

Building the Bridge of Trust

By John R. Snyder

Good Montessori elementary training is tough. There is so much to learn about the philosophy, the materials, the art of presentation, the preparation of the environment, learning to work from observation. Certainly those things are at the core of what distinguishes a Montessori guide from a good conventional teacher – what is taught, how it is presented and what supports are in place for the success of the enterprise.

Yet, all this is only about a third of what makes or breaks a new Montessori guide. There are two other vital aspects – parent relations and work habits – and it is actually in these two areas that we most often find guides getting into trouble and leaving the profession.

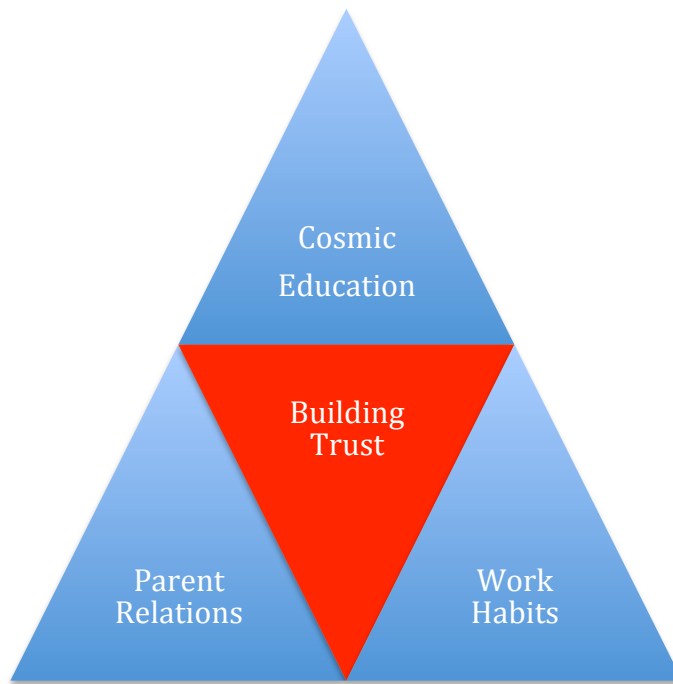
By *Parent Relations*, I mean everything that goes into the guide's relationship to the parents whose children are in their care or whose children will be in their care when they are of age. This encompasses formal communications such as parent education, parent conferences, children's progress reports, accident reports, memos about class activities, formal "thank you's," etc., as well as informal communications such as chatting at school events, daily hellos and goodbyes, informal "thank you's," routine phone calls, and so on.

By *Work Habits*, I mean everything that goes into being a successful worker (or professional, if you prefer that word). This encompasses working effectively with the school administration and your teaching and non-teaching colleagues; time management; self-evaluation and receiving the evaluations of others; pursuing continuing education; professional grace and courtesy (in communications, for example), and in personal presentation.

It is vital to see the Montessori teaching profession as comprising all three of these overlapping but distinct professional arts and not just as the work done in the prepared environment with the children. That way lies disaster, frustration, and potentially even the abandonment of the profession.

Cultivating good Parent Relations and Work Habits is every bit as important as knowing the Great Stories forwards and backwards and a good deal more important than, say, knowing the square root materials down to the last juicy detail. Yet, too many new guides see these non-curricular areas as "add-ons" or opportunities to take shortcuts whenever possible. Too bad for the children in their classes – these guides will always work under a cloud of suspicion and anxiety, missing much of the joy of the work.

Since these two areas are so important to our practice and our happiness as Montessori guides, I would like to explore them in some depth in my column this year, starting with a concept that is deeply connected both to good Parent Relations and Work Habits: *trust*.



Why is trust so important?

Trust is important to any profession or job, but much more so to professions in which one takes on tasks that represent real risks to the client. Surgeons. Lawyers. Airline pilots. Police. Therapists and clergy (because of privacy issues). Those who work for non-profit charities (because of financial risks/responsibilities). Teachers.

