



The Montessori

# OBSERVER

Discipline

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## Georgia Conference and Consultation

On October 24-25, 1986, a Georgia Montessori Conference on "managing misbehavior" was held in Roswell, Georgia for teachers, parents and school owners in the southeastern United States. Sponsored by the Hammond School (Roswell, Georgia), the conference was conducted by Lee Havis, executive director of the International Montessori Society, and included the participation of about 45 persons from the states of Georgia, Maryland, South Carolina, Florida and Mississippi. Several students and a graduate of the Society's "Independent Study Course" for Montessori teacher preparation were also in attendance.

Prior to the conference during October 21-24, 1986, the Hammond School was also engaged in an extensive and comprehensive Society consultation as to its Montessori educational program. Conducted personally by Mr. Havis, the Hammond School consultation included direct observation of the school's facilities and teaching staff in the operation of their various educational programs for children from infant-toddler through the elementary age level.

The Hammond school consultation included many meetings between Havis and the teaching staff, both individually and as a group, to consider their expansive being with children as "commitment to Montessori principles". Mr. Havis also spoke to the school's parents about the effective application of Montessori principles at their regular meeting held on the evening of Thursday, October 23, 1986.

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## Reflections

by Virginia Jones  
(Lilburn, Georgia)

*Virginia Jones is a student in the Society's "Independent Study Course".*

### Courage from Commitment

When I reflect on the progress I have realized with regard to awareness of my ability to express a complete commitment to the three Montessori principles, I am truly amazed. . . . What I have learned from all those hours of frustration when I was trying to identify just what my "personality" is, is that I am not my "personality" . . . . A few months ago I could not see beyond that "personality". I truly believed

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"Children helping children" at the Step by Step Early Learning Center (Miller Place, New York)—in collaboration with the Shoreham-Wading River Middle School Early Childhood Community Service Project.

## Children Helping Children in New York

*" . . . children of different ages help one another. The younger ones see what the older ones are doing and ask for explanations. . . . There is a communication and harmony between the two that one seldom finds between the adult and the small child."*

Maria Montessori  
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.226

The six-hundred student Shoreham-Wading River Middle School in suburban Long Island, New York, includes their sixth, seventh and eighth graders in an extensive community service program which involves regular visits to area day care centers, schools and nursing homes. The school's unique community service program of "children helping children" is now achieving national prominence, having been reported in a number of books and magazines, and having been invited for presentation at regional and national conferences.

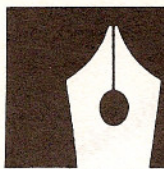
The school's "children to children" program was first initiated in 1973 as an experiment to allow a few disaffected students to work with younger children outside the school on an occasional basis. Results and impact of this first experience, were so remarkable that a supervised program of such "community service" was instituted as an established aspect of the school's curriculum—integrated with the

children's regular school work associated with their own subjects such as reading, writing and social studies.

The middle school children include their community service work within their regular classroom curriculum associated with the growth and development of young children. Specific activities include orientation sessions with speakers, films and discussions; reading, journals and other writing; planning for work at field sites; evaluation; and assuming responsibility for their own actions with others. The younger children are involved in such activities as finger plays, crafts, stories and music.

The Step by Step Early Learning Center, a Society member Montessori school in Miller Place, New York, has recently been participating in the Shoreham-Wading River Middle School's community service project wherein six sixth grade students visit the Step by Step school to work with various groups of young children one day a week for a ten week period. Judy Salmon, director of the Step by Step school states that the project has been very rewarding as it coordinates well with Montessori teaching for children to learn from other children

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# Discipline

by Lee Havis

*"... children are very well disciplined indeed when they can all move around in a room in a useful, intelligent, and free fashion without doing anything rude or unmannerly."*

**Maria Montessori**  
from *Discovery of the Child*, p.54

Dr. Montessori's vision of the child's true nature is that of complete harmony with its environment—revealing itself outwardly as an active spontaneous "self-discipline" with others. Such a vision considers true "discipline" as that which emerges from within the child itself rather than that which is from the customary fear and manipulation ordinarily imposed by external adult authority.

