

## Montessori education and the cultivation of patience

There seems to be a universal (and ironic) cry of “God give me patience and give it to me now.” So how do we get or learn patience? First, you can’t teach patience because patience is a by-product of life and attitude. Just making people wait is not patience – more like endurance or aggravation. The attitude of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is “Now and Me.” What isn’t “Now” in our society? Televisions on, cell phones, computers, news, jet travel, microwaves and even instant oatmeal. The convenience is wonderful – the attitude is deadly. Anything that does not come “Now” and come easy is avoided. Yet, most things of life that have value take time – a baby being born, a skill learned to excellence, a marriage in its golden years.

How is this attitude of patience communicated to a three or four year old who is often the poster child of impatience? Indirectly! It is the diminution of impatience that leads to an increase of patience. (Hello! Is this supposed to be a kind of rocket science and a deep, deep insight?) Yes it is! Because impatience is also an attitude – “Me! Now!” Interestingly, a Montessori environment, with its individualization, could certainly be a representation of “Me! Now!” But because of its philosophy and operation, where there is only one Pink Tower or one Broad Stair, children have to wait their turn to use the apparatus. However, in the meantime there are other activities to fill in the time.

An exercise like perforating or picking (whether it is a geometric shape, a leaf or a map) establishes the ability to focus on an activity for an extended period of time. The three hour work cycle of a Montessori classroom provides a venue for extended work which is a major distinction to the rapid fire world of children’s television with its constantly changing focus.

The slower rhythm of a Montessori classroom lends itself to countering the impatience factor in all of us. There is an axiom in Montessori that says, “The slower you teach, the faster they learn.” The relaxed pace of the classroom lends itself to a stress reduced experience which in turn reduces the pressures that contribute to impatience. The cooperative nature of a Montessori program lends itself to a shared community experience. That experience reduces the stress and impatience of having to be first. Yet, it does not blunt the individual drive to excellence and mastery. Classmates do not become obstacles to your progress (unlike cars in traffic!) so the impatience factor is lessened because of the nature of the environment. The child also does not become impatient with him or herself. Learning – “steady as you go” – lessens stress and impatience because you are not competing with classmates or the clock. The nature of big or long lessons – in math, geography, botany etc. – give children a long view of life and learning. They become

accustomed to not being impatient knowing that the process is lengthy and that impatience accomplishes nothing to meet the goal.

The lessons of grace and courtesy also play a major part in the diminution of impatience. Grace and courtesy by its very definition says “you before me” whether it might be physically holding the door for someone, or not interrupting, or letting someone have a turn all set a pattern and creates a habit of dealing with impatience. Thus, Montessori becomes a unique laboratory for dealing with impatience. The building of attitudes, the structure of the workday, the rhythm of the classroom, the big lessons and grace and courtesy – though none of that has as its primary purpose the teaching of patience – its by product is the lessening of impatience and the growth of the habit of patience.

There should be Montessori classrooms for adults – “Right Now!”