Constantly working to build trust is important because, in our work with children, it is inevitable that there will be difficult times when that trust is tested. At no time are perfectly reasonable people so irrational as when something is wrong with their children or when they perceive that their child is in some sort of danger. Feelings that arise at these times are deeply rooted in the biological imperatives of parenting. It was true of me as the parent of a growing boy, and I have seen it to be true of scores of parents in my community. Often, a strong history of trustworthy interactions is all that pulls you and the parents through.

So, people in "high-risk" professions need to go overboard to send signals of safety, competence, prudence, discretion, and reliability to those who depend on them. Entering one of these professions entails the giving up of certain personal prerogatives and the cultivation of certain personal disciplines. Moreover, because schools are collective endeavors, the actions of one person on staff can have serious consequences for the whole

enterprise – in a way that would not be true for employees of most business corporations. Schools, especially independent schools, definitely feel the effects of the “weakest link” phenomenon. I have seen enough damage done to individuals and schools to be willing to say that if one is not prepared to rethink one’s life through the lens of what builds trust, one should find a different line of work.

Looked at from the guide’s perspective, to work in the high-risk, high-stakes teaching profession when one does not have the trust of the parents and one’s colleagues is a truly miserable experience. Everything you do is questionable and questioned. Everyone is poised to put the worst possible spin on anything you do. Little everyday mistakes are blown out of proportion and seen as certain proof of your unworthiness, incompetence, or venality. Evidence of competence and trustworthiness will tend to be discounted or overlooked once it begins to be the cause for *cognitive dissonance* in those who have formed an opinion of you as untrustworthy and incompetent.

Cognitive dissonance is the foundational concept in social psychology that people will act to reduce the internal conflict they feel when simultaneously holding two contradictory ideas. One way we reduce cognitive dissonance is to filter out evidence for the idea we don’t want to keep holding. This can work for or against you as a guide, depending on whether you are giving others more evidence of your trustworthiness or the opposite.

Children pick up even the unspoken discomfort of their parents (and your discomfort around their parents) and may then begin to become difficult for you to work with, leading to even more anxiety in you and in the parents. This is the beginning of a negative spiral that not infrequently leads to the loss of a family for the school. When one family leaves, other families may be shaken. It’s not uncommon to see the exodus of several families during the first year or two of a new guide’s practice – and I speak from personal experience.

One doesn’t have to be perfect – most parents will give a new guide the benefit of the doubt, but first impressions do count for a lot, even with parents and staff who think they are above all biases and see everything objectively.

It is important to always keep in mind that parents whose children are with new guides are necessarily people in conflict. They have conflicting needs and impulses – it’s in the structure of the situation. On the one hand, it is in their best interest to offer trust and support to the new guide, because that is what the new guide needs from them in order to succeed. On the other hand, it is in their best interest to view the new guide with a modicum of suspicion, because a great deal hangs in the balance – the safety and well-being of their precious child. (Remember the biological imperative?) So, these parents tend to be hyper-vigilant, watching carefully for any evidence that would let them off the fence, that would let them settle into one or the other of the mixed emotions and resolve the cognitive dissonance.

The Bridge of Trust

I like to think about (and talk to the children about) the *Bridge of Trust*. Between any two people there can be a bridge of trust. The bridge is either strengthened or weakened by every interaction you have with the other person. The earliest interactions lay the foundations for the bridge. If the bridge is new (“still under construction”), even a small negative interaction can damage it or break it down altogether so that it can no longer bear the weight of the relationship. On the other hand, a very strong bridge can withstand many little bumps and bruises and tremors without significantly weakening. It takes time and focused effort to build a very strong bridge.

Success in teaching is very largely a matter of bridge building and bridge tending. If you can take this perspective – that you are voluntarily entering into a profession that requires the highest standards of personal presentation and conduct and continuous improvement – your chances of success and a long career will be greatly enhanced. And it will be a lot more fun in the long run.

Next time, we’ll look at the two dimensions of trust and describe some concrete things that a guide can do to build the bridge of trust with parents and co-workers.

