



The Montessori

OBSERVER

Interest

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Child working with "knobbed cylinders" at the Apple Montessori School (Rego Park, New York)

Apple Montessori in New York

The Apple Montessori School located in Rego Park, New York, is under the direction and ownership of **Sneh Parasher**. This Society member school provides a full and half-day program for children aged three to six.

The school expresses its commitment to the Montessori principle of "Preparation of the Environment" by offering a wide variety of opportunities for the children's individual constructive activity throughout the day. A special music program at the school centers on the weekly visit of a graduate music student from nearby Queens College. This specially trained teacher guides the presentation of musical instruments in a variety of interesting activities. Mrs. Parasher states that the children eagerly participate in these opportunities to learn through music.

On December 19, 1986, the school presented a special "Holiday Show" for all the parents. Conducted by the children themselves, this annual event is offered to enable children to gain confidence in their skills to perform a variety of carefully prepared activities arising from their own interest and ability.

Mrs. Parasher maintains a keen interest in extending the skill and mastery of her staff in the effective application of Montessori principles. Recently, she personally attended and participated with others at the Society's New York conference on "managing misbehavior."

For further information, contact: Sneh Parasher, Apple Montessori School, 59-38 Xenia St., Rego Park, New York 11368. Tel. (718) 699-1262.

Why Do Children Bite?

In general, children "bite" as a frustrated oral expression of their feelings of pain and hostility with others. As with all other forms of misbehavior, "biting" is ultimately resolved in time through one's being as a complete commitment to the three fundamental Montessori principles of: (1) "Observation"; (2) "Individual Liberty"; and (3) "Preparation of the Environment."

Expanding the principle of "observation" serves particularly well to effectively resolve the underlying drama of "biting" in children. Such resolution proceeds as a growing awareness of such drama, without the typical forms of repression, blame and guilt which are ordinarily associated with such violent misbehavior.

Children tend to learn early in life that "crying" and other forms of oral expression are not fully effective to communicate their feelings of pain and suffering experienced with others. Ordinarily, adults tend to unconsciously repress effective oral expression in children

Cont'd. On Page 4, Col. 3

New York Conference

- November 22-23, 1986

The Society conducted its latest conference on "Managing Misbehavior" at the Sheraton Inn at La Guardia in New York on November 22-23, 1986. Continuing the Society's expanding communication of "commitment to Montessori principles," the recent New York conference was attended by school owners and teachers in the northeastern area of the United States. Society member schools represented in attendance at the conference were Forest Hills Montessori School (Forest Hills, New York), Apple Montessori School (Rego Park, New York), Ideal Montessori School (Queens, New York) and Villa Fusco Montessori School (Schenectady, New York). Several students in the Society's Independent Study Course also participated as well as a Montessori teacher from the state of Rhode Island.

Conducted by **Lee Havis**, executive director of the International Montessori Society, the recent New York conference extended considerably the work of prior conferences offered in Roswell, Georgia (October, 1986) and Corpus Christi, Texas (August, 1986).

The New York conference extended beyond previous similar events by offering many new "misbehavior" scenarios for consideration and analysis. In addition, the conference discussion addressed such further issues as proper use of Montessori materials and how government regulations are related to the effective operation of Montessori schools.

An audio tape of important excerpts of this conference will soon be available for purchase from the Society. The New York conference tapes will offer a considerably improved audio quality from that which is present with the currently available Corpus Christi conference tapes.

Further Society conferences are scheduled for San Francisco, California (February 7-8, 1987); Dallas, Texas (March 7-8, 1987); Los Angeles, California (April 25-26, 1987); and Detroit, Michigan (May 16-17, 1987). Advance registration is required. Price is \$150 per person (\$120 for Society members). For registration form or further information, contact: IMS, 912 Thayer Ave., Silver Spring, Maryland 20910. Tel. (301) 589-1127.

"'Wait while observing', That is the motto for the educator."

Maria Montessori
from Dr. Montessori's

Own Handbook, p. 136-137



Interest

by Lee Havis

"Finally, the time comes in which the children begin to take an interest in something . . . this interest corresponds with natural laws and opens up a whole cycle of new activities . . . This is the moment at which the teacher most often goes wrong."

Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p. 279

"Interest" is a primary focus and concern in one's effective being as a commitment to the three fundamental Montessori principles of: (1) "Observation;" (2) "Individual Liberty;" and (3) "Preparation of the Environment." Such commitment functions essentially to nurture the child's spontaneous interest through the provision of a properly prepared environment, beginning first as a process to locate the child's true interest through one's careful and discerning "observation."

Observation

"The Montessori teacher is constantly looking for a child who is not yet there . . . So what must she look out for? That one child or another will begin to concentrate."

Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p. 276

"Observation" as a Montessori principle seeks primarily to locate a child's true interest in the present moment through such means as visual scanning, inquiry and total sensory awareness. Such "Observation" emerges as a "directionality" wherein one proceeds to expand awareness of the child's being in the environment even amid the presence of mistakes, distractions and considerable misconception. Limited by the distracting presence of one's "personality" in the form of a constant stream of random thoughts and feelings, "Observation" only imperfectly reveals the child's spontaneous interests in outer form. Ultimately, such interests tend to remain deeply hidden as a mystery of creation within the child-itself.

The Unknown Child

" . . . all, or nearly all, see the child as he is commonly known only, not the child as he is, still an unknown entity."

Maria Montessori
from *The Formation of Man*, p. 60-61

Observing the child as an "unknown entity," one perceives "interest" in any given moment as only a trace of that which has already passed by; like the wake of a ship. Distorted by unconscious prejudice and expectations, one's moment-to-moment judgment of a child's interest includes some considerable speculation and experimentation in the process of one's function to effectively "prepare the environment."

Preparing the Environment

"The environment must be rich in motives which lend interest to activity and invite the child to conduct his own experiences."

Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p. 92

"Preparation of the environment" serves primarily to provide constructive experiences with physical objects to meet the child's spontaneously emerging interests. Ordinarily, such preparation is limited indeed—guided only by the most superficial perception of the child's initial inclination towards the drama of fantasy play, as opposed to its more serious interest in real work. Environments for young children are therefore typically only "prepared" for play by the provision of a great quantity of toys.

Toys

" . . . the child quickly tires of a toy . . . He wantonly breaks it, and people infer that he has a delight in taking things to pieces and in destruction . . . The children have little interest in these things because there is no reality in them."

Maria Montessori
from *Ed. for a New World*, p. 64

The child's involvement with toys is limited generally to momentary curiosity or whim—noticeably lacking any substantial attention or deep concentration. Such toys serve essentially only to dramatize superficial sensations in one's escape from a reality perceived as fearful, hostile and confused. The child's true interest in hard work with real objects tends to remain unseen behind the external drama of play.

Play

" . . . a child always has something important at hand, he is not particularly interested in playing."

Maria Montessori
from *Secret of Childhood*, p. 220

A child's play—erroneously assumed as "normal"—is ordinarily not only tolerated but often even encouraged. Dominated by unconscious prejudices about the child's being as essentially idle and "playful," some teachers may abandon children to "play" under the erroneous impression that they are effectively applying the fundamental Montessori principle of "Individual Liberty."

Individual Liberty

"The principle of liberty is not therefore a principle of abandonment, but rather one which, by leading us from illusion to reality, will guide us to the most positive and efficacious 'care of the child.'"

Maria Montessori
from *Spontaneous Act. in Ed.*, p. 9-10

"Individual Liberty" serves to enable children to choose their own true interest in reality. Children abandoned to "play" are not truly "free" but rather limited to choose only from among those various forms of escape which provide some momentary distraction away from reality.

Distraction

"It is not possible to speak of free choice when all kinds of external stimuli attract a child at the same time and, having no will power, he responds to every call, passing relentlessly from one thing to another . . . He is still a slave to superficial sensations which leave him at the mercy of his environment."

Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p. 271

The typical child appears bound within a state of constant distraction, bouncing from one superficial sensation to another—abandoned to whatever dominating environmental influence there may be present at the given moment. Traditional teaching, generally adopting such a superficial view of the child, attempts to "create" interest in children by imposing various forms of environmental stimulation, manipulation and motivation under the guise of "education." By contrast, Montessori teaching approaches the child as its own "cause"—having its own inherent guidance and creative purpose to which the environment can at best only supportively respond in harmony.

Cause of Interest

" . . . internal activities act as cause; they do not react and exist as the effect of external factors. Our attention is not arrested on all things indifferently, but by those which are congenial to our tastes."

Maria Montessori
from *Spontaneous Act. in Ed.*, p. 160

Cont'd. on Page 3, Col. 2

Look for the March Observer featuring Education

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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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Subscription to this *Observer* publication may be obtained by requesting Society membership which is open to all individuals for a \$15 annual fee. Society members also receive a subscription to the *Montessori News*. Send request for membership benefits.

ADVERTISING

Advertising space is available for services and products relating to Montessori education. Marketplace ads are \$7/line. Position and Placement ads are \$10 each and will be set and edited by the Society to conform to space requirements. Write for the Society's advertising outline as to rates and other information about design advertising.

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LETTERS TO IMS

November 13, 1986

Dear Mr. Havis,

The Atlanta conference (October 24-25, 1986) was indeed very valuable to me. Many of the Montessori ideas I was learning about began to crystallize in my mind as I saw the practical side of applying the three principles of Montessori. I find that, even if I don't fully understand them, when I think about each one in the face of misbehavior in my children, I am put in touch with the reality of the moment. Then I can see what needs to be done. This firm foundation gives me peace in the rough times.

I guess I would just like to express the gratitude I feel to you, to IMS . . . I feel I am on the road to becoming a much better prepared part of my children's environment. As I learn more about these precious little beings, these diamonds in the rough, I am hopeful they will become normalized, and in the process maybe I will too.

Sincerely,

Bonnie (Sanders)
Beaufort, South Carolina

Ed. Note: Bonnie Sanders is a student in the Society's "Independent Study Course" and refers to her experiences of the Georgia Montessori Conference which she attended in Roswell, Georgia, on October 24-25, 1986.

November 19, 1986

Dear Mr. Havis,

I await my last lesson with mixed feelings. On the one hand I am excited about the completion of my course . . . On the other hand however, I will truly miss our weekly dialogue. Talking to you "energizes" me and I know I will miss that. I hope we can find a way to communicate often. I know I can call you if I have a problem. I hope you will keep in touch also.

I read your "Moments of Peril" and I loved it . . . I like the idea of all your mini scenarios. I could relate to almost everyone! I noticed that IMS is sponsoring the next few conferences. Would you consider another one in Atlanta . . . I feel many of the teachers at the last conference (Roswell, Georgia, October/1986) would support another one . . .

Sincerely,

Virginia Jones
Snellville, Georgia

Ed. Note: Virginia Jones received her certificate of completion of the Society's 22-lesson "Independent Study Course" for Montessori teacher preparation on December 12, 1986. The "Moments of Peril" document she refers to is a worksheet of "misbehavior" scenarios incorporated into the Society's conference, most recently conducted in New York on November 22-23, 1986.

November 24, 1986

Dear Lee,

During the flight home, I made the decision to take your course. I hope you can see all the gratitude and appreciation I have for you in this one small act. I hope you can see it as my highest compliment and my most heartfelt thanks.

The conference (New York, November 22-23, 1986) gave me assurance that I have been on the right path, going in the right direction, though groping in darkness some of the time. I received much support and encouragement from you and the other people there.

Your friend and colleague,

Paul Posillo
Ashaway, Rhode Island

Ed. Note: Paul Posillo is referring to his experiences of the recent Society conference which he attended in New York on November 22-23, 1986.

Positions & Placements

Montessori Teacher: (7-12). Elementary trained teacher for school year 1987-88. Full-time position to supervise and manage a class of 12 to 30 children. School is located in Redding, CA, at the northern end of the Sacramento Valley. City's population is about 51,000, offering beautiful surroundings, country living and fine outdoor recreation. To apply, send profile along with salary requirements to: Montessori Elementary School of Shady Oaks, 1410 Victor Ave., Redding, CA 96003.

