwide are about 20,000, including 5,000 in the United States. Of the US schools, more than 500 are public schools.³⁸

The National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector (NCMPS) has summarised extensive research that has conclusively proven the effectiveness on Montessori education over a wide range of outcomes and published it on its website. The summary lists the following conclusions:

- ***School Readiness:*** Children in Montessori preschool and kindergarten classrooms fair very well with the traditional ‘school readiness’ measures.
- ***Executive Functions:*** Great strengths in executive function skills have been displayed; this includes self-regulation, working memory, planning, and inhibitory control. Executive function strengths are associated with academic achievement and greater potential for success in all areas of life.

38 National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector (NCMPS); <https://www.public-montessori.org/montessori/#schools>

- ***Social Development:*** The children have good social problem-solving skills, a stronger sense of community and social justice, and more positive perceptions of classmates.
- ***General Academic Achievement:*** Higher levels of self-regulation are common amongst Montessori students, leading to very good academic progress. They also display higher levels of intrinsic motivation on academic tasks.
- ***Language:*** Strengths have been observed in phonological decoding, letter-word identification, reading assessments, sentence structure, and writing creativity.
- ***Mathematics:*** Higher scores have been recorded in applied problem solving, understanding of math concepts, as well as in standardised test scores.
- ***Science:*** ‘In one study, children in a public Montessori program from ages 3 to 11 achieved significantly higher science standardized test scores in high school.’

The NCMPS website has a lot more research gems that are well worth any time and effort to explore. We now turn to what a few famous Montessori alumni have to say about their experiences.

The website of a leading Montessori organisation in the UK, Montessori Centre International, also called the St Nicholas Charity, has stunning quotations by highly successful individuals; and we share them below.³⁹

1. JEFF BEZOS, ‘Amazon’s founder, who proudly cites his Montessori roots, is a study in contradictions: analytical and intuitive, careful and audacious, playful and determined.

39 <https://www.montessori.org.uk/about-us/famous-montessori-students>

Critics note his extraordinary ability to learn from others, one hallmark of Montessori education.⁴⁰

2. SEAN P Diddy COMBS, a Grammy Award–winning musician, rap recording artist, and CEO of Bad Boy Records. ‘This multi-talented hip hop artist says he feels fortunate to have attended Mount Vernon Montessori School during his childhood, recalling that, “I feel like I was nurtured into wanting to be somebody special”.’
3. HELEN KELLER (1880–1968). She was blind and deaf, a political activist, author, lecturer, awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and one of Gallup’s most widely admired people of the twentieth century
‘Maria Montessori said that Helen Keller became a woman and writer of exceptional culture—who better than she proves the potency of [the Montessori] method? In her tribute to Montessori, Helen’s teacher observes, only through freedom can people develop self-control, self-dependence, willpower and initiative. This is the lesson Helen’s education has for the world.’
4. GABRIEL GARCIA MARQUEZ (1927–2014), Nobel Prize–winning author
‘Marquez said his Montessori education gave him the desire to kiss literature and states, “I do not believe there is a method better than Montessori for making children sensitive to the beauties of the world and awakening their curiosity regarding the secrets of life.” His book, “One Hundred Years of Solitude” has been named as the book that has most shaped world literature of the last 25 years.’

40 About a week after writing these words, the media announced on 14 September 2018 that Bezos allocated \$2 billion to counter homelessness and help children. The children angle, The Day 1 Academies Fund, will manage a network of Montessori schools in impoverished communities in the United States.

5. SERGEY BRIN AND LARRY PAGE, Google co-founders ‘Larry Page and Sergey Brin have been friends since childhood but when asked if it was the fact that their parents were both college professors being the reason for their success they said that it was their going to a Montessori school where they learned to be self-directed and self-starters. They said that Montessori education allowed them to learn to think for themselves and gave them freedom to pursue their own interests.’

Many of these people were exposed to Montessori education only at preschool/kindergarten level, and for them to still single out this period of their education as a source of their success is a tremendous vindication of the Montessori Method.

We conclude this chapter with comments from number 6, Steve Wozniak, the co-founder of Apple. In a televised interview, he pulled the traditional education system to pieces as stunting children, not allowing individual creativity, blocking children from pursuing their own interests (they have to follow the same ‘track’ as everybody else), following a restricted view of intelligence (everybody’s answer must be the same), and being based on money. To give context to one of his points, ‘our whole system of schools is unfortunately very bad because it is based on money.’ He singles out Montessori education as bucking the trend—quite an astounding compliment from someone who has scaled the heights of society through bucking the trend of common-sense opinion and advice to go forth and create the world’s wealthiest company. His interview is available at the website *Daily Montessori* at <http://www.dailymontessori.com/montessori-questions-answers/famous-montessori-educated-people/>.