In Montessori education, the emergence of "undisciplined" behavior in a child is seen as "abnormal," the result of undue detrimental influences in the environment. Such "abnormal" behavior can be indirectly corrected nonetheless by the child itself in the distinctive Montessori "normalizing" environment; i.e. adult being as commitment to the fundamental Montessori principles: (1) Observation, (2) Individual Liberty; and (3) Preparation of the Environment. By contrast, traditional education generally considers "undisciplined" behavior as a matter for the teacher's direct control or repression.

## Traditional Education

*"To dominate the child, to bring him into subjugation, to make him obedient—this is the basis of (traditional) education. If this can be done by any means whatever, even by violence, all the rest will follow."*

**Maria Montessori**  
from *Spontaneous Act. in Ed.*, p.29-30

Traditional education generally views "discipline" in children as a matter of adult responsibility which must be established before any effective instruction can be accomplished. Even with the more "enlightened" forms of individualized education, whether associated with the word "Montessori" or not, at least some measure of manipulative, repressive adult being with children is invariably assumed as somehow "necessary" or "justified." The typical adult attitude of repressive domination of children seems particularly present in circumstances of a child's abusive rebellion, disobedience or "misbehavior."

## Typical Adult Attitude

*"... a typical attitude of the adult is to be always looking for vice in order to suppress it. But the correction of errors is often humiliating and discouraging... and, since (traditional) education rests on this basis, there follows a lowering in the general quality of social life."*

**Maria Montessori**  
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.240

The typical adult repression of children, whether offered under the guise of "teaching"

or not, is ordinarily justified by some presumptive higher "good" to maintain "discipline" in the entire social group. However, this type of "discipline" arising from adult imposition is temporary and superficial at best since the child's own independent will is necessarily crushed in the process of achieving the intended external results. Whatever emerges as "obedience" from such adult repression would be therefore more properly characterized as slave-like subjugation to tyrannical oppression.

## Oppression

*"If a child carries out the will of a teacher because he is afraid, or because his affection is exploited, he has no will, and obedience that is secured by suppression of the will is truly oppression."*

**Maria Montessori**  
from *Discovery of the Child*, p.85

External appearances of ordinary "discipline" and "obedience" in children typically implicate an underlying condition of oppression wherein the child's own voluntary will has been effectively suppressed or destroyed. Imposed entirely by adult oppression, the ordinary "discipline" of traditional education is clearly dependent on external fear or manipulation from the adult presence. By contrast, the development of true inner discipline according to Montessori principles necessarily includes a parallel development of the child's fully independent "will," the ultimate "cause" of which lies far beyond any adult "teaching."

## Cause of Development

*"Anyone can dominate and repress the weak and subdued; but no one can cause another to develop. Development cannot be taught."*

**Maria Montessori**  
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.206

The development of true natural "discipline" arises essentially as the child's own creative activity perfecting itself through a gradual integration of many environmental experiences. From such integration, a self-discipline emerges in the child which is dynamically active and uniquely harmonious with others. Such "active" discipline is sharply distinct from the ordinary "discipline" of traditional education so customarily associated with passive immobility and docile subjugation to external authority.

## Active Discipline

*"We do not believe that one is disciplined only when he is artificially made as silent as a mute and as motionless as a paralytic. Such a one is not disciplined but annihilated... active discipline... embodies a lofty principle of education that is quite different from the absolute and undiscussed coercion that produces immobility."*

**Maria Montessori**  
from *Discovery of the Child*, p.49

The "active" discipline characteristic of the

child's true nature given at conception (i.e., "normality") is that which emerges as a slow and steady process of exercise and experience with others over a long period of time. Even children from "unnaturalized" circumstances in the past can be led towards their own true self-disciplined nature with others in the supportive circumstances of a Montessori "normalizing" environment. Ultimately, a profound self-discipline arises in the child from such an environment to far exceed the level of "discipline" which would otherwise emerge through ordinary traditional education.

