

Montessori Association of Tennessee

# **The Art and Science of Innovative Teaching**

Instructional Strategies That Empower Children  
To Achieve Higher Levels of Normalization

Jonathan Wolff

**The Art and Science of Innovative Teaching**  
Instructional Strategies That Empower Children  
to Achieve Higher levels of Normalization

Too often Montessori teachers resort to verbal reminders to help children get back on task, work with greater precision and accuracy, and behave more respectfully and responsibly. In this session we will examine a variety of creative instructional tools and techniques effective Montessori teachers employ to help children move to higher levels learning and social intelligence.

# **Metaphors That Tease the Imagination and Invite Transformation**

## **4 Types of Stories**

\* Object Lessons

\* Fables

\* Sagas of Human Potential

\* Personal History Tales

## Off-the-Shelf, Child-Directed Extensions of Storytelling

1. Keep the artifacts employed in the object lesson in the prepared environment.
2. Flannel board representations
3. Finger puppets representing characters in the story
4. Drawings, paintings, or photograph cards that depict the scenes/events in the story, for children to sequence and retell. The illustrations could also have matching text descriptions of various scenes.
5. Opportunities to draw, paint or sculpt scenes and characters in the story
6. Poetry exercises that retell the story in verse
7. Dramatic re-enactments of the story - audio and/or video taped
8. *“What do you think might have happened to the characters before the story began?” “What happened next after the story ended?”* (a whole or small group exercise; possibly off-the-shelf question cards for older students)
9. Exercises (whole or small group) in which the language is scaled down and made more understandable for younger children in the school - written, illustrated, told, read, or dramatically re-enacted for them
10. Converting the story into a play for students, parents, and/or the community-at-large to enjoy
11. Creating a mural showing the scenes and sequence of the story
12. *“If you were to take characters out of the story and have them join our classroom, which ones would help make our classroom peaceful, respectful, and happy? Is there a part of the story that, if we all behaved that way, our classroom would be a more peaceful, respectful, and happier place to be?”*

# Helping Students Affirm Their Intention To Improve Their Work Habits and/or Social Skills Through a Goal-Setting Exercise Known As “Cueing”

## Language Framing Examples

*“Today, during our work period, are you planning on doing more of your work and less talking to friends who are trying to work? Or are you planning on talking more than working?”*

If the child responds that he/she will try doing more work with less talking, respond, *“I want to thank you for helping everyone in our classroom do their work with talking less. This will really help everyone, including me.”*

If the child responds, *“I am not sure what I will do,”* or something less than a commitment to try, say something like, *“Well, if that’s what you think, then I am going to ask you to do your work over there at that one person table so both you and your friends can work without interruption.”*

*“Today during our outdoor recreation time, if one of your friends makes you angry by not doing what you want them to do, are you going to try to use words to tell them what you want and how you feel?” Or are you planning on using your hands to hit and hurt them?”*

If the child answers in the affirmative, respond, *“I want to thank you for using words instead of hands today. This will help keep everyone of us safe and happy.”*

If the child responds negatively or without a commitment to change, say something like, *“I don’t want you or anyone else in our class to get hurt because someone hit them. So I am going to ask you to sit with me for a while. Then we can talk about this again.”* (Later ask the child the same question as before about their choice of behavior.)

***“Ah Ha! I caught you doing something right!”***

Reinforcing Increments of Progress and Effort

*“The teacher must learn to appreciate and gather in all those tiny and delicate manifestations of the opening life in the child’s soul.”*

### **Exercise**

Bring to mind a child you have (or had) in your classroom who exhibits/exhibited learning engagement and/or behavior challenges. What would the *“tiniest”* increment of effort and progress look like? See and hear yourself giving this child positive feedback about their efforts or progress - as soon as possible BEFORE they default to old behavior pattern.

## **The Transformative Power of Appreciation, Acknowledgment, and Encouragement**

- I. ***“I am happy you are in my life.”***  
***“I am happy you are a member of our classroom.”***

Message: *“You are valued. You are a vital member of our family, classroom, or school community.”*

- II. ***“I love this about you \_\_\_\_\_.”***  
***“Your quality of, or ability to \_\_\_\_\_ is appreciated.”***

Message: *“I enjoy and am grateful for the qualities of character, gifts, and talents you share with us.”*

- III. ***“I see and appreciate the effort you are making.”***

Message: *“Your labors have not gone unnoticed. I see you working to improve yourself.”*

- IV. ***“I notice the progress you have made. I celebrate your gains.”***

Message: *“You are moving forward in your learning and life.”*

- V. ***“I am happy for what you have accomplished. I cheer your success!”***

Message: *“Congratulations! You have achieved your goal.”*

## ***Appreciation, Acknowledgment, Encouragement*** **Instructional Planning Exercise**

Make a list of the children in your classroom (or school) this year who need support and guidance in improving their work habits and/or social skills. Next to each child's name write a statement of appreciation, acknowledgement, or encouragement you could share with them that is genuine and heartfelt, based on what you have observed about their traits or talents, efforts, progress, or accomplishments. Refer to the *Appreciation Guide* on the prior page to help you come up with a variety of statements of positive feedback.



## The Brief Debrief

At the conclusion of the work period, play period, school day or week, review the work and/or behavior goals the child has set for herself/himself.

1. *“Can you call some times this when you chose to . . .”* (describe goal skill or behavior) “ The teacher can input this conversation: *“I saw you do . . .”*
2. *“Were there some times or situations that you could have done better to . . .?”* (restate goal behavior). *“What do you think about the time when . . . Do you think you could have made a choice to do this?”*
3. *“So tomorrow, if you were in this situation again (refer to #2 above) what would you do differently, that would be more respectful and helpful?”*

***Say It Ever!***

***Say It Never!***

\*

\*

\*

\*

\*

\*

\*

\*

\*

\*

\*

\*

\*

\*

\*

\*

\*

\*

