



Volume I, No 5

## THE LOVE OF WORK AND ORDER

*Sarah Betterton is a brawn-eyed, four-year-old with a charming smile and a mind of her own. When she recently decided to finish her reader, only brief breaks interrupted her two-hour session of reading out loud. She tired as she neared the end of the book, yet even mother Lyndal's suggestions that they finish the book later could not diminish Sarah's desire to continue. It was an exceptional day for reading, and when Sarah pursues an interest, she does it with an admirable zeal.*

### A NATURAL JOY IN LEARNING

Since Sarah had her marathon reading session, she's continued with her usual pattern: some days she's hungry for reading, some days she doesn't want to read at all. There are days when she prefers activities such as embroidering a circle, writing the same letter over and over again, or improving her swimming skills. She wants to learn how to play the violin as her brother Christopher Ashley does, and she looks for ways to help her father in the garden. Many days she does all of these things.

Her interests ebb and flow, but her smiles, her concentration, and her clarity about what she wants to do all convey her natural joy in learning.

### IT STARTS IN THE HOME

As is natural for all children, Sarah was born with a love of learning. This innate tendency has been nurtured by her family. Her home environment reflects attitudes characteristic of families who have been influenced by the writings of Maria Montessori.

Dr. Montessori's insights into children and learning have had a remarkable influence on early education. Parents such as the Bettertons have begun to apply the observations she made in the classroom to the things they can do with their children at home.

For example, Dr. Montessori had a great respect for children and considered them people deserving of dignity, rather than imperfect adults. She observed that young children's minds were much more absorbent than those of adults, and believed in creating a "prepared" environment where children are presented with materials which foster the development of independence, self-discipline, and the love of work and, order. She noted that these characteristics are developed within a framework which allows children freedom of movement) recognizing that mental development is intimately connected with physical movement.

## OBSERVATION EXERCISE

Some of Maria Montessori's ideas are reflected in the statements below. While reading them, decide whether they are true for you and your children, fairly frequently, sometimes, or rarely. Gear your answers according to your children's ages; for example, you would not expect a two-year-old to put away materials as consistently as a six-year-old.

1. My children are free to move throughout the house.
2. They work for their own satisfaction rather than to please adults.
3. They concentrate when working on projects of interest to them.
4. They strive to work independently of adults.
5. They cheerfully put materials back where they belong once they've finished using them.
6. I teach my children how to do things for themselves—even when I know I can do them faster.
7. I allow them to explore newly taught activities without interrupting them to explain the "right way." If they become frustrated, I again show them how to do it rather than doing it for them.
8. I use some learning tools which allow my children to discover the "answers" without my help.
9. I teach order through my own example in the home.
10. I enjoy what I'm doing. I am relaxed.

No one could be expected to respond to these statements with "always," but these ideals do offer some useful guidelines for review. Many helpful tips for enriching your home are offered in the following section.

## THE BETTERTON HOME

The Bettertons have worked as a team to reflect these attitudes in their home-life. When Sarah was very young, they put away their delicate treasures allowing her freedom of movement throughout the house. Initially she learned how to handle delicate objects by experimenting with easily replaced glassware, and now she's matured to the point where she handles her own 1/10<sup>th</sup>-size violin.

Charles, Sarah's father, installed low bookshelves in her closet so she could get and return her books and materials without adult assistance. He also lowered the closet clothes rod to help her reach her clothing when dressing herself. Lyndal organized the bathroom so Sarah could reach the sink, toothpaste, soap, and toilet paper. One of the dressers in Sarah's bedroom has low drawers so the items she uses regularly (socks, underwear, and night-gowns) are kept within her reach. Since she enjoys helping Lyndal with laundering the clothes, this arrangement also allows her to put away her own things.

Sarah likes to help with the housework. Making the beds with mother and assisting with light cleaning are part of her daily routine. At mealtimes, she frequently climbs on a step-stool and helps with tasks such as cutting potatoes. If the Bettertons' small kitchen seems crowded that day, she may choose to do a project in the adjoining utility room. There, the multi-purpose table lends itself to art projects and the easily cleanable floor allows Sarah to wipe up any spills.

These activities are helping Sarah to refine her sense of order. Dr. Montessori observed that children pass through "sensitive periods" during which they are psychologically ready to learn ideas and skills more easily than at any other time in their lives. One of these sensitive periods is for acquiring a sense of order, and children who are encouraged to develop this sense when they first express an interest in it, mature into neat and helpful adults.

