



Message from the SAMA President

Dear Parent,

As winter sets in now and most children are at home for the winter holidays, I am reminded of a strong message from a talk by Paul Epstein at our recent conference (Why “good job” breeds “bad job”) on being unconditional with children without diminishing or judging their efforts, and how, as parents and teachers, we unknowingly encourage co-dependence in our children.

How independent are any of us? And what is the importance of independence? As parents we know and value its importance. Yet while we all may try to support physical independence, are we backing this up with the language that we use for emotional and psychological independence? We have given a link here to Alfie Kohn’s website. He has written extensively on the issue and his books and articles are worth reading and sharing. Our school recently held a parent evening at which we discussed this topic; I have added the notes in this newsletter for further clarity and reading.

An appreciative thank you goes to our executive committee, which took time out over the weekend of 24 and 25 May to work through a strategy for strengthening SAMA. This will help to make sure we continue to bring what is important to our member schools and support Montessori in South Africa. Harris Gordon facilitated a fabulous learning experience, and we are grateful for his guidance.

While we may wish to hibernate through the cold, please keep the Montessori fires burning.

Warm regards

Jacky



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EXTRINSIC REWARDS AND MOTIVATION

“The prize and the punishment are incentives towards unnatural or forced effort, and therefore we certainly cannot speak of the natural development of the child in connection with them.”

Maria Montessori



I can do it!

By Nicky Rodseth

As Montessori teachers and parents we are keenly aware that it is vital to foster children's independence. Independence is, after all, one of the key tenets of Montessori practice. Fostering independence is really important as when children are given opportunities to do things for themselves they become confident and develop a can-do attitude and believe in themselves and their abilities. This feeds their self-esteem and allows children the self-belief to try new tasks and succeed in those. It creates a habit of perseverance and eventually a whole history of success.

As parents, we often help our children where it is unnecessary, for example, some of us cannot refrain from picking up and carrying our children in and out of school when they are quite capable of walking. We disempower them further by constantly carrying their bags, juice bottles etc. And yet...as parents, we only want the very best for our children. We are not intending harm but are rather acting out of love and out of habit. Breaking habits is difficult and that is our challenge both as teachers and parents. If you share these concerns with me I think you may find the following observations helpful

Laurie Adams of the Vancouver Montessori School shares these insights. (http://oregonmontessori.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/parenting_laurieadams_Fostering-Independence20130207.pdf)

A child's sense of independence can be hindered in a variety of ways. For many adults, "doing things for our children" is associated with loving them. In many families, both parents are working. It can seem more efficient to dress the child, clean up after him, and have fewer expectations of him. Doing too much for children is a challenging frame of mind to change. Following are some examples of how we unintentionally hinder our child's developing independence.

- Doing too much for the child when developmentally they are capable.
- Speaking for the child.
- Not inviting verbal or physical collaboration.
- Not showing the child how to do things (put own pants on, sweep the floor, pour milk).
- Not allowing the child time to develop their skills/coordination and doing it for them.
- Not having an environment that promotes their growing capabilities.
- Not setting appropriate limits, boundaries and expectations for behaviour.

It is often so much easier and faster to just "do it for the child". Sometimes this is practical and necessary. However, when we regularly do too much for children, they can become dependent on us to do it for them". Their innate need for growing independence and caring for themselves can be stifled. When this happens, they may expect to be taken care of or stubbornly refuse to do things they are otherwise capable of.

In learning to care for themselves, much practice and unstructured time is needed on the child's part. The adult must offer a great deal of patience along with offering just enough assistance for success.