CHAPTER 18

Critique: A Children's Utopia In A Dystopian World

A critique is not only a pointing out of failings but also a general assessment of a work or theory. In this sense, this entire book is a critique; this chapter can be seen as the final section of the critique.

I. Madame Montessori saw education as a means to a peaceful society. It was only natural that after a devastating war, thinking people would look for ways to end future wars and improve society. Exactly one year after the end of World War II, she stated in her first London lecture, 'The events of the last years have brought us together. In these times, more than ever before, our hope is that education will offer an aid to better the condition of the world' (*The 1946 London Lectures*, p. 1). In this same lecture, she presents, as if in a mirror, the horrors of war and comes up with ideas to overcome it. It is in these ideas that her idealism is exposed. Firstly, she calls on us (humanity) to 'refocus our hearts' (*ibid.*, p. 6), appealing that we need to focus not on our mistakes, but on our great creations. This, she argues, needs to be extended to children as well, who go bowed under the weight of our mindsets that direct us to focus on their mistakes (*ibid.*, p. 6). Secondly,

she avers that if society, with this 'change in our hearts', gives the development of children all the help it needs that it would lead to the better world she believes that we deserve. This help she calls education.

Inspiring words, but it is not as simple as this. Yes, we need to end the warfare mindset and we need to change the world; but if we misunderstand the causes of war and of the failings of society, we will not be able to work out what needs to be done, and the same old terrible situation will continue unabated.

The best analysis of the causes for our greatest miseries (including wars) referred above is made by what is called the class analysis of society. It is interesting that Montessori refers to Marxist theory but ignores its major contribution to understanding the origins of war and the failings of our society. In a nutshell, we summarise this understanding in point form:

1. Society is divided into classes, based on the different roles played in the economy by the respective classes.
2. The ruling class or the richest class (or the one percent), which includes the political rulers and the media bosses, is exclusively focused on protecting and extending their material wealth and political power and no cost is too great for this.
3. Wealth is amassed at the top and poverty at the bottom of the class structure due to the inner dynamics of the capitalist economic system and the machinations of its major beneficiaries: the ruling class. They do not cringe away from taking from the poor to give to the rich. For example, we have witnessed in the past few years how powerful governments have bailed out huge corporations at the expense of ordinary folks (most infamous in recent history being in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis).

4. This is the cause of all wars no matter who started it or how it started. It is always about wealth and power.
5. For as long as this class structure defines society, socioeconomic ills will persist. So what is to be done? Dear reader, you do the math.

Where would the promoted mass change of hearts come from by the adults of this world? It cannot simply come from self-reflection. Has not even the ruling classes promised to end all wars after the First World War? This was the purpose for bringing into being the League of Nations, precursor of the current United Nations Organization.

But within only a few years, the wholesale global slaughter of humans took on a frenzy unknown before. And is the world today not more weaponised than ever before in human history? Is it not so that at the pressing of a few buttons in Russia and a few in the USA our entire planet can be wiped out a few times over? The ruling class, as a group, cannot be expected to promote peace when war provides opportunities to protect and/or extend their wealth and power; it is counterintuitive. It would be like expecting a lion to become a vegetarian because it grew a conscience. Since the time of Madame Montessori, there has not been another world war but multiple regional wars. At the time of writing, there are open wars continuing in Yemen, Syria, and Afghanistan, with the civil war in the Ukraine having subsided but still simmering. On top of this, belligerent bluster continues to be directed at Iran, China, and Russia.

Madame Montessori was well aware of where society went wrong, but she did not fathom the why. 'In addition to these natural conflicts⁴¹ there are others caused by deviations in individuals' (*The Secrets of Childhood*, p. 192). She lists the following:

41 Competition over limited resources

- The longing for possessions without regard for the preservation of the species
- Possessiveness, which replaces love with hatred
- Exploitation of the work of others

She continues, ‘The guiding norm becomes convenience which, under the guise of rights, establishes the results of human deviations as social principles. In this way error triumphs and becomes and is taken as a part of human life and morality . . . and all accept as inevitable the consequent ills’ (ibid., p. 192).