## Exercise and Experience

*"Only exercise and experience can correct a disability, and it takes long practice to acquire the various kinds of skills that are needed. The undisciplined child enters into discipline by working in the company of others, not by being told that he is naughty."*

**Maria Montessori**  
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.245-246

In a Montessori "normalizing" environment, the child's "undisciplined" behavior changes to that which reflects true "normality" through a process of considerable environmental practice and experience with others. During

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Look for the  
**January Observer**  
featuring  
**Interest**

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Lee Havis, Executive Director

The *Montessori Observer* is mailed six times each year to Society members throughout the world. The *Observer* is sent during the months of January, March, May, September, October and November. The purpose of this publication is to provide news and information about the development of Montessori education to extend awareness of Montessori principles and to promote harmony within the Montessori community.

## INTERNATIONAL MONTESSORI SOCIETY

The International Montessori Society is sponsored by Educational Services, Inc., a non-profit corporation organized in Maryland, U.S.A. The Society's purpose is to support the effective application of Montessori principles throughout the world.

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## ADVERTISING

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## LETTERS TO IMS

October 20, 1986

Dear Lee:

I would like to thank you for the recent article in the *Montessori News* publication.

Everyday I am finding out that Montessori's principles are used more and more in my classroom. There is much more thinking before reacting. I appreciate all 22 lessons.

Sincerely,

Kathy Strobel  
Montessori Children's House  
West Bend, Wisconsin

*Ed. Note: Kathy Strobel is a recent graduate of Society's 22-lesson "Independent Study Course" and director of the Montessori Children's House in West Bend, Wisconsin.*

October 27, 1986

Dear Lee,

"Words" cannot begin to express my feelings about the past week. Thank you for all you did and were.

Toni Hammond  
Hammond School  
Roswell, Georgia

*Ed. Note: Toni Hammond is director of the Hammond School which recently concluded a week-long consultation and conference conducted by Lee Havis.*

## Georgia Conference

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The conference itself was held on the evening of October 24, 1986 and 9-5 on Saturday, October 25, 1986 to consider the issue of "managing misbehavior" according to one's being as "commitment to Montessori principles". During the conference, various misbehavior scenarios were specifically analyzed and resolved following the approach of: "control the environment, not the child". The conference was noteworthy for its lively and attentive discussion among the participants, including considerable dialogue as to their own personal experiences, ideas and thoughts relative to one's effective being with children.

Mr. Havis stated that "the Hammond School consultation and conference reflects a most constructive forward impulse to the creation of the 'new education' in the southeastern United States and beyond. I am looking forward to further good work on behalf of the "normalized" child to emerge from this conference among the participants and through the Society's further conferences and consultation elsewhere."

For further information about the Society's schedule of conferences or for consultation, contact: International Montessori Society, 912 Thayer Ave., Silver Spring, Maryland 20910, Tel. (301) 589-1127.

## Marketplace

Montessori School in Philadelphia, PA suburbs. Equipment, lease and business. Capacity, 30 children. Will negotiate financing. For information, contact: Barbara Waters, Carolyn Cox, (215) 872-3110.

## Discipline

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infancy and until the age of about six, this process emerges most strikingly in outer form as spontaneous goal-directed activity referred to in Montessori education as "work."

### Work

*"The first glimmerings of discipline have their origin in work . . . Discipline is therefore attained indirectly, that is by developing activity in spontaneous work."*

Maria Montessori  
from *Discovery of the Child*, p.304

Directed by the creative impulse of the "teacher within" the child itself, goal-directed activity with physical objects (i.e., "work") is the means by which inner self-discipline is gradually realized. Such "work" is most strikingly present in a child's prolonged period of intense attention and profound concentration on some specific physical object.