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Two Dimensions of Trust

By John R. Snyder

In our last article we argued that success as a Montessori guide was a three-legged stool that stood or fell not only on (1) a solid working knowledge of Cosmic Education, with its philosophy, lessons and materials, but also on (2) personal work habits and (3) relations with parents of children in your classroom community. We ended with a metaphor I called the Bridge of Trust – that between any two people there is a bridge of trust that is either strengthened or weakened by every interaction the two people have with each other. Now we can look more carefully at trust itself.

There are two dimensions of trust, and it can be very helpful to keep these in mind when you are thinking about your relationships. The two dimensions are (1) trust in competence and (2) trust in intent. That is, we intend certain things, and then we act to produce what we intend. Often even our best efforts are not enough to produce what we intend – this is the all-important *gap* between our vision and our practice. We may feel at times that this gap is a bottomless abyss, ready to swallow us up if we come too close to it, but, in fact, it is better seen as the open space in which we live and practice. The tension between vision and practice is the source of great energy for life, the motive force whose tension moves us forward into growth and development.

Of the two dimensions of trust, trusting someone's intent is the deeper kind of trust and the one that most directly affects our feelings of safety. Parents absolutely must trust a teacher's intent – both for their children and for themselves as parents – before they can feel safe and supportive. On the other side of the coin, for most of us, it is far more wounding to have others lack confidence in our intent than it is for them to lack confidence in our competence or ability to do the job. Competence is something that can be developed through practice and education, but lack of trust in our intent feels like a questioning of our moral sense, of our personal integrity, of who we really are at our core. We intuitively understand this when we have to express our own misgivings about how someone has handled a particular task: "I know you meant well, but ..."

I bring this up in part because, as guides, we do run into people who are quite unskilled at telling the difference between the two kinds of trust, very unskilled at looking at their own thinking and feelings and knowing what is actually the source of their discomfort with us or our performance. There are people who, perhaps because of the specific kinds of wound they have received from important people in their lives, will over-generalize your little incompetencies and turn them into criticisms of your intent, of you as a person. Forget to remind them of the date of their parent conference and suddenly you are the distant father who neglected to come their high school graduation. Forget that you promised them last year that they could help chaperone the fall camping trip, and suddenly you are a monster single-mindedly bent on forcing them out of the school and compromising their child's social standing in the community.

Through patient, skillful communication one can sometimes bring such people to see the difference between one's intent and one's ability to consistently produce what one intends. Even when that's not possible, just knowing about the two dimensions and how easy it is for some people to mix them up can give one a little more space in which to work with one's own strong reactions to being accused and criticized.

Bridge-tending

I bring up the two dimensions of trust for another reason, as well. They are critical to our understanding of our own work with the children – especially our daily work of bridge-tending with each of them.

There is a very important sense in which children are in the world to make mistakes. Their job is to fail and to fail as often and as quickly as they can, because it is through this kind of trial and error that learning comes. Dr. Montessori understood this very well, and she famously said in *The Absorbent Mind* that we must all “cultivate a friendly feeling towards error, to treat it as a companion inseparable from our lives, as something having a purpose, which it truly has.” We go to great pains in Montessori to remove the usual negative consequences of error precisely because we know that error is key to learning and we want the children to feel free to try and fail, try again and fail again, try again and do a little better ... all the way to mastery.

Being around all this trial -- and especially all this error -- is really difficult for many of us. It takes a lot of patience and a very clear head. *It requires being able to completely trust and honor the child's intent through long periods of not being able to trust the child's competence.* We need to hold that vision of the child *for the child*, because the child needs us to be able to help them back to it when they begin to doubt themselves. We patiently give the child chance after chance after chance because we know that holding onto the vision will eventually produce results – and because it is not ours to decide when the learning process should end, only ours to serve the process and keep it going.

When we have personal agendas for the children, when we become identified with the children's results, when we have strict timetables for the children's development, we are on very dangerous ground: dangerous to ourselves as guides who are then susceptible to burn-out and dangerous to the children who are developing in the performance-oriented, self-alienating environment we have established.

Transitive Trust

As valuable as the “trust as a bridge” metaphor may be, we should be careful not to infer that trust is a static, rigid structure. On the contrary, it is an organic, dynamic, evolving relation, with stages and phases and many changes of weather. Over the years that a

child could be in your class, the trust between you and the family will change not only in quantity but in quality.