*(continued on page 4)*

Basic

Principles

## THE RELATION BETWEEN *PLEASURE* AND DEVELOPMENT

Let's begin by assuming what most experienced parents know well: that generally children develop and learn best when they are happy and enjoying themselves. These parents have found that children learn through pleasure.

They may also have perceived that children feel pleasure when learning.

### PLEASURE AS REWARD

Standard learning theory has touched only the edges of the connection between pleasure and learning.

We've almost all come across Pavlov and his dogs, conditioned to salivate at the ringing of a bell that they associated with the pleasure of eating. Then came Watson and Skinner and the rest who taught us to reward desired behavior with pleasure.

*Let's say we want Bobby to hang up his coat when he comes in, so we*

- show him how, with smiling, personal attention;*
- make a game of it perhaps, so it's fun;*
- praise him when he remembers;*
- reinforce the praise with hugs or treats or some other form of pleasurable attention;*

*and, eventually, hanging up coats is established as a habit for him.*

It works well of course. Reinforce desired behavior; reinforce, reinforce, reinforce. It's a technique probably all parents use, more or less consciously, and all of us find effective when we use it well.

### PLEASURE AND PUNISHMENT?

There's also the corollary concept of punishing undesired behavior, and parents of many cultures are familiar with that practice; but it's trickier. Punishment usually includes negative attention from a parent. To discouraged children, some degree of negative attention from a parent can be more pleasurable than no attention at all. Therefore, some punishments, in some situations, can reinforce undesired behavior rather than extinguish it.

It is also true that punished children can receive the passive pleasure of the absence of pain when they perform as parents desire.

*For example, you can send Bobby to his room for five minutes every time he forgets to hang up his coat, and he may remember to hang it up just so he won't have to stay in his room. That is, he receives the passive pleasure of not being sent to his room.*

At the same time, however, Bobby may then associate hanging up his coat with the punishment of forgetting to, and so may set up continuing inner resistance to doing so. Learning the new habit with an active pleasure as reinforcer can help Bobby associate coat-hanging with happiness, which can become an inner attitude for the child, a personal orientation in favor of hanging up coats |

Generally the active pleasure associated with reward evokes more cooperation from children than does the passive pleasure of relief from punishment. Ruth Beebe Hill in *Hanta Yo*, her engrossing account reports the tribal saying that, "Striking a child merely knocks in the mischief." Many learning

theorists of today agree. They advise parents to use pleasure, reward, and positive reinforcement as the most effective means of acculturating their children. And almost all of us who are parenting and teaching in today's culture are putting those means to good use.

We find them effective—on a certain level.

We also find ourselves thinking about the other levels.

## BEYOND REWARD AND PUNISHMENT

In the early 1900's, Maria Montessori set up a nursery school/day care situation for preschoolers in one of Rome's working-class ghettos. She designed learning activities and provided treats as rewards for completing them. To her surprise, the children became absorbed in the learning processes, repeated activities again and again, showed enormous pleasure and pride in their accomplishments, and had no interest in the proffered rewards!

From such experiences, Montessori developed a new kind of education and a new perception of how children develop. In *The Montessori Method* she writes:

*"The prize and the punishment are incentives toward unnatural or forced effort, and, therefore we certainly cannot speak of the natural development of the child in connection with them!"*

Anyone who has closely observed a really effective Montessori classroom (as well as children in certain other situations) has observed individual young children—thought too young to have a long attention span—concentrating for extended periods of time on some specific learning task. Their absorption is almost meditative, their pleasure evident. The learning they are involved in is its own reward.

But are these just children who've had special early training? Is such pleasure in learning really an innate quality of childhood?

In his flawed but brilliant *Magical Child*, Joseph Chilton Pearce refers to a study by Hanus Papousek which strongly attests that it is innate. Papousek designed an experiment in which hungry two- to three-month-old infants were rewarded with feeding nipples each time they correctly responded to a learning problem. It was not surprising that the hungry infants smiled broadly as they gave correct responses and received the feeding nipple—not surprising, that is, until Papousek realized that the babies were smiling because of the fun of completing the learning process, not because they could eat!

*"For no matter that they were hungry, they turned down actually nursing at the nipple, instead, each time turning eagerly back to the researcher with a beaming smile of delight over their success, wanting to play again."*

The learning for them was indeed, "play." It brought such pleasure that any further reward was superfluous.

At the Better Baby Institute in Philadelphia, Glenn Doman has been telling increasing numbers of parents that young children, "would rather learn than eat!" Even enthusiastic listeners frequently smile at his "charming exaggeration," which is, apparently, quite literally true.