A superb characterisation! How can ‘deviations in individuals’ cause such powerful consequences? How can it grab the entire human civilisation by the throat and shake it to pieces? It can only be so because these deviations have as their source very powerful roots, namely the very socioeconomic foundations of society. They are bred by the nature of society, which means that people such as Madame Montessori are actually the deviants! This is the reason why these deviations are being (and will continue to be) reproduced from the one generation to the next. For these deviations are perfectly innate to the exploitative and rich-first essence of the one percent society. To her credit, Madame Montessori has made a great case that this situation is not natural at all. It is up to us to take her great work further and to find the ways to bring human society back in line with the true nature of the human essence.

Education can become a means to bring the world the total peace it deserves if it accepts the necessity that only by changing the class structure of society will humanity be set free. This would require a revolutionary change in our mindsets. Once society is rebuilt on new foundations with better values, then education with Montessori principles will be able to come into its own. It is society that will save education, but the latter can play a role in saving society, alas, not in the manner thought by Madame Montessori.

II. We introduce this section with an insightful passage by Dina Cramer: ‘The Montessori movement . . . was a system of pre-schools and early education developed by Dr. Maria Montessori in Rome, Italy in 1907 for children of the poorest slum of Rome. These ideas were brought to the United States in the 1920’s but died out only to be revived in the 1960’s when they became popular and were adopted *especially by the upper middle class* [emphasis added]. Since then this movement has flourished throughout the U.S., *extremely popular with highly educated people* [emphasis added], leading one to wonder why a system based on the needs of destitute Italian children of the early 20th century transferred so readily to well-to-do modern Americans.⁴²

This is a common phenomenon worldwide because Montessori schools are generally private institutions, which, by their very nature, exclude the poor. The growth of public Montessori schools counter this trend, meaning that children from all walks of life have access to them; but these are the exceptions for the moment. So here we have an education system born amongst the poor with the promise of changing society for the better; yet it is captured by the well-to-do. Furthermore, a quick Google search of powerful Montessori alumni, or promoters will reveal that not only the pure of heart find Montessori education useful for their purposes. The alumni include royalty, extremely wealthy people, and even known warmongers. We single out one man only because we mentioned him before: Jeff Bezos.

We saw how well disposed he is towards Montessori education. However, he is constantly in the news for paying many of his workers such pitiable wages that they need government support (e.g. food stamps) to make ends meet. Their shameful wages are only equalled by their shameful working conditions. The situation

42 <http://www.simoneklugman.com/marx-buddha-montessori-and-the-migration-of-ideas/>

is so bad that attempts are being made (at the time of writing) to address the matter in legislation in the United States. Montessori has sung the praises of workers, and her philosophy promotes valuing workers and all human beings for that matter. Yet a person with such a heart as Mr. Bezos is prepared to spend huge amounts of money to build the Montessori movement. Though this is a huge step for the movement, it also underlines our argument in bold relief. We can only hope that by continuing to associate with Montessori education, the philosophy will gradually rub off on him. Amongst the rich, famous, and ill-intentioned, there are many who find Montessori education quite attractive for the simple reason that it is the best method to educate their children—period!

The Montessori Method is the best for educating all children, even those of deviant⁴³ parents. So why would those with the means not pay for the best education for their children? If they do not like the broader humanitarian philosophy, they know they can impart their own values to them. This dystopia will continue for as long as society is divided into predators and prey.

The Montessorian dystopia is encapsulated in two major contradictions:

1. It is a near-perfect educational system in an imperfect world.
2. It is being used by the well-to-do to reproduce society with all its ills.

43 To use Madame Montessori's term

CHAPTER 19

Concluding Remarks

The groundbreaking contribution of Madame Montessori to the education of the human race cannot be overstated. But let it be emphasised she has been the foremost advocate for the child, showing to the world how we have been neglecting and repressing the true nature and true worth of our children. Then she showed us how to change that, and more and more people are taking note. Furthermore, her work has shaken the theoretical foundations of the traditional system to the core and placed the education of the child on a strong scientific footing. It is testimony to the regressive tendencies in our society that the Montessori educational principles have not been developed and expanded much by the centres of learning or adopted as the educational mainstream by any country. But you cannot keep a good idea down, so the Montessori Method has been steadily growing worldwide but from the bottom up—a true grassroots movement.

With the advent of public Montessori schools in the United States in particular, there is a lot of hope that the results of Montessori education will force itself into the public domain in such a way that the powers that be will no longer be able to ignore its potency.