In most cases, the first kind of trust the family extends to you as a guide new to their family and children is what I call *transitive trust*, borrowing a term from mathematics or grammar that indicates a property that moves from one object to the other.

Transitive trust is trust that you inherit by virtue of your relationship to already trusted people or institutions. The parents trust the school; the school trusts you enough to give you responsibility for a class; therefore you must be trustworthy. New parents hear from trusted older parents that you are a good sort, so you are given transitive trust, a.k.a. the benefit of the doubt.

Transitive trust is a good place to start, but it is only a start. Soon enough the transitive trust scaffolding holding up the new bridge will be removed as the parents begin to have direct experience of you as a person and a guide for their children. While the scaffolding is in place is the time to put special effort into bridge-tending, keeping in mind the parents' need to trust both our intent and goodwill and our ability to effectively guide their children.

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Speaking to Parents About Their Children

By John R. Snyder

In the last few editions, we have been exploring the importance of trust to our profession, and any discussion of trust must eventually come around to *communication*. The root meaning of “communication” is “to share,” and good communication allows us to do just that. Not only to exchange ideas, but to share them – to come to a common understanding and perspective from which we can act in concert.

Communication with parents and colleagues is a vast topic, but there are a few areas I would like briefly to spotlight in this and future essays. Beyond that it is good and even necessary for us to make communication in all its facets a personal lifetime study, tapping into as many different resources for our own development as possible.

There are many, many books on general and specific aspects of communication and much good advice. For example, the Non-violent Communication (NVC) work of Marshall Rosenberg is one well-developed approach. There is much to be learned from the work of Albert Ellis, William Glasser, Haim Ginott, and Rudolf Dreikurs (whose work was popularized by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish). I advise teachers to read widely in this literature, looking for an approach that speaks to them. There are many paths, but one destination.

Any approach to communication worth its salt will require a good deal of introspection and personal change, not merely the memorization of pat phrases or “techniques” to employ in this or that situation (although those things may have their place within the system). And most authors would agree that the most important part of learning to communicate well is learning to listen well.

Speaking to parents about children

No matter how we come to view communication, one of the most important and sometimes difficult situations we as teachers encounter is the parent conference. These little slices of time we have with parents are of the utmost importance in our project of building bridges of trust. Even the easiest, most cordial conferences call for our most serious attention, both in preparation and in execution. We must know what it is we need to communicate, and we must balance that need with skillful listening to what the parents need to communicate to us. The subject of conversation – these children that are the reason for our being in conference – is of deep interest to both parties, and how we speak to parents about their children is very important. Much hangs in the balance.

For one thing, as Montessori guides, we have a particular perspective on childhood that is very different from conventional views and, sadly, often very different from the views that parents have of their own children. Our Montessori view can be summed up in several

affirmations (some of which are taken from the work of Sandy Blackard, a brilliant parent educator in Austin, Texas, whose material is available at www.languageoflistening.com).

- All behaviors – even dysfunctional ones – are ultimately driven by healthy needs. Recognizing the need allows us to see and ally ourselves with the good in children, regardless of their behavior.
- Everything children do and say (including what they don't do and don't say) is a communication. Children are driven to communicate until they feel heard and understood.
- Children are in the world to learn and to challenge themselves to move beyond their current capacities. That is their nature. Children intuitively know how to set the right level of challenge for themselves and will do so if we will let them.
- We can only work with the communications we have from the children, from what Dr. Montessori called "the periphery." We are not privy to the child's innermost thoughts, feelings and needs or to what it is like to be them. We work only with the periphery, not with the core. Even our understanding of the periphery is always provisional and open to modification based on further evidence from observation.

This is the view that we must hold for ourselves, for the children, and for their parents. All our communications about the child, whether "good news" or "bad news" must be framed in these terms. Parents can easily lose hope in themselves and their children, and we can help them by speaking even of challenging issues in terms that inspire hope and confidence. (In this, as in most things Montessori, I am indebted to my mentor Donna Bryant Goertz.)

