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Claus-Dieter Kaul

The ten wishes of children

A holistic approach to the interaction
of children and adults

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Thank you!

I would like to thank all the course participants who, during conversations that took place, gave me the crucial ideas for this book and also the courage to write it.

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I. Introduction

After 35 years in the profession as a Montessori teacher for children, adolescents and adults, I would like to show how the philosophy of *Maria Montessori* has paved the way for me to impart holistic learning. This book is intended to help other people working with children to rethink the task of education.

The children and adolescents of today have to learn much more than before, to make deliberate decisions between conflicting values, ideas and personal relationships, in order to keep to their self-chosen goals. The ability to form a relationship has decreased considerably in today's human being. That is why, in education, we must do all we can to counteract this deficit.

It is important to me at the beginning of this book to show my development work as a teacher and a human being in order to develop an understanding of the practical implementation. Thus, in the discussion with Montessori and the concrete application, I have found more and more for myself, and now, beyond my courses with adults, I would like to give more people the opportunity, via the very practical experiences described in this book, to find a more meaningful life and way of learning.

I started my work at a Montessori school in a class with disabled and non-disabled children. Since it was difficult for me to teach in a conventional way, I chose the liberal approach of Montessori. The direct contact and exchange of views with individual children was of great significance to the development of my personality as a teacher. Since I initially saw and practiced the Montessori pedagogy in a very methodical and purely functional way, I was repeatedly being challenged to set apart the individual qualities and abilities of the individual children.

A particularly challenging task for me were the children with different disabilities - especially Andreas, who claimed to be an ant. Various therapies had been undertaken to "drive out" the ant before he started school, but without success. From the first school day, he made it clear to me that as an ant he did not have to learn to write, read, and calculate, and confronted me and his classmates with his „ants life.“ He crawled around the ground and asked his classmates to play ants, crowned his friends as ant kings with wings and without wings and drew ants for hours.

Andreas and other children reminded me that Montessori's demands on how to support children in learning are absolutely right.

According to Montessori, this means that the teacher should not first think of the curriculum, but the children who need all our help in the learning process in order to develop independent personalities. We should not start from ourselves, but from the child. This means that we teachers encourage the children when we make our actions dependent on the child. In this respect, my work became a constant self-reflection.

This is how I managed to accept Andreas as he was and to wait for the signs from him when he would be ready to accept me as his teacher and to work with me. At the same time, I was confronted with the fact that I taught the children according to the curriculum and always let my parents and colleagues bring me back into line in my role as teacher. Most parents, colleagues, and other interested people were all trapped in the same pattern of seeing the Montessori idea as a loving and well-intentioned way of educating the child.

But ultimately, with the prepared Montessori environment, the focus is on helping the child to function well in our environment. The child should attain the same abilities as everyone else, but perhaps better, thanks to the Montessori material, in performance. The adult is always anxious and doubtful as to whether it is correct to let the child develop and unfold in a different way. In particular, children like Andreas were strong enough to show me as a teacher and parents that a child can also learn to read, write and calculate in quite different ways with different possibilities and in their own time. For, surprisingly, he also acquired these abilities at primary school.

Again and again Maria Montessori accompanied me and gave me strength to be active from my personal centre:

„Before our eyes a new image was formed; Not the image of a school or education. It was the person who came before us ... Therefore, I believe that every form of education must be based on the development of human personality. Man himself should become a centre of education. The child will reveal himself as the greatest and consoling miracle of nature. We will no longer have a child before us a powerless being,

something like an empty vessel that has to be stuffed with our knowledge, but it shows itself in our dignity by seeing in it the creator of our intelligence, a being guided by a an instructor, full of joy and happiness, working tirelessly to build this miracle of nature, man, according to a fixed program. We as teachers can only help the work already done. Then we shall witness the development of the human soul: the emergence of the new man, who will no longer be the victim of the happening, but, thanks to his clear vision, be able to master and shape the future of human society.”¹

From this statement it becomes clear how important to Montessori the connection was from outside and within, and this has always determined my way to the „totality“, which ultimately became a further field of experience in the founding of the „Institute for Holistic Learning.”



Photo 1: Children washing their hands

In all the chapters of this book, I will summarize the topics of **Elfchen** and **Haikus** again.

➤ **Elfchen** and **Haikus** are poems that allow every human being to concentrate their thoughts and bring them to the point - a good exercise in the reflection of our educational work.

An **Elfchen** has the following structure:

- 1st. line has one word
- 2nd. line has two words
- 3rd. line has three words
- 4th. line has four words
- 5th. line has one word

And here the **Elfchen** to the book:

*Children
Have wishes
From us adults
We must pay attention
Trust*

A **Haiku** has the following structure:

- 1st line has 5 syllables
- 2nd line has 7 syllables
- 3rd line has 5 syllables

And here the **Haiku** to the book:

*Ten Children's wishes
In this book considered
As a perceptual field*

¹ Montessori ², p. 6f.