Pioneering innovations, such as the Montessori autism school mentioned earlier, point to a bright and rich future for the Montessori movement as it is clearly a big step along a road with huge possibilities. Such innovations can only multiply.

Parents, when looking for Montessori schools for your angels, do not be fooled by the name of any school. Ask questions and visit a few classes so that you can choose a school that you can trust to educate your children in the manner you expect.

To overcome the Montessorian utopian island in the ocean of socioeconomic chaos, nothing short of a fundamental revolution is required, one that will put society on the course of real peace, freedom, and equality. It would do away with that hunger for possessions and power that Montessori wrote about. This would be the only environment in which education for the holistic development of the human race will be allowed to flourish. Education for peace will find fulfilment only in a society for peace.

POSTSCRIPT

By Mustafa Hassan and Sertel Djelal

The Youmemontessori Family

Even before it was sent to the publisher, *You, Me, and Montessori* already started to make waves by inspiring the website www.youmemontessori.com.

Youmemontessori.com is much more than your regular book-promoting website, providing a panoply of insights, practical experiences, resources, and other services about all things Montessori for all and sundry.

Our mission is to promote the authentic Montessori approach globally with the view to advocate it for all children as a deserving right. We also promote the adoption of the authentic Montessori approach by the traditional education system, which is already a growing trend in the United States and a few other countries. It is the best educational method as it places children in the centre of their education and exposes how society has been misunderstanding and neglecting their true nature since time immemorial.

The website was created to provide teachers, administrators, student teachers, and parents with the necessary information and

insights to help them expand and deepen their Montessori horizons. It aims to achieve this vision by featuring weekly articles, greatly derived from the book (but much more). We are hereby striving to make the book available to a larger population by publishing the content in a more digestible format. The website intends to expand the theoretical knowledge and practical experiences into usable resources in the form of lesson plans, sensory activities, practical ideas, and lots more.

The Montessori lesson plans are designed to enable the teacher to be well prepared to aid the student through his/her learning process. No two students will master the lesson objectives at the same time; thus, it is important for the educator to be a good observer, flexible, and in touch with each student's needs. When a child combines Montessori-designed materials with sensorial work, it helps them become more logical, perceptive, and aware. Dr. Montessori developed the concept of sensorial work long before sensory play was put into practice. In Montessori philosophy, the child is considered the 'sensorial explorer' and learns to perceive qualities through sensorial experiences.

In addition to the downloadable resources, the site also provides a comprehensive checklist outlining the fundamentals of what to consider when deciding on the Montessori school that will suit your child's needs best. The site also provides opportunities to acquire your own state-of-the-art Montessori equipment for home and school. In the near future, the website plans to provide visitors with the opportunity to design their own Montessori homerooms with state-of-the-art furniture and equipment. Should you desire to establish your own Montessori institution, the site provides a unique business plan adaptable to your needs and requirements.

The website also supports a freebie policy not only limited to lesson plans but also other essential Montessori-related resources.

The website intends to build a community of like-minded Montessori enthusiasts by means of a forum, where any concerns, thoughts, suggestions, experiences, etc. can be shared. In short, it aims to plough a fertile breeding ground for ideas for anyone, both guests and members, to plant healthy seeds in.

An integral component of the website is the blog. It is updated on a weekly basis providing unique and multi-faceted insights into the Montessori approach in addition to addressing any queries or concerns that may have arisen within the forum.

A tab labelled News and Stories will bestow the viewers with Montessori-related news on a global scale. It's a remarkable feature that will enable all viewers with access to some of the latest Montessori news and stories in a single click.

To provide a form of light entertainment, the site gives you access to quizzes, which start off with basics of Montessori education and gradually delve into the depths of the Montessori approach. They will allow you to test and share your knowledge on social media.

Last but not least, the co-author of the book, Leon G. Caesar, who is also the co-founder of the website, has granted all visitors a free downloadable copy of his science-fiction novel *Timecrunch: The Trails of Death*, a philosophical novel about both the ugliness and beauty of humanity. The novel, *Timecrunch: The Trails of Death*, is there for the sole purpose of providing a source of entertainment on demand. This book is not really off the mark at all because we are sure the ideal society typified in it is the kind of society spoken about a lot by Madame Montessori.

This is our invitation to you to join the Youmemontessori family. The journey ahead is exciting and adventurous. Take that first step.

Mustafa Hassan and Sertel Djelal

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