Some areas of self-care to consider are:

- Dressing self
- Wiping nose
- Cleaning hands and face before/after eating
- Brushing teeth
- Brushing hair
- Putting clothing in laundry hamper by self
- Folding and putting clean laundry away
- Choosing own clothing—preferably choosing from two or three outfits laid out before hand
- Packing/unpacking lunch bag
- Wiping up spills
- Using toilet
- Cleaning up after activities
- Clearing place setting after meals
- Preparing food for self

**The environment
that most children
live in is furnished
and functions
efficiently for
adults.**

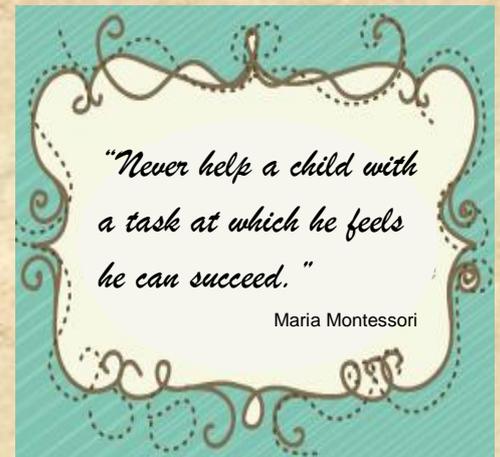
Children often have their play area, but they must adapt to the rest of the home. To best understand your child's needs, sit on the floor—at your child's height—and consider what hinders or challenges your child?

Some things to consider:

- Can your child reach the sink and toilet by his/her self?
- Is the cupboard clothing rod at his/her shoulder level?
- Are baskets/shelving available to store their belongings?
- Is there a small table/chair available for work (drawing, food preparation, playing)?
- When does my child have to wait for me to help them or to get something for him/her?
- Simplify your child's belongings.
- Which playthings aid your child's development and which ones are simply pacifying?
- What engages your child's attention?
- Too many toys are overwhelming for children and adults.

Care of Self, It is often so much easier and faster to just "do it for the child". Sometimes this is practical and necessary. However, when we regularly do too much for children, they can become dependent on us to "do it for them".

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Positive Discipline Ideas

By Jacky Price

These notes were put together to support our families in understanding and supporting children in a Montessori classroom and to bridge the classroom with home.

You often hear in Montessori speak; 'no rewards or punishments', this is another term for *intrinsic motivation* as opposed to *extrinsic motivation*.

As we know motivation is what pushes us along to learn and explore our world, make sense of it and to learn.

INTRINSIC MOTIVATION:

"I want to do this"

EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION:

"someone wants me to do it"

You will not find stars, stickers, detention, demerits or pizzas for reading programmes and so on. Teacher evaluation is invisible to children. They will receive matter of fact notes like, "you need a comma here" or "is that a good choice" or "is there anything else you could add to your research project".

If you think about babies, they naturally learn with no motivation what so ever, their learning and development is innate, they need no external encouragement to explore and grow. .. So what changes throughout childhood, why do we constantly hear about how difficult it is to get our children to cooperate, help out and be motivated to learning? Why do we see their enthusiasm for learning decline over the years when they start in the preschool with much energy and verve to want to learn without any ask? You do not see a four year old boy with a "motivational deficit"

Maria Montessori saw that there were certain characteristics that make us human. Depending on our individual natures, sensitive periods of learning or different psychological characteristics, the following activities or tendencies define us as human. At various points in human development, certain tendencies appear stronger.

These tendencies include: activity, belonging, becoming, exploration, orientation, order, communication, imagination, exactness, repetition and perfection.

Human beings need to be involved in meaningful activities. They need to feel a sense of becoming. Human beings need to feel that they belong. They need to explore the world and create order and make sense out of the chaos around them. We need to communicate to others. We use our imaginations. We work at exactness. We learn using repetition. We yearn for perfection.

What happens then when the love of learning, doing, belonging, repetition etc is diminishing?

I come back to intrinsic motivation which we all have. We want children to do thing of their own accord, because they want to, not because we say so. We do not coerce the children with stars, stickers or endless “well done!” praise.

In our classroom the child’s feedback to themselves through control of error which are built into the design of the materials and the classroom. Constantly pointing out a child’s mistake de-motivates them. It is unnecessary and they do not self-regulate when you constantly tell them how and what to do. A child knows that when they have dropped something that they have spilled, they do not need to be told to be careful and shamed for their mistake.

