



Dear Members

As Chairperson I would like to invite you to celebrate St. Nicholas Night on Friday 3rd December 2010 at St. Nicholas House Dunlaoghaire for an evening of Christmas music, finger food, refreshments and an Art & Craft demonstration given by Lisa of Wee Play and Learn. I look forward to meeting you there- put the date in your diary! The highlight of St. Nicholas Montessori Society of Ireland's 40th Anniversary Celebration was the Conference held in April 2010. Hope you enjoy some of the photographs.

Kate Gray

Chairperson St Nicholas Montessori Society of Ireland



NCIP Project

St. Nicholas Montessori Society of Ireland promotes the education of children according to the philosophy of education of Dr Maria Montessori and is dedicated to the promotion of quality Montessori Preschools programmes in Ireland. The priorities in the implementation plan 2010 are to provide support and mentoring to Montessori Preschool teachers and the certification of Montessori Preschools programmes by onsite visits and the ongoing provision of information and professional development. The workshops, seminars and network meetings are very well attended and the evaluations of these events request their continuance and suggest area for further support. Onsite visits to Montessori Preschools support Montessori teachers in improving the quality of their Montessori preschool programme. The feedback from these visits confirms their value to Montessori Preschool teachers and certification confirms the attainment of a standard of quality.

Frances Carr, The Old Schoolhouse Montessori School, Lucan, Co. Dublin gives an insight into her experience of a mentoring visit to her Montessori Preschool.

MENTORING VISIT- As another school year came to an end, I decided it was time to take a fresh look at the classroom and see if some improvements could be made. Over the eight years my Montessori school has been in operation, I recognised that things could have become a bit jaded, and that sometimes we move things around and as time passes they stay there and we can't remember why we put them there in the first place. So I called St Nicholas Montessori Society to ask for some advice and it was suggested to me that a visit from a mentor might be a good idea. I readily agreed and looked forward to this visit, but yet was a bit concerned. Would the school be found lacking in some way? Would any changes recommended be very costly? Would I agree with the mentor? And what happens if I don't agree? I was also a little worried that I was in for a lecture. Well, fear not.

Dara Tighe called to see me at the school in mid-July. What a lovely sunny lady she was. Instantly, I felt at ease. Here was someone I felt I could talk 'with' as opposed to being spoken 'to'. Dara captured in an instant the disarray in my layout that had built up over time; nothing major but little things that could change the whole flow of the classroom. She walked around the room with me, shelf by shelf, and made suggestions for a cleaner, smoother layout. She gave me ideas for adding to some of the activities on my shelves, e.g. in language and culture. She suggested that I create 'areas' within the classroom for the various parts of the Montessori programme. By turning a shelf out from the wall (so the side of the shelf was to the wall rather than the back of the shelf), the practical life area became enclosed (like a room within the room), and the classroom took on a whole new look. The sensorial area now has lots of floor space directly beside it for working on mats, whereas before there were tables there and the children had to walk around them to get to the floor space. And so she continued in this vein. An update and more advice on the records that need to be kept in the school finished the session. Practically no financial outlay was needed and I feel like I have a whole new classroom as school begins again next week. I would strongly recommend to anyone who feels that their classroom could do with an uplift to consider the mentoring programme offered through St Nicholas.

Thanks to Frances for this feedback. I would like to also thank Mary Nestor, Maureen Leonard Dodd and Niamh Wallace the other Mentors on the Team. Welcome to Daragh Bennett who has recently joined St Nicholas Society Ireland as Administrator.

Mina Walsh Team Leader NCIP Project

St Nicholas Montessori College of Ireland

All students have now settled into the new academic year.

The HETAC (Higher Education and Training Awards Council) Institutional Review process is in progress and the preparation is well underway for the presentation of a new suite of programmes to HETAC for validation to commence in September 2011.



The implications for our graduates of the Teaching Council Registration Regulations 2009 are also being addressed. Each new academic year brings new challenges for all in the education sector.

I would like to take this opportunity to send to all students, teachers, staff members and members of the Society my best wishes for a very productive and successful academic year, as you continue to advocate best practice in Montessori Education.