### Concentration

*"Discipline is born when the child concentrates his attention on some object that attracts him. . ."*

Maria Montessori  
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.264

In the process of developing true "discipline," the child's profound concentration signals the establishment of a critical psychic integration of being within the child. Termed "normalization," this mysterious psychological phenomenon represents an essential point of departure from which the child's own independent and self-disciplined functioning begins to effortlessly unfold into the future.

### Normalization

*"the child whose attention has once been held by a chosen object . . . is a delivered soul . . . From this moment there is no need to worry about him."*

Maria Montessori  
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.272

From the moment of "normalization", the child's discipline begins to extend itself spontaneously in ever deeper levels of self-developmental perfection. Such "normalization" emerges in the child as a sort of mysterious harmony with the uniquely psychic environment created by the adult being as complete commitment to the three fundamental Montessori principles. Such Montessori being provides a certain external condition of "scientific freedom" for children wherein their development of true "active" discipline is effectively supported.

### Scientific Freedom

*" . . . freedom and discipline are two faces of the same medal, because scientific freedom leads to discipline."*

Maria Montessori  
from *Absorbent Mind*, p. 285

Whereas "freedom" in traditional education is typically taken as appropriate only *after* there has emerged some "discipline" in children, Montessori education considers a more expansive view of "individual liberty" wherein such presence is necessary *even before* the emergence of any true or complete discipline. This

"scientific freedom" considers that whatever "mistakes" or "misbehavior" there may arise in the process of "normalization" are more for "observation" than "suppression"; i.e., part of a larger process of the child's own independent self-perfection. The adult's function to support this process of "normalization" is directed essentially to that of careful preparation of the child's environment.

### The Adult Function

*"A child slowly perfects his activities. An adult can assist in shaping the environment, but it is the child that perfects his own being."*

Maria Montessori  
from *Secret of Childhood*, p. 195

Montessori teaching reflects an adult function of "preparation of the environment" to remove whatever detrimental influences there may be present in the child's environment as a moment-to-moment process of being a "commitment to Montessori principles". Such being recognizes that reality is a matter of conscious awareness in the present moment wherein one begins by simply "thinking" about the three Montessori principles. As DesCartes said, "I think, therefore I am."

### Thinking

*" . . . a man is capable of becoming anything . . . Making use of his own will in his contact with the environment, he develops his faculties and thus becomes in a sense his own creator."*

Maria Montessori  
from *Secret of Childhood*, p. 33

By "thinking" about the three Montessori principles, saying them to oneself in some troubling moment of peril with children, the reality of true Montessori teaching is gradually engendered within oneself. Whatever "doing" there may be associated with such "being" tends to arise as a natural and spontaneous expression of one's moment-to-moment removal of detrimental influences from around the individual child in question. In external form, the environment for "preparation" around an individual child consists of (1) physical objects; (2) other children; and (3) adult.

### Removing Obstacles

*"The teacher's happy task is . . . removing the obstacles, beginning with those which she herself is likely to present (for the teacher can be the greatest obstacle of all)."*

Maria Montessori  
from *Spontaneous Act. in Ed.*, p. 264

From one's being as "commitment to Montessori principles", the adult's supportive presence involves a gradual removing of the detrimental influences in the child's environment which otherwise would continue to deter its normal development of discipline. Here we find that the adult's own "personality" with children can often prove the most resistant to effective removal as a detrimental influence.

### Adult Personality

*" . . . the teacher . . . removes the obstacle that is created by his own activity and authority."*

Maria Montessori  
from *Secret of Childhood*, p. 111

Even if a teacher is able to restrain some destructive forms of adult imposition, such as

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### Discipline

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violence, punishment and threats, there may yet remain many other less obvious forms of unconscious impositions which persist, such as abandonment, dependency and manipulation. To examine one's own unconscious errors must therefore remain the constant preoccupation of an effective Montessori teacher.

