

Understanding Montessori



Being Friendly with Error September 13, 2009

Nicholas, a cheerful three-year-old, had cried every day at snack time for a week. Because he had spilt a pitcher of water on the snack table, Nicholas refused to try to pour himself a drink of water. Efforts to encourage Nicholas to pour an eight-ounce pitcher were met with tears. "I can't. I'll spill and make a mess and everybody will be mad at me."

Pouring water in a Montessori classroom is a critical skill because so many other lessons involve water or pouring, such as hand washing, table washing, and cloth washing, to name a few. Nicholas had such a fear of failure at pouring, that I didn't know how to get him over this obstacle.

In the middle of the night, when most inspiration seems to arrive, I had an idea. The next morning, I told my classroom assistant that I was going to give a cloth-washing lesson and in the process "accidentally" spill a large pitcher of water. Could she encourage children to set up away from my presentation area to avoid more chaos than necessary?

During the lesson to an older student, I "tripped" and a half-gallon of water rushed over the hardwood floors.

"Oops", I laughed, surveying the water. "It's okay. It will clean it up. It's just water."

To my surprise, Nicholas arrived, mop in hand, asking if he could help me. "That would be lovely," I replied.

Nicholas and I mopped and dried the floor, checking that every drop was gone so our friends wouldn't slip on a wet floor. We laughed and sang, "...down came the rain and washed the spider out. Out came Nicholas to dry up all the rain..." "When a big person spills, it's a big spill," I joked with Nicholas.

Mike, a four-year-old walked up and said, "See, Nicholas, I told you it's okay to make a mistake at school."

Nicholas broke into a wide grin and turned to put the mop away.

Later that morning, Nicholas came to me. "Ms. Maren, did you spill that water just for me?"

"What do you mean, Nicholas?"

"Did you spill it to make me feel better?"

Now it was my turn to feel as though a bucket of water had just dumped over my head, like in the old 70's Laugh-In Show. Sock-it-to-me. I thought I was a better actress than that. I imagined myself to be more convincing to a three-year-old.

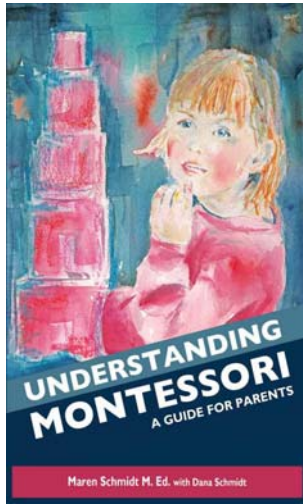
"Thank you, Ms. Maren. I'm not scared to pour anymore." Nicholas gave me a hug.

'You're welcome, Nicholas." I took a deep breath.

Thank you, I thought, for helping me remember to be friendly with error.

Next week: Freedom within Limits of Responsibility





The Understanding Montessori Newsletter is written by Maren Schmidt and is part of her Kids Talk weekly syndicated newspaper column.

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Her book, *Understanding Montessori*, is available on line at these sites:

www.MarenSchmidt.com.

www.amazon.com

Or order through your local bookstore.