June Hosford

Director St Nicholas Montessori College of Ireland

RELECTIONS

As teachers, it's always good to look back on our own experience of being taught, and to ask, how does my experience inform my present practice as a teacher? With this in mind, I'm going to look at a few episodes or critical incidents in my education and see what I have learned from them.

Overall, I would say I enjoyed school most of the time. The first years in primary were difficult because of a violent teacher. Nobody complained about this teacher, but I developed asthma and my parents, without complaining, took me out of that school and sent me to the local national school. Here, I was happy, and learned quickly, but over the years I became extremely good at doing what I was told and not questioning or taking initiative. I had a lot of information but I certainly wasn't a self-motivated learner. So when I went to secondary school, I was ill-equipped to deal with new subjects and new routines. I yearned for the simplicity of doing what the teacher told me to do. In secondary school, there were too many teachers and they all wanted something different and I didn't understand. One teacher told me to get a notebook. I bought a notebook in the local shop. It was about 6 inches long and four inches wide. It was the only kind of notebook that I knew. My teacher then gave out to me because he wanted one that was 10 by 8. Why didn't he say so? As teachers, at every level, we must be clear about what we want the learners to do, and we must be patient, when learners don't understand.

We often talk about readiness to learn among learners; we should also talk about readiness to help in the teacher, and we should also encourage peer learning and teaching, as Montessori did. Most of the help I got from peers in primary and secondary school was given illicitly; it still seems incredible to me that we were forbidden to help each other, but we were.

I remember a music class in secondary school. The teacher showed us how to do counterpoint (I think). Then he gave us exercises to do, and put on a record of Beethoven's Pastoral, quite loud. I hadn't a clue. There were notes on a staff and you had to put other notes below them but I had no idea how to do it. I asked for help from the teacher. He sat down beside me, explained the process again and walked away again. I still didn't understand.

I remember two things: blaming myself for not understanding, and wishing that the music wasn't so loud. It's a bit ironic that the music in the room was so loud that I couldn't understand the music on the page! Another way of saying that is that if the child doesn't understand, shouting isn't going to help.

As teachers, we cannot blame the child for not learning: we take upon ourselves the responsibility of finding a different way to help each child to learn, and, in general, of creating optimum learning conditions for every child. If the music had been turned down, I would probably have had a better chance of understanding, but I also needed a teacher who could observe exactly how I learned and exactly where I was stuck.

Reflecting on our own education is always worthwhile. If we had good experiences – and most of us had some – we remember them. If our experiences weren't good, we can learn from them by considering how things should have been back then. We can also shed any negative feelings we retain for the teachers who oppressed us. We cannot know for certain, but, however bad they were, they were probably doing their best.

Michael O'Connor, Lecturer, St Nicholas Montessori College

ST. NICHOLAS SCHOOL NEWS

Our 2009-2010 school year was brought to a close with the 9-12 year old class celebrating EU Day on the 9th May.



The 6-12 year olds enjoyed a trip to W5 Science Museum in Belfast while the 3-6 year classes visited Glenroe Farm in Wicklow.

Our new school year began on 1st September, 2010.

We are delighted to welcome our assistants Niamh Cotter, Nicky Doyle, Sinéad Moroney and Eduardo Ascencio-Lane for the coming year



We begin our first full year as part of the Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme with 15 out of 78 children participating in this scheme. During the summer the teachers refurbished the classroom for 9-12 year olds in a similar style to that undertaken over the past two years.



Since the beginning of term our new pupils have all settled in and are working happily. The whole school are enjoying the weekly Music, PE and French lesson while pupils in the 6-9 year old and 9-12 year old classes are also enjoying outdoor activities of Hockey, Football and Rounders. Hopefully the weather will continue to facilitate these outdoor activities.

Noreen Tierney Principal, St Nicholas Montessori School

THE ART OF OBSERVATION

As the beginning of a new term it is always good to reflect on the words of Dr. Montessori in order to refresh our approach to the fundamental points which illustrate her method. In this, her third lecture, she illustrates the importance of developing 'The Art of Observation'.