For example, we can say "Donald is more often using his words instead of force to express frustration," instead of "Donald still sometimes pushes other children when he's angry." Both may be true, but one inspires hope and the other invites frustration or defensiveness and over-reaction.

We can say, "I am looking for the best way to gain and keep Lena's trust," instead of "Lena tries to hide things from me." Or "Candice looks for praise less often and seems more connected to her own inner satisfaction," instead of "Candice relies more on adult praise than is healthy for a child her age."

Instead of "I'm working on it, but the other children often see Delma as harsh and selfish," we can say, "I am working with Delma to enlarge her awareness of the needs and feelings of others, and I am working with Delma's classmates to help them see how Delma is growing in this way."

Or we can skillfully and graciously stand our Montessori ground even as we give the parents good reason to come stand with us: "Nan has been concentrating on math. I am supporting her to extend and deepen this interest because I see that this is the way she has chosen to develop a long concentration span, strong self-motivation, and a cheerful perseverance. When these qualities are solidly established in her character, I will work with her to transfer them to writing and other subjects."

This way of framing communication about the child has nothing to do with soft-pedaling, sugar-coating or New Age happyspeak. It is a reflection of our confidence in the ultimate goodness and strength of human nature and of our confidence in the child to find her own way, with a little help from her friends. It is a concrete expression of who we understand ourselves to be *vis a vis* the child; namely, "aids to life" or those who are privileged to stand by and watch the work of a master (the child constructing herself), offering only as much help as the child needs and can accept. It is not an act of cowardice or evasion, but an act of deeply humanistic courage to believe in the power of the human being to perfect itself and to transcend its current imperfect circumstances through its own efforts. It is also a gift of hope and support to parents who may otherwise be overwhelmed by their children's difficulties.

Yes we can – together!

Parents are under much pressure to "understand" their children. A parent who doesn't understand his child? What kind of parent is that? Not a very good one, says society. But we know that children are enigmatic, complicated, confusing – and they consciously or unconsciously know how to hide from us, to push our buttons so that we can no longer see them clearly. It is often a great relief to parents when someone who is so often with their child demonstrates some understanding of the child and gives the parents a way of thinking about and supporting the child. On the other hand, when a parent feels that their child is not being understood, all their own personal feelings of not being understood (all the way back to infancy) erupt into consciousness.

As Donna Bryant Goertz has written:

Individual parent conferences are such a rich opportunity for building a relationship that I like to hold a conference very early in the year with each parent of a new child. I reserve an hour and a half for each new parent. This is a time to let a parent feel the full force of my delight in having her child in my class. Parents need to know their child is a wanted and treasured community member. Before I approach any hard work with a parent or with a child I like to have initiated a trust based on the parent's introduction to our living and learning culture, my knowledge and skill as a guide, and to my fondness of the child. Every parent deserves to hear in one piece the issues we plan to address, the positive characteristics of the child upon which we plan to build, and the shining goal toward which we aim. I want the parent to see clearly that I consider every child to have issues, and

that these issues are the stuff of life that provide the child with necessary opportunities for struggle and growth.

We can be comfortable not having all the answers about a particular child. (We never will, of course – not even in principle.) We can allow the child to be the mystery he is and to model that for the parents – but only if it is done in the context of this deep faith in the powers of the child to find his own way in his own time.

Helping parents frame the bumps in their children's developmental paths in such positive, insightful ways is a true gift to them and to their children. Moreover, it creates another link in the bridge of trust between us and them, inviting them to stand with us to see the dynamically developing child we are seeing and to enjoy the beautiful view. From that place of common understanding and appreciation, we can work together in creative ways to find solutions that work both at school and at home.

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When and What to Communicate with Parents

By John R. Snyder

To round out this series of articles on trust and communication between guides, parents and administrators, I would like to pass along some hard-won advice about when and what to communicate with parents. Have a seat, get comfortable, and let's talk shop.