II. The ten wishes of children

1. Give us love!

Observing adults in my circle of acquaintances and relatives, they often show the same behavioural patterns when dealing with children. *Giving love* is equated to the giving of a present, which may consist of money or something material.

In addition, many adults attach conditions to the gift. Typical utterances, for example, are „If you have done your homework, then you may go play.“ Or „If you finish all the food on your plate, you will get an ice cream.“ This behaviour, as it were, is then taken over by the child, as are his conditions: „If I am very nice to my sister, then I can go to the cinema.“ Or „When I'm good at school, I will get a Playmobil car.“

The child will unconsciously make the connection that love can be bought or equated to some material object. I experience children right next to me that expect and wait for affection to be shown and given in this manner. They practice any work and even play in order to attract

attention. Suddenly, they are amazed when they see me as an adult, giving them time and attention without the expectation of a counter-performance. They learn how to perfect their use of work or play for their personal development.

Children have the wonderful natural ability to submit themselves completely to the here and now, and to remain completely in the moment. Even children who have fallen out of their natural equilibrium and thus no longer find their inner peace, can again find access to the connection of their inner world with the outer world. They need **stable rituals and ceremonies**, which offer them a possibility of true love.

An example from my *Montessori* work, taken from the area of „practical life exercises,“ which Montessori emphasized as a loving, careful approach to the objects and actions of everyday life:



Photo 2: Child soaping his hands

Hand washing ceremony

Place a metal or porcelain jug and bowl on a small table and place two folded guest towels next to it. In a small bowl, add a small bar of soap, and in a second bowl some hand cream. Next to the table is a cleaning cloth, on which you place a bucket and a small brush. Keep in mind that the arrangement of the objects should be appealing to the eye and that the utensils make interesting sounds during the ritual of hand washing. Invite children or the whole family to attend your hand-washing ceremony.

➤ First fill the jug with warm water and place it on the prepared table. Pour most of the water into the bowl keeping some back in the jug. Immerse your hands in the water and moisten your arms with it. Rub your hands and arms firmly with the soap. Place the soap briefly in the water and place it back in the soap dish.

➤ Massage the soaped hands and arms, smoothly and lovingly. Allow yourself a lot of time and pay attention to the beautiful sounds; Different memories and experiences are evoked in us - for example, slurping pigs or walking barefoot in the mud.

➤ Now begin to massage each finger of the left and the right hand intensely with love and concentration. Pay attention to every nail. Now immerse your hands and arms in the bowl and slowly rinse the soap off. Let the water drip from the fingers slowly into the bowl and then dry your hands and arms with a towel.

➤ Place the used towel over the back of a chair or over a radiator for drying. Pour the water from the bowl into the bucket next to the table and pour the rest of the water from the jug into the bowl. Using the brush and the cleaning cloth, thoroughly clean the bowl of any remaining soap.



Photo 3: Scrubbing the fingernails



Photo 4: Rinsing the hands



Photo 5: Emptying the dirty water into the bucket



Photo 6: Drying hands and using handcream

➤ The cleansing ceremony ends as you cream your hands, fingers and arms intensively with the hand cream from the small bowl. It is important that you always stay calm within yourself and your body and that you give a feeling of satisfaction, peace, awareness and love to the audience.

Maybe you are wondering why this particular example was selected. This ritual explains most closely what is meant by the gift of the child: „Give us love“ in full: „Give us from the very first day that love, time, and thoughts which you give yourselves when something is important to you and gives you a good feeling.“

➤ Again and again, adults say „Children cannot sit quietly or be quiet when we show them something.“ The above is essentially how we show children that this really matters to us. Even the most disinterested of children are fascinated by such rituals and pursue our actions in a curious and interesting way. Children have a very special gift to practice respect and to remind others to do the same.

In the case of such activities, it is important that, as an adult, I have first of all made it clear to myself whether I also have sufficient respect, self-esteem and time for myself and everyday things.

In the course of this work, the statements by Thich Nhat Hanh have helped me a great deal, as did the following example:

„The path to enlightenment and salvation leads to the practice of mindfulness. You have to go with patience and perseverance, and most of all, under the guidance of an experienced master. You should practice meditation while walking, standing, lying, sitting and working, washing hands, rinsing, sweeping and drinking, talking to friends and doing everything you do. You have to do every action with mindfulness. Every action is a ritual. Does the word ritual sound too solemn? I use it to show you once and for all that awareness, is a matter of life and death.“²

So before you perform such a ceremony for children, you should take the time to do the ritual on your own. In doing so, you will realize how beneficial such a small everyday action can be and how much love and respect you are giving yourself at this moment.