Not giving endless praise or criticism may seem foreign to us who have only experienced our world in this way and you may question why not give PRAISE for a job well done.

Giving endless praise creates co-dependence. We reward for every little thing you children do without giving any real feedback to the actual tasks itself.

“You drew a squiggle you are so clever! You drew a circle you are so clever! You drew a picture, you are so clever!” Really I am clever?

We hand out praise pats constantly with no real feedback. It is habitual and has no impact. We see it as over indulgence, grade inflation, helicopter parenting, excessive focus on self-esteem and handing out trophies to all participants.

Children are praised for things they that they ought to do because they have been told to do them. It is an exercise in sugar coating control.

We all know that children behave to get the things they want? Why? Because good behaviour gets rewarded. This we call conditional love.

All children want to be loved **unconditionally**, to know that they will be accepted even if they mess up or fall short. Yet conventional approaches to parenting such as punishments (including time-outs), rewards (including positive reinforcement) and other forms of control teach children that they are loved only when they please us or impress us. Much damage is done when children grow up thinking that they have to earn our approval. This is a common discipline technique and not necessary the message we intend to send.

What praise does to our children:

It manipulates them to perform to our wishes. Works for a short time while you are still in the room and takes advantage of their dependence on us.

Creates “praise” junkies –children rely on adult evaluations instead of forming own judgement.

Decreases interest children deserved to delight in their own achievements instead of being judged.

Reduces achievement a pressure to continue to perform and keep up the good work, tend to become unsure of their ability, fear that they may not receive positive feedback and start to resist challenging tasks.

We explore and change the language we use: we go from

person praise e.g. “you are a good girl, I’m very proud of you, you’re good at this.” This is vague and general praise.

To

Positive, specific feedback – which is related to the child’s efforts and gives real encouragement on the behaviour and actual task.

Thus creating a flexible mindset confronts their weaknesses and takes on challenges.

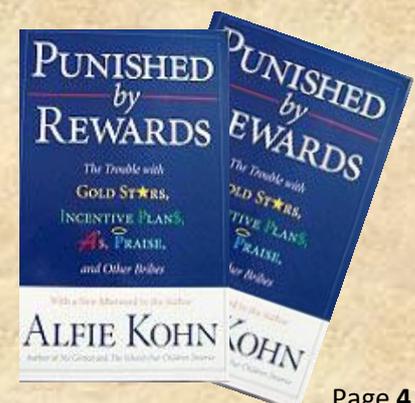
How?

- Describe your child’s behaviour and effort.
- Say what you see
- Keep it simple, evaluation free
- Pay positive attention to appropriate behaviour
- Avoid praise for low-challenge tasks
- Take care when giving praise after failure or mistakes. You do not want to convey pity.
- Be sincere
- Reduce the amount
- Provide for natural consequences

For further reading:
<http://www.alfiekohn.org/parenting/gj.htm>

Punished by Rewards

The Trouble with Gold Stars, Incentive Plans, A's, Praise, and Other Bribes
(Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993 / 1999)