I have found in all areas of life that communication is nearly always better than no communication, but there is such a thing as too much communication between parents and guides. We have been talking about the Bridge of Trust between guide and parents, and this is where the Bridge needs to be strong enough to hold the load without constant patching. For one thing, parents do not need to know every little thing that goes on with their child at school in order for them to do their job as parents -- just as you do not need to know every little thing that goes on at home in order to do your job as a guide. That level of monitoring creates anxiety in the parent and also in the child. It sets parents up to be "helicopter parents" who continue to hover around their adolescent and adult children long after they should have retired to the sidelines to enjoy from there the view of whatever their adolescent or young adult is making of her life.

In a well-functioning Montessori elementary, there are many ups and downs during the day, many opportunities for conflict and conflict resolution, many spontaneously arising situations and experiences that allow children to stretch themselves and to venture outside their comfort zones. As the adults, our job is to give children the tools they need to handle these things themselves and to refrain from rushing in to give "help" to those who are decidedly not helpless. It is not always clear when to give help and when to keep observing, but experience tells me that it is often best to wait just a little longer than our reactivity would otherwise dictate.

Preparing the social/emotional environment

We prepare the physical environment with scientifically validated materials that support the development of all the various facets of the human intellect. But what are the materials for the social/emotional "curriculum"? They are the children themselves and their interactions in the prepared environment. How do we prepare the social/emotional environment? We prepare the social/emotional environment by modeling the values of respect, kindness, flexibility, optimism, good humor, etc., that we know the children need to develop; by providing the means for them to practice the skills that underlie emotional intelligence (including the considerable time this practice takes away from "academic" subjects); by gentle coaching; by active listening; by showing the children that we believe them to be capable of growing and learning in the social/emotional arena and by honoring such growth as an important part of their work at school; and by providing the children with many stories of people who have walked this path of human and spiritual

development and transcended themselves and their situations to become exemplars of what it means to be fully human.

In short, we offer the children the skills, the freedom and the time they need to develop socially and emotionally. Psychologists, brain scientists and other researchers who have looked into Montessori education tell us that nobody supports the development of “executive functions” and high-level thinking skills as well as we do. And part of what makes our approach work is that we do not constantly involve the parents in all the day-to-day social/emotional drama. When a parent is told about a challenge their child encountered that day, they will naturally feel that there is something they need to do as a parent to “fix” the situation. Otherwise, why would you be telling them? Usually, there’s nothing at all for them to do, and their attempts to invent something to do may constitute an impediment to the child’s own work of social/emotional development. Not fair to the parent; not good for the child.

So what *does* one tell parents about the social/emotional ups and downs of the classroom? I think it comes down to two things: *patterns* and *extreme incidents*.

Communicating about patterns

Parents need to be informed of *patterns* of behavior that you see. A pattern comprises a *series of similar events or observations over time*. If we are observing as we were taught to observe in our training, patterns of all sorts will naturally emerge, and parents deeply need this information in order to do their work of parenting. There will be patterns for individual children, patterns for certain groups of children, and patterns for the whole community. (There will also be patterns in our own behavior, but that’s a story for another day.)

Parents need to know about their child’s patterns, both positive and negative. They need to know about the positive patterns because that is what strengthens the bridge of trust between them and their child. They need to know about negative patterns because there is usually something underneath the surface that is giving rise to the pattern – something that the child has not yet discovered how to shift for herself.

You also need to tell parents about patterns of behavior in order to compare your perspectives and observations with theirs. Just as they need to know about the patterns you are seeing, you need to know about patterns they see at home. If you are all seeing the same patterns, there is something important the child needs for all of you to know. If you are seeing different patterns at home and school, that’s also a clue about the origin and meaning of the various patterns. You and the parents are on the same team to discover what is going on, as best you can, and to offer appropriate support to each other and to the child. If you together cannot understand the pattern, it may be time to add others to the team (counselors, occupational therapists, neuropsychologists, etc.).

Focusing on the child's patterns also helps the parents (and you) not become too focused on specific incidents. If there is a pattern going on, specific incidents usually find their meaning only in terms of the pattern, and obsessing about the details of this or that incident leads to not being able to see the forest for the trees. The regular periodic parent conferences you probably already have scheduled with the parents are often good times to bring up patterns.

