

MNW A to I – Day Two (06/16/2020) – Nancy Lechner

Grace & Courtesy

Young children learn by watching and imitating adults, following by example and observing what adults say, do and how they act. The child absorbs what the adult says and does all the time. Therefore, adults need to be aware that children are always watching and need to start assessing themselves and practice being lovely and pleasant at all times. Behaving gracefully and being courteous has to come from the adult's self, for example, our smile has to come from the heart, because the children know when we are being fake. Once the adult becomes aware of his behavior, he will go through a personal transformation. His perceptions of his self will start to shift.

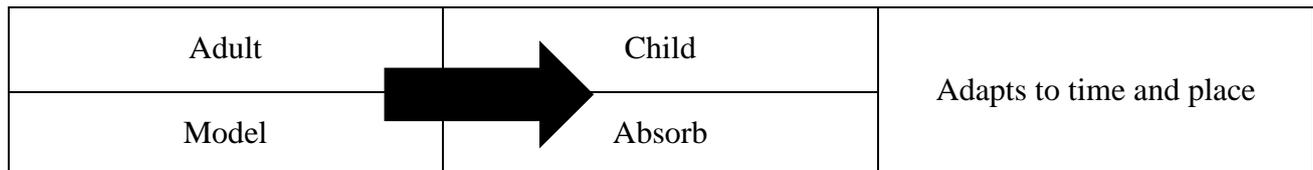
Grace and courtesy might change from culture to culture. However, it is consistently based on respect and values. The word “grace” means how we move and is related to the elegance and refinement of movement. The word “courtesy” means how we do, related to politeness and civility manners and speech. Blending these two words will guide how children learn social behavior.

Margaret Stephenson says that Grace and Courtesy are “our human responsibility” and “something that must become as familiar to us as breathing”. Montessori observed that the adult's goal in life is to be efficient and to do things unconsciously, which is different from the child's goal. The adult desires to move and act as fast as possible with the least effort. The child has the desire to work for the work itself, without a definite ending goal. So, the adult needs to develop a consciousness towards the way he behaves and slows down his actions. Whatever we do or say, we need to be aware that the child will do and say the same. Our grace and courtesy are our contributions to a peaceful society.

Different age groups will need diverse ways to be presented with grace and courtesy activities. The modeling ways of greeting people are distinct for 3 to 6 year-old children that can practice with each other and pretend. The 0 to 3 year-old child does not understand practice or pretending. This age group needs consistent and constant modeling of proper behavior and proper language from the adults. An adult must always model grace and courtesy and never force the child to act or say what the adult expects them to, like asking a child to say “please”, “thank you” or “I am sorry”. These behaviors will come from the child with time. There is also the need to model an imperfect human being since we are all learning and growing and can make mistakes. Consequently, adults can show the child how they would handle an error.

Most of the time we, adults, act to meet our goal to be efficient and fast, we are not being graceful or courteous to others, and the child will absorb an inappropriate behavior. One example is when we want to carry many things at once without planning. The child that is observing us at that moment, will incarnate this impression and try to reproduce it himself later. An older child might know that adults are not being a good example and will still follow the adult. On the other hand, we also need to acknowledge that we are not perfect and that we all have prejudice. It is something different than a like or a dislike based on something previously experienced. A prejudice is having a reaction or opinion towards something without previous experience. We grow up feeling and acting how we are raised and what we see. If our family and surrounding society have prejudices, we will grow up to have the same ones. That is why there needs to be a constant effort to change and realize how we act, when with prejudice. If we meet or know someone that expresses prejudice thoughts or feelings, we need to understand that they probably are unaware of their actions and call attention to them in a loving way.

The adult model's appropriate behavior and the child absorb it. That is how the child adapts to her own time and place. In the classroom, the teacher must create a "Culture of Peace", understanding and respecting each child's background, which is based on their perspective of society, and study more about each culture's good manners. If we want a better society, the adults must take on the responsibility to practice grace and courtesy until the point it becomes a habit and that is the way they move and do unconsciously. Knowing how to act properly, we will all build a community and do our part in society. Each one of us could always improve and do our best to make our transformation.



What could be modeled every day in the classroom?

- The teacher must always leave problems and frustrations outside the classroom.
- Being responsible for one's things as respect towards others.
- Greeting each other (adults and children) and smiling at them.
- How to talk to a co-worker, using appropriate words (please, thank you, sorry, would, could, may).
- Movement through class (how to walk and manipulate objects).
- Respect for privacy during toileting or diapering.
- How to listen to the child (get down at the child's eye level, observe his communication, tune in to his emotions, and acknowledge what they are trying to say).
- Push the chair back after leaving the table.

I will be the best of me so that the children can be their best as well.