GIVE SELECTIVE, SPECIFIC AND POSITIVE FEEDBACK

PRAISE	POSITIVE FEEDBACK
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Indiscriminately given to all children as every child is given a gold star at the end of the game. <input type="checkbox"/> Is general-overuse of 'pat phrases' and often delivered mechanically 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Is selective: directed to an individual child or small group dependent on a specific behaviour <input type="checkbox"/> Is descriptive and specific – provides explicit feedback about the behaviour or the rule reinforced and delivered with a natural and neutral but enthusiastic voice
Examples of praise:	Examples of positive feedback:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> "good job" <input type="checkbox"/> "great stuff" <input type="checkbox"/> "You are such a nice boy Thomas" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>You put all the lids back on the kokis. Now they won't dry out, thank you.</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>"Gina, you remembered to put your hand on my shoulder while waiting to talk to me." That way I could finish talking to Amy before listening to you."</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>"Thomas, I noticed you shared the trucks with Rosie today."</i>
<p>Makes negative comparisons or encourages competition between children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> "Tommy you are the best runner!" <input type="checkbox"/> "You are the best helper." 	<p>Avoids comparison or competition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> "Tommy you run so fast now!" <input type="checkbox"/> "You helped Mel clean up all the puzzles."
<p>Use evaluative words like good, beautiful or focuses on the end product.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> "What a beautiful picture." <input type="checkbox"/> "You are a good reader." 	<p>Focuses on an improvement of process rather than evaluation of a finished product.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> "You painted a long time using lots of blue paint." <input type="checkbox"/> "You are learning to read lots of new words."
<p>Relies on external rewards or approval of teacher.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> "you took turns with the tricycle today. Here is a lollipop/sticker." <input type="checkbox"/> "I like the way you worked together." <input type="checkbox"/> "Well done!" 	<p>Links behaviour to their own enjoyment and satisfaction or to the effect on another person.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>You took turns with the tricycle today."</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>"You and Sammy had lots of laughter and fun with the game you played."</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>"Look at Cindy's face. She looks happy that you gave her a turn."</i>

"The child, in fact, once he feels sure of himself, will no longer seek the approval of authority after every step."

Maria Montessori

Montessori Alumni



I came from a 6-9 small private primary school Usutu Forest primary in Swaziland into a mainstream government primary school; after one year my Montessori journey finally started. I was 11 years old and loved the Montessori way of

teaching as it drew me out of my shell because my previous experience had left me feeling insecure. The Montessori Method provided materials for me to do so. The guidance I found was within myself and a few other important individuals that I thankfully met along the way. Montessori provided me with an environment where I could discover my strengths and eventually become the student I am today, which is focused, diligent, determined and academically orientated. I push myself hard and strive to achieve well academically, the emotional support in my junior years helped me gain the confidence I needed to face up to challenges and never thought initially were possible. I am currently completing my Grade 11 and 12 in a private college and the next step would be University.

What is the most important thing that you learned at your Montessori school?

It taught me to find confidence within myself and forced me to become an independent learner.

What does a Montessori education mean to you the graduate?

I believe that the Montessori education is unique in that it broadens your horizons and nearly every aspect of life. The primary system particularly was good in helping me discover my strengths and full potential and always to acknowledge where my weaknesses were.

What has being in a Montessori environment taught you?

Montessori has taught me to never give up. The system accepts uniqueness. It shows all-encompassing acceptance of the individuality of the student hence the system grows around the learner and does not force the learner to mould into the system.

How did the Montessori environment most affect you?

In my primary years Montessori drew me out of my shell for it taught me that I could conquer any obstacle and I was happy in my primary years, free of judgement.

Nurturing the curiosity in your children

By Tom Maydon, parent at Stepping Stones Montessori

It's said that children are natural scientists- not necessarily in understanding the world around them, but rather in their insatiable attitude to explore, to test, to question. It's this instinctive curiosity that often sadly leaves them as they grow up. Einstein famously said that the greatest gift bestowed on him was not retention of knowledge or a capacity of understanding complicated concepts, but rather curiosity.

Nurturing a child's curiosity was certainly not lost on Maria Montessori; in fact it is one of the core tenets of the philosophy. The Montessori way encourages children to explore, in their own way, at their own pace, independently. It has been shown that children in a main stream environment when forced to learn at the same pace as others and in a clinical manner often lose that spark – the love of learning. This has been recognised for centuries.

The Greek writer Plutarch once said, *"The mind is not a vessel to be filled, but a fire to be kindled."*

Fundamental to all of this are our roles as parents. We are there to kindle this fire of curiosity. As parents we *should* be taking our children into nature regularly or taking them to museums. At home we *should* involve them in art, cooking and gardening. We *should* have our home set up with activities that allow our children to learn and discover. We *should* set up bookshelves and fill them with books allowing our children to explore the world around them. It is within these environments that our children will flourish.

These days there are countless resources on this subject. I recently came across this excellent website which has some tips and tricks for bringing Montessori into the home.

www.giftofcuriosity.com