Communicating about incidents

Parents also need to be *informed of incidents that are so upsetting* to the child that the child will likely want to process them with the parents after school. Parents need to know enough about the situation not to be caught off guard, in order to know how to listen to and support the child emotionally. Harking back to the last column and its advice to support parents by speaking even of challenging issues in terms that inspire hope and confidence, we can let them know the issues along with some suggestions for how to support their child at home. "I want to let you know that Sally is working hard today to figure out how to respond when someone keeps hiding her lunchbox. Should she retaliate? Should she tell me and let me sort it out for her? Should she bring her friends into the solution? Should she just ignore the behavior? Should she use humor? She's looking for ideas and she may need for you to spend more time with her than usual just listening as she brainstorms and considers the possibilities. I'm confident that she and I will discover a good way for a person like her to handle such a situation, but she may need to feel some moral support in the meantime. This is a big, important work for Sally, and I'm really excited by the way she's taking it on."

If you present an upsetting problem to a parent like this, it provides support in a couple of ways: it gives the parent a "heads up," and it gives them a specific role to play – they're not caught off guard and they don't have to scramble to figure out what they as good parents are supposed to do. It also lets the parent know that you are aware of the problem and are actively working on it.

It's a good idea to let parents know at the beginning of your relationship that this is how you will work with them. You won't be giving daily reports, but you will be very diligent about reporting patterns that you and they need to address together, and you will give them a timely "heads up" about any specific incidents you think their child may need to process with them after school. Likewise, let them know that you welcome communication from them about things they are hearing from their children.

I wish you great success in your communications with parents. Perhaps, nothing is more important to the ultimate success of your work with the children.

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Understand Your Relationship to Time

by John R. Snyder

Tell me how you personally relate to time, and I can tell you what are likely to be some of your greatest challenges in the classroom. How you relate to time is a huge issue both for your parent community and for your coworkers. It's also a huge issue for your students and provides many opportunities for conflict, if you let it. My wife, a marriage counselor, says that having differing relationships to time is one of the most difficult issues for her client couples to understand and overcome.

Basically, the issue is that one group of personality types (I'll call them "Type J" after one of the categories in the Jungian Myers-Briggs model of personality) sees time as very organized. For them it is a salient, determinative, foreground feature of everything they do. The other group of personality types – let's call it Type P – see time as an open-ended field in which to experience life as it happens. To Type J, time is a *limited resource to be managed*; to Type P, time, like space, is *unbounded and free*.

These two relationships to time had names to the ancient Greeks (who thought of everything!). To a J, time means *chronos* (= clock time); to a P, time means *kairos* – the organic unfolding of a process or event in its "right" or "appropriate" time.

Understanding your "time type"

Because we are working with children on a long arc of development, each traveling at his/her own speed, we need both to understand our own relationship to time and to learn to see time through the lens of the other personality types.

The Type P's are naturally comfortable with this kind of extended process, but they may need to develop the ability to tell the difference between child who needs time for development and the child who is just stalled out developmentally and needs some help from the outside to structure reality and get back on track. The P's may need help finding the right balance between providing space for process and providing the kind of consistent, predictable structure that allows children to feel safe enough to really explore their world. The irony is that while P's may think they are giving children all the freedom in the world, the children are not able to be authentically free because things are too unpredictable and open-ended.

The Type J's working in Montessori – myself among them – are always at risk of becoming the Project Manager of the children's long-term project of self-construction. They will naturally know how to "make the trains run on time" in the classroom, but they may need to develop the ability to "chill out" and let natural processes run their course. Sure, the clock says it's time to come in from the playground, but does what's going on developmentally on the playground say it's time to come in or time to stay out a bit

longer? Yes, the plan was to tell the first Great Story on Tuesday, but when Tuesday comes, is it really *kairos*, the right moment for the telling? To the unreflective J, spontaneity can come to be “the enemy” – and do I need to remind you that the English translation of Dr. Montessori’s book about the elementary is called *Spontaneous Activity in Education*? Much food for thought there.

Regardless of one’s personality type, informed observation and self-knowledge are the ways out of every difficulty with time and timing, as they are with every sort of difficulty in one’s practice.

