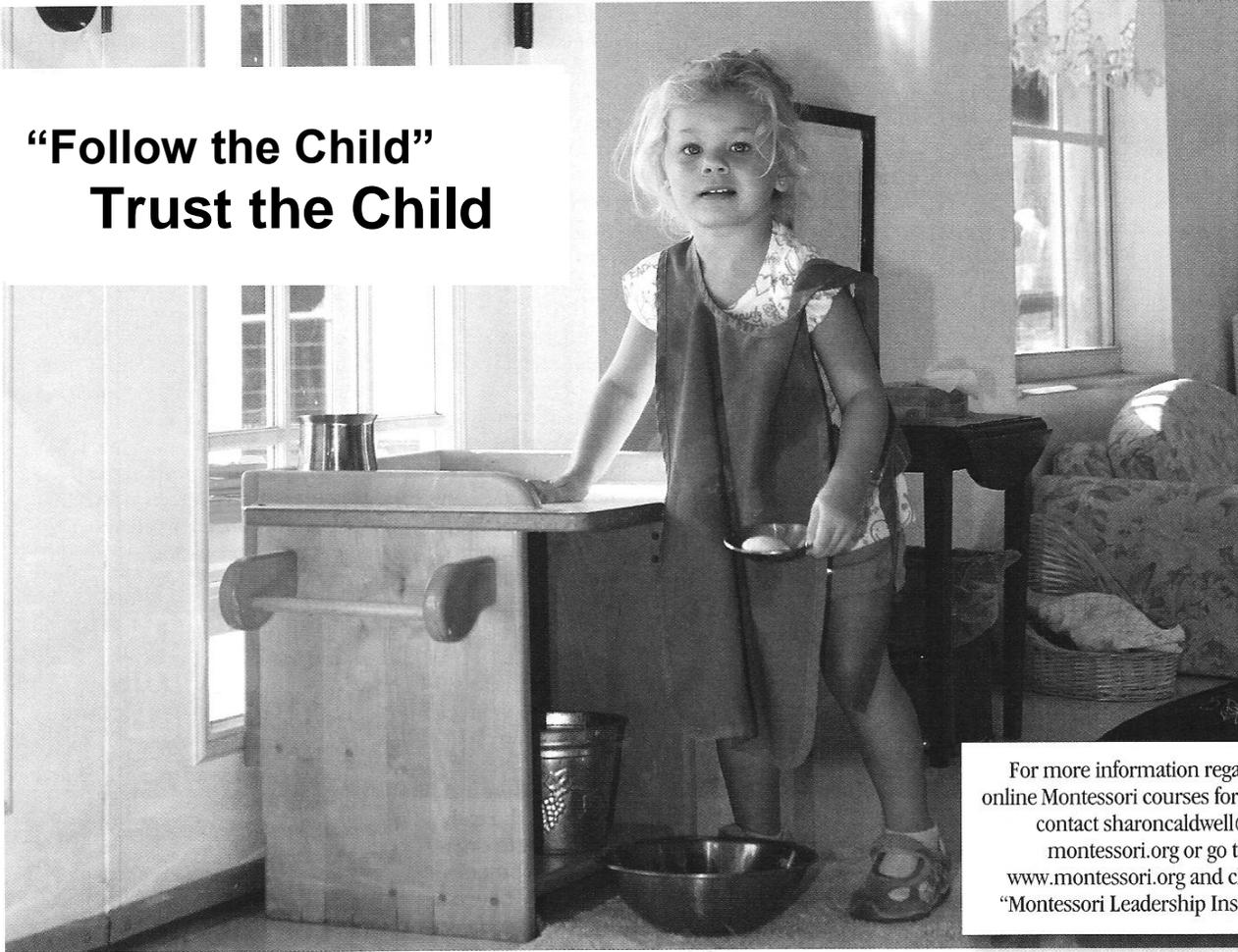


## “Follow the Child” Trust the Child



For more information regarding online Montessori courses for parents, contact [sharoncaldwell@montessori.org](mailto:sharoncaldwell@montessori.org) or go to [www.montessori.org](http://www.montessori.org) and choose “Montessori Leadership Institute.”

*"This summer I decided to take an online course offered by the Center for Guided Montessori Studies (CGMS) called Classroom Leadership. I figured, after almost 11 years of working for The Montessori Foundation, it was time I had a better understanding of what went on inside the classroom so that I could write more insightful articles, speak more intelligently about Montessori, and be a better grandmother to my first-born grandchild."*



**by Margot Garfield-Anderson**  
Director of Public Relations The Montessori Foundation

Many of our readers are new to Montessori and a phrase that keeps popping up is "Follow the Child." So what, your child's teacher just follows them around the classroom everyday, and as parents you are expected to do the same at home? Whew, that would be exhausting to everyone, wouldn't it? So what exactly then do we mean when we tell you this? I'm going to digress for just a moment before explaining what we mean.

This summer I decided to take an online course offered by the Center for Guided Montessori Studies (CGMS) called Classroom Leadership. I figured, after almost 11 years of working for The Montessori Foundation, it was time I had a better understanding of what went on inside the classroom so that I could write more insightful articles, speak more intelligently about Montessori and be a better grandmother to my first-born grandchild. The class was divided into six weekly components with video lectures and reading assignments. CGMS's educational Director and long-time friend of the Foundation and International Montessori Council, Kitty Bravo, was one of the video lecturers in the series. Kitty did a fabulous half-hour presentation on this topic that just made it so much easier to understand that I'm going to cite from her lecture throughout this article.