➤ We experience in this conscious action, which addresses all our senses, what a child experiences and learns:

- The arrangement of all objects on the table creates spatial awareness - an important basis for mathematics.
- Another mathematical benefit is the estimation of the water needed for hand washing and subsequent cleaning of the bowl.
- By soaking hands and arms, the child experiences the phenomenon of friction and how water and soap cause a chemical reaction.
- The massage of each individual finger gives the child information for counting from one to ten.
- The short immersion of the soap in the water as well as the cleaning of the bowl extend the child's horizon with regard to social skills

Ultimately, the child experiences an interplay of emotional and cognitive intelligence as well as the important access to one's own body during this everyday action and conscious execution.

In this way, we are able to accompany children more patiently and affectionately, we understand their actions and their own rituals much better and learn to provide them with more time. Children then accept our behaviour as a real, genuine form of affection and love, they realize that this is authentic with us. This is the only way to prevent these precious experiences from being reduced to compulsive, functional actions in everyday life.

Give yourself that attention and you will notice that during this ritual you will give yourself a piece of love. I often feel that children will thank me for my presentation and give me a kiss or a spontaneous embrace. In many children there is a need to do this ceremony now. Take the time to just sit by and watch the child give himself to the simple act, with the same surrender, with mindfulness and with all the time needed.

² Hanh¹, p. 45.

Time to live

I don't wish you all sorts of gifts.
I wish you only, what most people don't have.
I wish you time, to enjoy yourself and laugh,
and if you use it, you can make something of it.

I wish you time for your actions and your thoughts,
not only for yourself but also to be given.
I wish you time - not to hast and to race,
but just time to be satisfied in peace.

I wish you time - not just to while away the time.
I hope you have too much of it:
as time to wonder and time to trust;
instead of watching the time on the clock.

I wish you time to reach for the stars,
and time to grow, that is to mature.
I wish you time, to hope again, to love.
It doesn't make sense, to postpone this time.

I wish you time to find yourself,
each day, each hour to feel lucky.
I wish you time, also to forgive guilt.
I wish you: Time to have to live!

Elli Michler³

Translation from Elli Michler's poem: Zeit zum Leben



Photo 7: Invitation to meditate

³ Michler, Elli: „Dir Zuggedacht“, Wunschgedichte, Don Bosco Verlag, München 1999.

*Washing your hands
Full of devotion
For the child
An act of love
Gratitude*

*In daily life
To do work with love
To find relaxation*



Photo 8: *The washing of hands ritual*

2. Take care of us!

Several months ago, I visited various kindergartens to observe and accompany children in their play. In addition to many other materials, I brought for them the large trinomial cube - a cube that can be assembled from 27 individual parts. It has the size $50 \times 50 \times 50$ cm - the original trinomial cube from the Nienhuis firm has the dimensions $9 \times 9 \times 9$ cm.

➤ Here are the building instructions:

You will need sheets of plywood that are 1cm thick in the following dimensions:

4 pieces:	9 x 8 cm
14 pieces:	10 x 10 cm
4 pieces:	14 x 13 cm
14 pieces:	15 x 15 cm
4 pieces:	24 x 23 cm
14 pieces:	25 x 25 cm
12 pieces:	13 x 24 cm
12 pieces:	8 x 24 cm
24 pieces:	14 x 23 cm
12 pieces:	8 x 14 cm
24 pieces:	9 x 23 cm
12 pieces:	9 x 13 cm
12 pieces:	10 x 15 cm

You can now assemble the 27 parts of the trinomial cube with these pieces as follows:

Four pieces 9×8 cm and two 10×10 cm pieces each give the **smallest cube** painted in **yellow**.

Four pieces 14×13 cm each and two pieces 15×15 cm each give the **middle cube**, which is painted **blue**.

Four 24×23 cm each and two 25×25 cm pieces each give the **largest cube**, painted **red**.

Six pieces 25×25 cm each and twelve pieces each of 13×24 cm in size yield three cuboids whose square surfaces are painted **red**, the short edges are **blue**.

Six pieces 25×25 cm each and twelve pieces each of 8×24 cm in size yield three cuboids whose square surfaces are painted **red**, the short edges are **yellow**.

Six pieces each measuring 15×15 cm and twelve pieces each measuring 8×14 cm yield three cuboids whose square surfaces are each painted **blue**, the short edges **yellow**.



Photo 9: Trinomial Cube

* Please note this can be ordered as a building set, or already made from the Austrian firm: Martin Plackner, Altersdorf 21, A-4880 and T. Georgen im Attergau, T: 0043-76 67/86620 (www.spielzeugmacher.at)

Six pieces, each 15×15 cm and twelve pieces, each 14×23 cm in size, result in three cuboids, the square surfaces of which are each painted **blue**, the long edges **red**.