SOME SUGGESTIONS AND SOME REMARKS UPON THE METHOD OF OBSERVING

Course 1951, Lecture 3, Dr. Maria Montessori

The Art of Observation Requires Preparation

It would seem as though to know how to observe was very simple and did not need any explanation; perhaps you think it will be sufficient to be in a classroom in a school and to look and see what happens. But to observe is not as simple as that.

Any methodical observation which one wishes to make requires preparation. Observation is one of those many things of which we frequently speak, and of which we form an inexact or false idea. It should be sufficient to consider what occurs in all the sciences which depend upon observation. The observers in the various sciences must have a special preparation. For instance, one who looks through a microscope does not see what exists there unless his eye is prepared. It is not sufficient to have the instrument and to know how to focus it; it is also necessary to have the eye prepared to recognize the objects. Thus we might say in this case that a sensorial preparation is necessary. When Fabre describes his observation of insects, he really gives us a description of his long and patient preparation for observation; and he also describes the virtues and attributes, necessary to acquire in order to be able to observe. He must forget himself, and he must be at the service of the insects. He must rise in the morning at the hour when the insects begin to move. He tells us that he was very fond of smoking and yet he puts away his pipe, for fear that the smell of the smoke might affect their manifestations.

Then, should there not also be a preparation in order to observe the child? Perhaps the scarcity of observations made upon children is due to the lack of preparation for such observations.

Fundamental Points

For this reason, I should like before you begin your observations to give you some of the principal and fundamental points which illustrate what I have just said. These points, with which I begin, are not in relation to that which you have to observe, but are in relation to the observer himself. Obviously, those who observe children must not disturb them because the purpose of the observation is to see what the children are doing, independent of our presence. The observer should remain absolutely silent and motionless. You will say that this is extremely easy of accomplishment and that everyone knows how to do that; but that is not the case. Many times you will be tempted to show your admiration or your annoyance; or you will be tempted to communicate your impressions to your neighbour. Thus we find ourselves faced by a real exercise; an exercise which we may call an exercise of conscious immobility, directed by our will-power. This will also be one of the most valuable exercises to prepare students as educators in this method; because the first thing the teacher has to learn is to master himself/herself, and to remain motionless beside the child.

Controlling Our Impulses

While you are observing the children try to imagine that you are in the position of the teacher who is directing the class and try to examine yourself introspectively. Try to think how many times under certain conditions, you would have been tempted to go to the assistance of a child, or would have stepped forward to prevent something happening, which to you appeared harmful. How often you would think, "Oh, the teacher has not noticed that," and how many impulses you would have to step forward were you free. Also, notice how many times you would have the impulse to tell your neighbour to notice something which seems interesting to you. You might try to count all those inner impulses, and thus you will be able to measure the distance which lies between you as you now are the time when you will be a perfect observer. This quiescence is something which is extremely difficult for some people, and much easier for others. It is so difficult for some people that we have to concede some preparatory exercises to induce immobility; but even these exercises are not always sufficient. So we suggested to some teachers that they should tie themselves with cord to a stationary article of furniture! We are so accustomed to abandon ourselves to our own impulses, we are so convinced that our actions are always useful to others, so certain that we can do well that which others do badly, so sure that we can perfect that which is imperfect. And because, in the world, these impulses are considered good impulses we have never performed exercises in order to control them. No doubt, from one point of view, these feelings are good, because they show a desire to help others; but on the other hand they also spring from pride. In relation to the child, they are feelings which come from the difference which exists between the child's development and our own. That which we see the child doing with great effort we can do easily, and so we have the impulse to do the thing ourselves instead of letting the child do it, because we do it so much more quickly and efficiently. When we see the child struggling so hard to do a thing which is so difficult for him and would be so easy for us we have the impulse to help him.

Consequences of Wrong Interruptions

Consider what would have happened had Fabre felt these good impulses towards insects? Let us imagine Fabre watching an insect carrying a large ball which it has taken to the summit of a little mound. The insect allows the ball to roll down and is obliged to begin its journey all over again. What would have been the result had Fabre tried to solve this difficulty by picking up the ball and helping the insect? It is true he would have removed the effort from the insect but he would have destroyed a science.