Working with the other type

Nobody in our very *chronos*-driven culture reaches adulthood without having some pretty bad experiences with differing views of time. The P’s, in particular, will likely have been made to feel defective, immature, incompetent, inconsiderate, self-indulgent or worse.

The J’s will have had their natural inclination presented to them as a mark of their moral superiority, and their tendency to view the P’s as lacking something will likely have been positively reinforced to the point that they have some difficulty seeing any value at all in the *kairos*-oriented view of time. Often, they’ll think the P’s just need to grow up and get with the program.

So, the P’s often come to identify *chronos* as social oppression, a variety of control-related neurosis and something to be actively and consciously resisted or avoided, as one would resist racism or sexism or avoid drug addiction. One sees guides who, on principle, refuse to wear a wristwatch or carry a timepiece. Or one sees guides who are so obsessed with managing and measuring time that they have no time to stop and smell the roses – to really be present in the moment.

To the P’s, I would say that regardless of how unfair it may seem, if you are living in America (and most of the Western world), you are living in a “J”, *chronos* time culture. You need to make your peace with that and not expect the culture to meet you halfway on this issue. You are actually the bearer of a great gift to your J colleagues – the gift of relaxed spontaneity and sensitivity to process – but they will very likely need some help from you to see the gift you bear. You can do that by going out of your way to reach out to them in terms they can understand, just as you would do with a child you were trying to reach.

This means developing ways of time management that work for you and allow you to keep appointments and commitments in a timely way. In the *chronos* world, an appointment is a social contract defined by time. If the appointment is at 10:00 for an hour, the *chronos* world expects it to start at 10:00 and end at 11:00, regardless of any other considerations. The J’s may intellectually understand that when the time rolls around, 10:00 and 11:00 might not actually be the best start and stop times, but they will

see it as part of the rules of the “game” to work within the agreed upon boundaries, no matter what.

To put it bluntly, when a P turns up 10 or 15 minutes late for a meeting with a J or with a group that includes some J’s, here is quite possibly what is going through the J’s mind: “This person is a flake. If they can’t keep a simple agreement like this, why should I trust them with anything important? It’s really insulting to me for them to be late. I only have a short amount of time for this meeting and there are important things for us to do here. Seems like maybe they don’t really care. How passive aggressive! Why don’t they just come out and say what they think about me or our project? It’s so selfish of them to make us all wait, *wasting our time*. They must think they are the center of the universe.”

Synchronizing with others is an indispensable part of collaboration, and that means making friends with *chronos*. In some situations, being late really does have negative consequences for others.

To the J’s I would say become aware that your view of time is personal and cultural, not a reflection of the mind of God. *Chronos* is only half the story about time. Being a Type J does not give you permission to be critical of other people. On the contrary, it is important to begin to see how uncomfortable it must be for the P’s to live in a culture that is so clock-oriented, so oblivious to process.

You can begin to get a sense of this by imagining how uncomfortable you would feel working in a culture that had no clock time, no solid sense of beginning-middle-end, no social contract about time or keeping appointments, etc. This sort of *kairos* relationship to time is, in fact, the one that human beings have had for most of our tenure on the planet. Clock time is a historically recent phenomenon, and one that really didn’t gain the upper hand until the last 150 years or so (driven largely by the rise of the railroads).

Don’t give up on calendars and clock time, but do look for ways to accommodate your P children, colleagues and parents within those limits. For example, if someone is predictably late to a meeting, don’t sit around fuming about it – think of it as an opportunity to take a break, take a walk, go smell the roses or enjoy your breathing for a few minutes. Let *nothing* happen for a few minutes and learn to see that as OK. Watch your own reactions from a little distance and learn to be curious about them: why is this such a big deal for me? Hmmmm.

Colleagues can learn this kind of generosity toward each other, but it’s more difficult working with parents whom you see relatively infrequently and often never get to know very deeply. In those situations, it’s best to adapt to *their* style as much as possible. It’s a way of “joining” with them, and we need as many ways of joining with parents as possible to build the bridge of trust.

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