Innate pleasure in learning is part of the natural development of the child. As we learn to work with that fact, we can help uncover a new definition of what it is to be fully human.

## TO MOTHER IS TO TEACH

*by Joanna Carnahan*

### THE BATHROOM TECHNIQUE

There's always someone doing research on something, somewhere! And one recent bit of research uncovered a remarkably simple technique we can use for helping our children learn.

#### THE STUDY

In that study, one group of college students was taught an emergency lifesaving maneuver. Another group of students was not taught the maneuver, but posters giving the information about it were put up on the inside of doors to the toilet stalls in their dormitory bathrooms. Eventually both groups took tests on their knowledge of the maneuver. Both groups had learned it. Later, however, both groups were retested, and the students who had learned the maneuver from posters in toilet stalls had remembered it best!

#### APPLICATION TO PARENTING

Well, why not try it? Probably all of us can clear away a patch of wall in the bathroom—beside or in front of the toilet for girls, beside, in front, or behind for boys. And probably all of us can get as accustomed to quickly changing this bathroom display as we are now to quickly wiping off the mirror or hanging up towels. You may come up with ten different ways to use the findings of that study; here is just one idea to try.

#### FAST, FREE, AND FREQUENT

If whatever new teaching device you adopt needs to be fast, go get two boxes, bags, file folders, or the like and put them in or near the bathroom, on a shelf, or in a drawer or closet. You can write "IN" on one and "OUT" on the other. With them put some tape, pins, tacks, or a wad of that nice sticky putty that comes off walls without leaving spots. Add a stack of index cards or other small papers and a pen or crayon. Now you're ready.

When the mail comes, go through the junk mail before anyone throws it out; tear out any illustration that might attract your child's interest to some worthwhile facet of life. Then put those

pictures, with any accompanying information, in your "IN" box. Just a few items from my junk mail has yielded for the "IN" box recently are: small pictures of paintings by famous artists; a picture of Mozart as a young man; cartoons depicting a sister and brother working out problems amicably; a photograph of a dulcimer; a large picture of a painting by Corot; and a colorful drawing of the human body, surrounded by such interest-grabbing facts as, "One cubic inch of bone can withstand a two-ton force." Any of those items could generate discussion and stimulate thinking for us.

You can figure it out from there, of course. Newspapers, magazines, catalogs, charts, brochures, posters, greeting cards, postcards, business forms, even work your older children bring home from school, all have potential for use on your bathroom wall.

Label each illustration in a way that's appropriate for your child's reading level. (That's what the cards and pen with the "IN" box are for.) Use a large two- or three-word caption for your learning-to-readers, and longer, catchy descriptions for children who've gone beyond the "Dick and Jane" level.

Probably putting up one picture at a time and changing it daily will maintain the most interest and give your children the greatest exposure to new information. Sticking up 365 new picture-facts a year, and having your children show interest in 100 of them, provides more input than if you'd had 52 displays that year and elicited interest in all 52 or fewer. As you remove a picture, drop it in your "OUT" box. When you put it up again in a year or two, it can be for your children a familiar reminder that's appreciated at a new level, or a "brand new" display they're ready for now.

Variations are endless. Pick a theme; use other locations; teach a process; include elements of your regular teaching program; and, always, Enjoy!



Since Lyndal is home during the day with Sarah, she does most of the work in “preparing” the environment for daily activities. She has organized a work area in the den for activities which require special materials. The room has a child’s record player and records, a cassette recorder, a table and chairs, a closet for storage of educational material; and a miniature bookcase where she keeps special things that she and Sarah are currently working with.

Over a period of time, the bookcase houses such things as homemade cassette tapes of the books they’re reading, storybooks, readers, learning tools such as puzzles and games, a French tape, bits,\* crayons, pencils, paper, a Suzuki violin tape, an art box, a tape of bird songs, a phonics tape, and workbooks.

Lyndal organizes the materials and introduces activities, stepping aside when Sarah is doing things on her own. Sarah often chooses to do the things Lyndal suggests, but if she doesn’t want to do a particular activity, they go on to something Sarah expressly wants to do.

They may work outside or in the house, but whatever their choice, it allows Sarah to retain her natural joy in learning. That nurtures her joy in life, and fosters a love of work and order.

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\* A valuable, specialized teaching tool which we learned about from the Better Baby Institute; 8801 Stenton Avenue; Philadelphia, PA 19118.

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