Where time stands still

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The dividing line between the nation of adults and the nation of children runs through a place called “Time.” On the adult side time is measured in nano seconds so much to do, places to go, places to be but on the child’s side there is no measurement of time because there is no real internal or external clock. Time for children, if measured, is almost considered eternal, endless stretching out to some far horizon. Even learning to tell time is an accommodation to the adult world because time is a foreign word that has no meaning yet.

The conflict between the two worlds is painful and full of frustration for both adult and child. And ironically, it is only the “passing of time” that mitigates the conflict as the child sadly surrenders his childhood to the adult world. The child’s world (not the world of bills and jobs, responsibilities and obligations) is full of discovery and adventure where memories are few and possibilities are endless. The adult measures memories in a chronological diary while staying focused on now, today, this week … It is during this conflict that children learn why they have a middle name – adult patience has run out and you better hop to it NOW. It is also during this time that the child gets confused over his new name or title. It is traumatic enough to hear “John William” but now it is prefaced by “Hurry Up.” For the first two or three years of their lives children have been used to hearing only one name and now circumstances gives them FOUR names. Hurry Up John William (apologies to all the John Williams out there.) Hurry up brush your teeth. Hurry up put on your shoes. Hurry up eat your breakfast. Forget your name is John. Your name is now Hurry Up. (If you are grimacing while you read this you are recognizing your own world but also if you are reading this it means that your child is in all likelihood enrolled in a place “Where time stands still.”

Your Montessori school is a haven from the tyranny of time. It is a place of leisurely discovery and at the same time a laboratory of intense work (that is not governed by the clock.) The adult frustration of running out of time only visits a Montessori school when the adult clock says it is time to go home. But there is the promise that tomorrow I can pick up exactly where I left off - the intervening time does not make me miss the joy of discovery and work, unlike poor Mom and Dad if they miss the plane or the appointment or the deadline.

Now, there is another irony of this place where time stands still and it is time travel. Montessori is a place where three-year-olds can visit the world of fours and fives. Where four-year-olds catapult themselves into the future of learning. Nobody checks their passport for age. They get to explore the lands of writing, reading, math, science, geometry and geography and no one says you are too young (someone else’s concept of time.) Montessori children easily move back and forth through this environment where time stands still.

Can time stand still at home? A difficult challenge but you can mitigate the time wars and frustration to you and your children. Again, there is an irony here. It will take time. If a child needs thirty minutes to finish a process – brushing her teeth, putting on her shoes etc. – plan on thirty minutes not the five you can do it in. “Plan” is an adult word. That is what adults do – they plan. Plan time, lots of it for your children because they are not yet “blessed” with that gene. So, it is up to the adults to navigate the time reality and not complain about children not yet speaking the foreign language called time. Hopefully, some day, the only time “hurry up” will be heard in your house is when the children say, “I wish Christmas would hurry up and get here.”