

Classroom Tendencies: An Exhausting Joy by Julia Volkman



One of the great discoveries made by Maria Montessori was that all humans have certain tendencies or behavioural patterns.

No matter where we live, no matter our culture or ethnicity, we all follow the same natural laws that lead us to act or react in a specific manner. We are all driven to communicate, socialise, imitate, explore (we are curious), move, be exact/precise, concentrate, repeat, maintain/discover order, achieve independence, realise perfection/control errors/improve ourselves, control ourselves (physically, intellectually, emotionally) and work.

These are the ways in which we are all similar. They unite us as a species.

As Montessorians, our goal is to set up classrooms that accommodate these tendencies.

In practice, the demands of our duties outside the classroom often prevent us from doing all that we would

like. And yet, when we are unable to make time to work on our classrooms, the children are less peaceful and our jobs become more challenging.

In fact, it is the children's behaviour that tells us if something is amiss. This is how we know our environments need help: the physical space or logistical requirements get in the children's way. Their human tendencies are unable to fully manifest and concerning behaviours, like temper tantrums, excessive aggression or shyness and an inability to concentrate, become commonplace.

When we work with children who exhibit concerning behaviours, it can be useful to consider which of their human tendencies are being obstructed.

Are the children free to communicate, to socialise, to imitate, explore, move, concentrate, repeat, etc.?

Do our materials encourage movement, independence, precision?

Is there a logical and ordered way of using them?

Is the room organised and free from clutter?

Are our routines accessible?

Do our routines encourage or inhibit concentration?

As you observe in other classrooms and in your own, keep a list of the human tendencies handy. When you see concerning behaviour, look to the list. What is the behaviour's source? Is the difficulty within the child or with the child's inability to navigate through some complication in the environment or routine? Are the adults in the environment getting in the way?

Here are a few ideas to consider when you are ready to take stock of how your environment is working to promote the expression of the children's tendencies:

- Maintain what you have. The young child is obsessed with precision. If things are imprecise in the environment, s/he will notice (and often call it to your attention). It will distract him/her from focusing on the work. Could certain things use touch-up paint? Are your card materials bent or faded? Are your work rugs clean? Are your trays and containers appealing and sized for the work they contain? If everything needs maintenance, start with one shelf and continue on from there. Baby steps can be wonderful!
- Enhance beauty. When our environments are beautiful we inspire exploration and spark the children's interest. Does your environment include simple, yet attractive, adornments that inspire? Are your shelves crowded or do they present a feeling of spacious elegance? Are your plants thriving? Are your pets' quarters clean and appealing? Is there art hung at the child's eye level? Does the room feel airy, light, and inviting? Begin by removing the clutter...or at least by covering it up with a lovely piece of fabric.

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- Revisit your routines. The children must be allowed time and space to concentrate, repeat, move and socialise every day. Are you allowing the children a full three hours to focus on their work each day without interruption? Is group time optional for the youngest children or are you policing a circle? Can children work outdoors? Are the children inspired (not required) to assist in care of the classroom? Are grace and courtesy, poetry, music and joy a regular part of each day? Are the children free to help themselves and others? Is there enough time for this to happen?
- Look back to your training albums. The work we offer the children must meet their needs for logic, precision and self-discovery. If you have things on your shelves that are not written up in your albums, remove them for now. Work on beautifying and perfecting all of the basic work. Too many extensions are overwhelming to the child and can easily distract us from covering the basics...and they can really clutter up our shelves!

When we are ready to add other work to the classroom, we can make time to write up exactly how we will present it and then add that write-up to our albums.

We are overworked, underpaid, and exhausted and yet we can find a reserve within ourselves that gives us the energy to help the children in this way. Focus on the infrastructure of your space, your furniture, your materials and your routines. And then check back and look again.

Like the children, we too have a strong desire for self-perfection and improvement. By patiently observing ourselves, the children and the environment and responding with small and large adjustments, we honor our own humanity and our desire to offer the best world we can to the children...and we witness their breathtakingly beautiful true nature.

This is our work-an exhausting joy.

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THE E-ZINE FOR MONTESSORI PROFESSIONALS

informed



Hello

This is the first issue of the new-look Informed for 2008. Your thoughts will have returned to the 'world of Montessori'. You will be having interactions with the children in your classes, their parents and your colleagues.



There are ample opportunities in 2008 to reflect on your role in Montessori education.

This issue starts with an article about Adult Preparation.

Ana Pickering

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