#### Unconscious Error

*"... when her class becomes undisciplined, the teacher sees in the disorder merely an indication of some error that she has made; she seeks this out and corrects it. The teacher of the traditional school would feel this to be humiliating, but it is not humiliating, it is a part of the technique of the new education."*

Maria Montessori

from *Absorbent Mind*, p. 285

One's conscious awareness of the three Montessori principles tends to direct attention to the child's "environment", including the adult's own "personality", wherein many unconscious errors of perception and discernment must necessarily become conscious and resolved. Montessori teaching is therefore a continual process of "expansion" of the fundamental principle "observation" regarding one's own "personality", as well as the "physical objects" and the "other children" around the child at issue. Accordingly, "defects" in a child's behavior are seen more as opportunities for "giving space" to their emergence for one's complete observation, rather than as occasion to suppress such defects in the customary fashion of traditional education.

#### Giving Space

*"The usual conception of direct correction and suppression of defects is wrong . . . Correction is possible only by expansion, by 'giving space', by opening up the means for the expansions of the personality."*

Maria Montessori

from *The Formation of Man*, p. 49

While the typical adult suppression of defects in children might provide some momentary remission of such defects, the long-term

underlying patterns of destructive undisciplined behavior will nonetheless tend to remain active—to emerge in disguised form at some later time as abuse or disregard in the child's environment. True discipline, emerges only with a considerable adult "patience" in the face of "error" and "misbehavior" in children. The typically impatient adult faced with "undisciplined" children might well find the more passive role of true Montessori teaching very difficult to practice indeed.

#### The Passive Role

*"Even an intelligent teacher . . . cannot understand her apparently passive role, which is like that of an astronomer who sits fixed at his telescope while the planets go spinning around."*

Maria Montessori

from *Discovery of the Child*, p. 50

The essentially passive role of true Montessori teaching with children is very problematic for the typically impatient "busy" adult to practice; i.e. to "feel" tension within while one's being is that of an outer calm. Here we see that one's conscious awareness with children must necessarily direct itself more to the issue of what to "be" rather than what to "do". Eventually, one's being as "commitment to Montessori principles" will gradually compel what one "does" to result in the emergence of profound spontaneous self-discipline in truly "normalized" children.

#### Children Helping Children

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The Shoreham-Wading River Middle School Early Childhood Community Service Project is supervised and coordinated by the public school teaching staff and it is financially supported by an enthusiastic school board. For further information, contact: Judy Salmon, Step by Step Early Learning Center, 138 Radio Ave., Miller Place, New York 11764 Tel. (516) 821-0474.

### Reflections

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that it was the way I am and would always be. Now I know different. I look to the reality of my commitment to Montessori principles and know that my "being" is beyond my "personality"; they are independent and distinct from one another. This thought has given me great courage in the past months. . .

My commitment has given me a great courage that I never before felt possible. It has given me the courage to try even in the face of defeat. It has given me the courage to see beyond the misbehaving child and know that the "normalized" child is there just waiting to be unveiled. My commitment has given me the courage to do nothing when every ounce of me is saying "do something!". It has given me the inner strength I need to prevail against a society that fights anything that is different. . .

Reading about "normalization" and concentration provided great hours of reading enjoyment but it was always hard to actualize many of the things I was learning. My total awareness did not come until I entered the Montessori classroom and saw it through the eyes of one committed to its principles. I saw total concentration from a child and felt like I had witnessed a miracle. I watched children interact with the materials and absolutely love it. I have seen children enter the classroom with a misbehavior problem and have it disappear because I had the courage to do nothing but observe. There is no reward greater than working with children in the Montessori classroom.

I have been in the classroom for two years now and every day brings something new and wonderful. I am growing every day that I am in the classroom. The children are teaching me so much more than I could have ever learned on my own. My commitment to Montessori has opened up my mind and my heart to a new education that will give us a generation of "normalized" children.