If we wish to observe the child, we must observe. If we see that he is working with great effort and difficulty and if we see that it takes him a long time to do what we could do very easily, then we are observing; that is the observation. If there is a difficulty which is perfectly apparent to us, but which the child does not see, we leave him thus, and that is our observation. >>>>>>

How Can We Control Our Impulses?

I suggested to some teachers that they should wear a belt with beads attached and then to draw a bead along every time they have an impulse to interfere. This is very useful, because when we have an impulse we must act; and the reactions with the bead is a help. From day to day, one would make observations upon oneself in this way, until one came to the point of not having to draw any more beads. Then we should find that we have acquired a great calm and sense of repose, and perhaps we should have become transformed within. At any rate, we should have learned the following: that almost all these impulses to action are unnecessary. We shall find that by means of effort, the child, although he takes a long time and does the thing with difficulty, yet succeeds in the end, and finally perceives the error which at first he did not see. If we had acted we should not have been able to observe all this; and it is evident that the child would have lacked the opportunity to accomplish that work by means of his own force.

Develop a Positive Attitude

Perhaps at first this will give you a feeling of discouragement. You may feel that if you do not conquer yourself you will be useless and perhaps an obstacle in the way of the child. But in this moment of discouragement it will be a great consolation to us to discover that the child has within himself far greater powers than we had imagined. Perhaps from that moment will be born within us an intense interest in the child. A small and humble exercise of control may grow into a great power of meditation, meditation upon the misunderstanding which exists today between the child and the adult. The adult intends to help the child but is instead a hindrance, only placing obstacles in his way. He acts from love but in error and is only harming the beloved. Thus we begin to have the first vision of this liberation of the soul of the child, which can only be obtained by the adult being willing to pay the price, which is to refrain from substituting himself for the child. There is another principle of observation, which we may call physiological and that is when you are observing one child you must not, because of that, cease from observing all the children. We know that the vision is exact and direct towards one point; but at the same time we have a vast field of vision. It is not easy to bring our attention to all those things which we see indirectly. When one is looking at one person in a group, one must not let the whole consciousness become absorbed by that one person.

Preparation of the Teacher

At the same time all those things which enter into our field of vision must be followed consciously by an act of will; and this is an exercise of our will

which must be repeated many times. You can imagine a teacher having to run from one child to the other, observing first one and then the next. Instead we must prepare a person who will be calm, serene but strong, who knows how not to dominate by her observation everything which occurs. This is observation. She must know how to look and how to master her own impulses and to wait. She must be a person having a high grade of virtue, viz, patience. All great observers are fundamentally people having great patience. And here, as in all other cases where observation is necessary, if this does not exist very strongly and we are not prepared the phenomenon for which we wait will not take place. If we were prepared in early childhood for something which developed his attribute, we should naturally be patient and have control of ourselves; we should be stronger than we are not. We should not suffer from that which is so noticeable today, boredom or tiredness of observing.

As you know, boredom is a form of fatigue and the person who observes patiently without feeling bored has acquired an inner strength which must be acquired through exercise. Thus one of the first exercises will be to attend a class of children; to be silent and motionless; to try not to let yourself be carried away by the actions of one child, but to try to see the whole class.

Object of Observation

Naturally, in order to observe we must have something which is worth observing, and we must know what it is that has value as an object of observation. You must also realize that something which is obviously interesting, does not need a great deal of preparation in order to observe it. But we have to be prepared to observe phenomena which are not obviously interesting. Otherwise, what would happen to those observers who are waiting, let us say, for an egg to hatch? Or who wait for physiological phenomenon, not knowing exactly when it will take place? We are entering into a noble field, because we are following in the first steps of the path which leads to science and is the beginning of that which will make us scientists.

Recommended Reading:

[The Formation of Man The Advanced Montessori Method Vol. I, Chapter III](#)

[The Advanced Montessori Method Vol. I, Chapter IV](#)

Member's Meeting 2010



Transforming Ireland

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