Here is the crux of what it means: *Trust in the child, take your lead from the child, support the child, entice the child, don't rescue the child.*

Montessori believed that children are born with the innate desire and passion to learn and that as guides, whether trained for the class or parents wanting to enforce what's taught in the home environment, it is our responsibility to foster this passion and see that the flame stays ignited.

Often this flame gets extinguished by the age of 18 months to 2 1/2. Yes, around the time many of us think of as the 'terrible twos.' Parents are so busy

making sure their children are safe that they become unaware of the consequences of their actions. By constantly saying, "No, don't touch that," or "No, you'll break that," we can actually cause a child to shut down their natural desires and passion. (Of course, keeping your children safe is never something you compromise; it's just a matter of how you can go about doing this without stifling their natural desire to learn and explore.)

### **How to be invested...by keeping your distance & trusting in the child**

Make a conscious effort to be aware of how many times a day you say "No" and the reasons why you seem to start all your sentences this way, and then see if you can find another way to redirect your child. Find a different way for quiet time in the house that doesn't involve turning on something electronic, unless it's to listen to some soothing music everyone can enjoy.

When your child is 'working' on something (let's use a wooden puzzle as an example here) and is experiencing difficulties in fitting the pieces back in, please don't rush to their rescue to 'help.' Let them figure it out on their own. This is being supportive — really it is. By all means, be encouraging when they get a piece the right way.

But, even here, you need to be very conscious of not interrupting their process by being overly enthusiastic with the praise and the clapping and the big *Yes!* This takes the focus and attention away from what your child is doing and puts it on you, so just smile or nod approvingly. This is enough of a signal to let the child know you are paying attention to the big work they are doing, that they are being supported by your involvement, and that they are heading in the right direction with their progress.

### **Here is what else the child gains**

By allowing them to take the time to experiment with trying to fit the pieces together, children are: lengthening their attention span, sparking their ability to think critically and imaginatively, focusing on problem solving and self-correcting mistakes, and gaining a sense of great accomplishment. These are essential developmental tools to foster and encourage in a child. Doing the puzzle for the child may make you feel as if you are teaching them something, but after the

first or second demonstration, your role should be just to observe, encourage and support the entire process. Trust that the child will stick with it until some level of completion or mastery is reached — if not the first time, then maybe the next or the time after that. Give it some time — we are talking about toddlers here. When you rush in to do it for the child on a consistent basis, they will expect you to do this for them in other circumstances that won't end up helping them become independent people. So, again, catch yourself when you automatically want to jump in and fix.

The time spent with your child will be infinitely more pleasurable when you take a step back and allow them to set the pace. Then, once the child starts their Montessori program, understanding what the guide does on a daily basis becomes more meaningful as well.

### **Inside the classroom**

Your child's Montessori guide has been trained to understand and utilize an Individualized Learning Model. This is a multi-level approach that begins with understanding that children are born with this innate desire to learn. The guide is also responsible for awakening this desire.

By responding to the unique differences in each child, a Montessori guide can adjust presentations or lessons that reach the child on the level that best works for their individual learning ability. By following a cycle of Observation, Analysis, Planning for the Child and then Observing again the guide follows each of the children in the class. When parents can begin to understand these skills and incorporate them into the home, they reinforce and provide the consistency that is necessary for children to succeed.

### **Observe**

Guides spend many years perfecting the skill of observing your child. This is not simply record-keeping but a complex system of watching and understanding to see what kind of learning works best for the individual student.

### **Analysis**

Guides take many notes during the day and then spend time analyzing what they've observed. This becomes the tool they use to create tailored lesson plans

for their students. Since not all children learn at the same rate, or age, or thought process, the guide must determine what kind of learner your child is.

### **Planning for the Child**

The Montessori curriculum is carefully designed to ensure that your child is learning in a very specific sequence, developed after many years of research and development. Your child's guide, once again, has spent a great deal of time learning to understand the how's and why's of this sequence along with the curriculum. By taking the information gathered during the first observation step and analysis, the interest of the child and the stimulating activities each of the materials in the classroom can offer, a specific course of action can be effectively designed for each child.

### **Observing again**

Every day the guide observes. So why do they need to continue doing this? Because every day the needs of the child might either change or need to be altered, and by continuing to observe and monitor the reactions of the children, the guide can continue to ensure that the child is challenged, not frustrated, and keeps stimulated enough to continue to work through the curriculum.

When we combine both school and home environments, keep the messages clear and consistent, and work together as partners, parents and guides and the children themselves all benefit tremendously. Children become independent, confident and empowered. And isn't that what we as parents, guides, and grandparents want?

## **Calendar**

**February 18 - 21, 2011 -NAMTA  
2011 Annual Adolescent Conference**  
Long Beach, CA (440) 834-4011  
[www.montessori-namta.org](http://www.montessori-namta.org)

**March 17-21, 2011  
Montessori Foundation & IMC  
8<sup>th</sup> Annual West Coast Conference**  
San Jose, CA (800) 632-4121  
[www.montessori.org](http://www.montessori.org)  
[margot@montessori.org](mailto:margot@montessori.org)

**March 24-27, 2011-AMS  
20<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference**  
Chicago, IL (212) 358-1250  
[www.amshq.org](http://www.amshq.org)

*If you have a conference or event you'd like to promote, please email information to: [tcnag@montessori.org](mailto:tcnag@montessori.org).*