Six pieces each measuring 10×10 cm and twelve pieces each measuring 9×13 cm yield three cuboids, whose square surfaces are painted **yellow**, the short edges are **blue**.

Twelve pieces each measuring 10×15 cm, twelve pieces each measuring 14×23 cm, and twelve pieces each measuring 9×23 cm, yield six cubes, the short edges of which, on the sides and bottom, correspond to the sides of the small and medium cubes - **yellow** and **blue** and whose long edges are painted red - corresponding to the sides of the large cube.

The plates are glued together and attached with small nails.

This material has been adapted to offer children a wider range of playing possibilities:

- Due to the special size relationship of the parts, a high tower can be built with all parts.
- On a base, parts can be assigned according to size and colour, resulting in a cube.
- In certain layers, the same diagonal with the three cube sides can be seen on each side.
 $(a + b + c) \times (a + b + c) \times (a + b + c)$
- The individual parts can be posed as a street or in a circle, and the children can then balance, etc.



Photo 10: Children build a tower out of the trinomial cube



Photo 11: Starting to build the trinomial cube

We adults have many theoretical thoughts about what the child can learn all about, even with this great trinomial cube. It is much more important not to give the children our goals and expectations in the game, but to take the time to observe them and learn from them. That is, we should see the children as they are and not how we want them to be. For us, the ability to observe is a true art - namely, the urge to suppress, to interfere with the child's processes or even to accelerate them. Montessori calls this „attendere osservando“, which means „wait while watching“. Children learn through spontaneous activities, in which they develop an enormous energy.

Montessori said:

„Considering a child carefully, it is evident that his mind develops with the help of movement. The movement supports the psychological development, and this development finds expression in further movements and actions. It is therefore a cycle, since the psyche and the movement belong to the same unit. The senses also help, for when the child has no opportunity for sensory activity, a lesser development of the mind takes place. The child who has helped himself develops a stronger character.“⁴

It was also impressive to see the intensity and creativity of the children with the trinomial cube material. The 27 parts, standing at the edge of a round carpet, caused them to form a circle themselves, to tap on the wooden parts, and to organize a drum concerto.

Next the largest cube was taken as the foundation and all the other cubes were piled on it. Quickly, chairs and tables had to be taken to help build the high tower to the end. In a further group of children, some at this stage came up with the idea of carefully removing individual parts from the tower without the tower collapsing.

In this free work I could observe children, building a room with the 27 cubes, a room equipped, with table, chairs, bench, bed, and so on, their dolls and animals, and carried out an intensive role play.

Other children built a blue street, a yellow street, and a red street, so that the entire coloured surface was visible at the top. Soon after, they discovered that the road could also be built so that the same colours were always visible along the heights. The whole thing ended with a hurdle race, all the parts being spread over the meadow.

It is good to see with what joy and inner imagination children can take their learning into their own hands if they know that they are seen and respected. For us

adults, it is important to distinguish between respectful and interested looking and bored, controlled looking.



Photo 12: Which piece comes next?

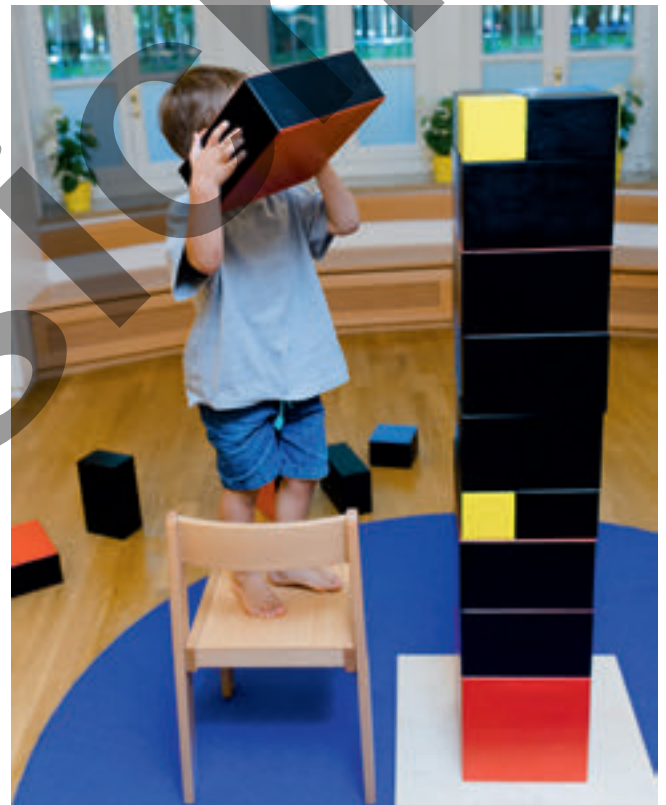


Photo 13: Using a chair to reach the next height

⁴ Montessori ², p. 129