

## The Daily Ritual of Silence

Silence is almost unknown to children today. Noise is so commonplace, that children have rarely known or experienced the tranquillity of silence. They have not seen it modelled. It does not come automatically to them.

Silence requires effort, the attention of the will, and maximum self control. For children to become a master of silence, they need to learn to relax, listen and appreciate quiet solitude. They need to learn what their body does when it is still and quiet. They need to understand that when in silence their sense of hearing is heightened so much so that they can hear their own breathing and heartbeat.

Maria Montessori was the first educator to 'recognize children's innate need for intervals of stillness to nourish their inner peace' (Wolf 2007).

According to Montessori, silence is the cessation of every movement. This silence of movement 'suspends normal life, and raises the person to another level of self' (The Montessori Method).

One hundred years ago, Maria Montessori created the 'game of silence' where all the children and the teacher remain as quiet as possible to listen for 'the lightest sounds like that of a drop of water falling in the distance and the far-off chirp of a bird' (Montessori, 1936 quoted in Kramer, 1976:115).

The teacher can whisper the word 'silence' very softly, ring a small bell or turn over a prepared sign that says 'silence. The children stop what they are doing and gather together in a designated space. The teacher whispers 'Let us close our eyes'. The children, sit in such silence that the room seems deserted<sup>1</sup>. The children still with their eyes closed waiting to hear the teacher whisper their name. After a few minutes when all children are silent, the teacher softly whispers their names. Children listen attentively for their name to be whispered. When they hear their name, the children walk very quietly toward the teacher - so quietly no one hears them moving. It is important to call every child. If someone does not hear his name, call some of the other children and then call him again. The children need really to listen.

When all children's names are whispered, silence stops and children return to what they were doing before the game began. It is important not to break off the game abruptly.

---

<sup>1</sup> Start with 30 seconds of silence and increase time as the children increase their ability to be silent.

According to the writings of Maria Montessori this activity is designed to help children develop a higher level of self-discipline, along with a greater awareness of the beauty of silence and subtlety of sound (Seldin and Wolff 2007).

Repeating the game process so habituates the children to immobility and to absolute silence that, when one of them interrupts, it needs only a syllable, a gesture to call him back immediately to perfect order. (Montessori, 1964, p. 205). The end result is a calm and peaceful environment, with everyone feeling calmer after the experience.

#### Variations/Extension:

Children need repeated opportunities to experience silence within group and individual settings. In conjunction with the 'game of silence', there are many ways of inviting children to silence, including the following:

- ▽ Guided visualization
- ▽ Meditation
- ▽ Yoga
- ▽ Progressive muscle relaxation
- ▽ Listen to breathing
- ▽ Feel heartbeat
- ▽ Listen for noises and tell the noises you hear
- ▽ Sit quietly and listen to music sounds
- ▽ Quiet spaces where children enjoy tranquillity
- ▽ Peaceful secluded garden
- ▽ Use sand timer for the duration of silence time

#### References

Kramer, R. (1976). *Maria Montessori*. G.P. Putman's, New York.

Montessori, M. (1964). *Montessori Method, rev. ed.* Schocken Books, New York.

Seldin T., and Wolff J. (2007) *The Exercises of Practical Life* The Montessori Foundation. The International Montessori Council.

Wolfe, A. (2007). Renewing the silence game. *Montessori International Magazine*, 85, December, 12-13. Montessori St Nicholas Charity.