

Preparation of the Guide

Henry M. Schantzen

Submitted to:

Michael Dorer

Center for Contemporary Montessori Education

September 25, 2007

Working as the guide in a Montessori environment requires a large amount of preparation. The guide is responsible for leading the students as they make discoveries in the prepared environment. In order to function as an effective guide, the adult must become educated in the methods and philosophies of Dr. Montessori. The guide must also undergo a transformation of self, consciously developing the ability to empower children while they are in the process of constructing themselves. This transformation takes place through diligent preparation. This preparation can be separated into five equally important categories; intellectual, physical, didactic, moral and spiritual.

The first category, which is the underpinning of the education of a Montessori guide, is the intellectual preparation. A guide should have a liberal background. The guide must be culturally literate in the place that he will be employed. Many things in the Montessori education revolve around the culture that the child is immersed in. The guide should be versed in social sciences such as history, geography, and anthropology. He must also be well versed in mathematics, particularly arithmetic and geometry. The guide must also be a master of his language. The ability to communicate clearly through speaking and writing, along with listening skills and knowledge of the grammatical rules of language are all necessities. The last part of this category is the knowledge of Montessori theory. Obviously, in order to succeed in the Montessori environment, the guide must be well versed in Montessori philosophies and methodologies.

The second category is that of physical preparation. The guide must have control of his own movement, as he will be modeling that movement for the children. The guide should move appropriately in the environment, and with a purpose. He must also have vocal control. A calm and soothing voice is desired, as an aid to the children.

Whispering is not desired, as it is damaging to vocal chords and tends to carry more than a soft, fully spoken voice. Physical flexibility is another necessity. Much of the work in a Montessori classroom is done on the floor, so a level of flexibility and agility are important. Control of the hand is another important aspect of the physical preparation of the adult. The hand will demonstrate the emphasis of movement to the child during a presentation. The hand should be slow moving and accurate, as the child will be expected to reproduce those movements.

Didactic preparation is the next category, which is the mastery of the subject materials. This means mastery of the prepared curriculum, how things are organized, presented, assessed and recorded, and that all concepts have materials designed for a specific purpose. The organization of materials in the room creates a sequence of development. We must remember to focus on the direct aim of each of the materials, to achieve the desired outcome. The presentation of the materials is also important, emphasizing the spatial relationship between the guide and the child, the manner of the presenter, and the slow, methodical nature of the presentation. The guide must model control. After the presentation, the guide must observe the child to assess what has been acquired from the presentation. Dr. Montessori suggests observing children as though they are of a foreign culture, so that we are objective and don't pollute the observation with our own egos. The child will show us whether or not the presentation has been effective, and we must carefully observe to assess their level of understanding.

Recording the work is the last step in this category. The guide must record the work of the child, and not rely on memory alone. Memory tends to be deceiving, but proper records will maintain an accurate account of the child's work.

Moral preparation is the fourth category in the preparation of a Montessori guide. The guide must adhere to the highest moral standards, as they are acting as a role model for the children. The guide must be truthful and honest, maintaining personal integrity at all times. He must also operate fairly and with a dedication to justice. The guide should also have a strong sense of confidence, stemming from knowledge of and love of self. The children need to see and feel that confidence, as the guide is the leader in the room. A belief in responsible freedom is essential for the guide. The children have the freedom to choose their work, held within a context of responsibility. The materials have specific uses, and those uses must be honored by the students. The guide must feel that the children have inherent worth. If the child is not viewed as valuable, the guide will not be able to aid that child in any way. The guide must also function with a sense of mutual respect and equity for all children. This can be viewed in the scope of whether or not the guide would bring his own child to the environment. Would the child be treated with respect, dignity, and equity? What about kindness and humanity? The guide must be able to address the mistakes made by children effectively, and recognize the advances they make at the same time. The guide is serving as a role model for the children, and must treat them correctly. Without the moral aspect of this method, the children will likely learn to dislike school, and suffer setbacks in their self-construction.

The fifth category is that of spiritual preparation, which is viewed as the kingpin of the guide's preparation. The guide must be free of any and all prejudices toward children, adults, materials, and all others. The guide should also have a strong sense of humility. The guide must remove his own ego from the equation, and develop humility. The guide cannot view the child as inferior, or himself as superior. Arrogance is the

enemy of the guide. The guide must also understand the dignity of children. It is the nature of childhood that allows us to develop into the adults that we are. We must be open to the perceptions of the child. The guide must also have faith that the child's true nature will be revealed, even if the child is presenting himself as naughty or disruptive. Many layers of the child may need to be worked through to reveal his true spirit, compared to the many layers of an onion, hiding within an outer shell. The guide must also revere the child, as he is constructing his personality. The child is truly creating himself, which is the greatest undertaking of his life. The child masters his culture in a few short years, including the use of his native language. This is an enormous undertaking. Finally, the guide must have a deep love of the child, and humanity in general. This love will fend off impatience, and allow the child to follow his own path of development.

The guide must actively undertake these preparations in order to successfully aid the child in his quest to construct himself. The child must be led to discoveries, and encouraged to explore, taking in all that he can through his senses. If the child is to succeed in his self construction, the guide must be prepared to lead the way, and know when to step aside and let the child work.

References

Dorer, M. (2006). *The preparation of the adult*. MediaSite Recording. St. Paul, MN: College of St. Catherine.