Interest

Cont'd. from Page 2, Col. 3

The child's true interest emerges from within the child itself as creative activity—not from environmental stimulation or external motivation as generally considered in traditional education. While the environment may certainly support and enhance the child's interest as it becomes perceived in outward form, the cause of its creation lies invariably hidden within the child to unfold a mysterious plan of development set in motion at the moment of its conception. Environmental support for such creative development is therefore limited essentially to the presentation of a precise organization of work, following always the purpose of the child's own freely chosen self-directed activity.

Organization

" . . . the child . . . ought to find in his surroundings something organized in direct relation to his internal organization which is developing itself by natural laws . . . "

Maria Montessori

from *Spontaneous Act. in Ed.*, p. 70

"Preparation of the Environment" includes the careful organization of physical objects with which the child may become deeply interested. This organization of work provides opportunities for coordinated goal-directed movement, experience and mental activity with physical objects in categories such as "practical life," "sensorial" and more advanced "cultural subjects." Guided by one's expansive observation of the child's attention and free activity in the environment, the Montessori teacher offers various brief "lessons" to enhance and support the child's continuing interest in its work with physical objects.

Physical Objects

"The teacher . . . must be able to choose an object suitable for a particular child and place it before him in such a way that he understands it and takes a keen interest in it."

Maria Montessori

from *Discovery of the Child*, p. 151

The child's instinctive interest in work with physical objects is occasionally enhanced by the adult's presentation of their particular use and purpose; i.e., a "lesson" which is noticeably distinct from the ordinary distracting adult domination and lengthy verbal explanations more commonly associated with conventional "teaching." While one's own judgment and knowledge of the potential use and purpose of some specific physical object provides a certain initial direction in presenting a particular piece of work, the primary essential guide in offering lessons is always that of the immediate interest of the child itself.

Child's Interest

"Too many teachers are inclined to be continually interrupting and teaching . . . The teacher considers that she must lead him from the easy to the difficult, from simple to complex, by gradual steps, whereas the child may go from the difficult to the easy, and makes great strides . . . A child who is interested in what he is doing goes on and on without fatigue."

Maria Montessori

from *Ed. for a New World*, p. 67

The child's interest effectively guides the adult in the introduction of work with materials. Lessons are therefore limited generally to only a brief moment to avoid the child's tendency towards imitation or its undue dependency on the adult's presence. Such brief lesson presentation is also more likely to assure the child's own independent learning through discovery and experimentation with the materials themselves. When mistakes are evident in the child's work or when there emerges some sort of inconsistency with discernible external order or sequence of work, the Montessori teacher avoids correction or interference as much as possible so that the child is able to effectively complete its own cycle of activity.

Cycle of Activity

"There is a vital urge to completeness of action . . . the cycle must be completed. Adults therefore should not interfere to stop any childish activity however absurd, so long as it is not too dangerous to life or limb . . . The child must carry out his cycle of activity."

Maria Montessori

from *Ed. for a New World*, p. 57

A child's external activity invariably reflects some mysterious inner creative process in which a cycle of activity is seeking to complete itself. Such completion serves a hidden purpose of the child's own creative construction which may never fully become realized, even after the conclusion of some particular series of external events. In any case, the value of this purposeful cycle of activity lies not in the accomplishment of identifiable external results, but rather in the process of activity itself as mental concentration and physical experimentation.

Experimentation

"Anyone who will adopt this method will make of every school and every class where it is used a laboratory for experimentation."

Maria Montessori

from *Discovery of the Child*, p. 319

Montessori teaching recognizes that "experimentation" is part of the process of offering lessons to respond to the child's perceived interests. Such experimentation begins with one's "observation" of phenomena such as a child's eye focus or verbal expression, thereafter proceeding generally to some responsive "lesson;" e.g., momentary "eye contact" with the child or perhaps a brief presentation of some specific piece of work. Success in such lesson presentation is determined by the extent to which a specific "point of contact" between the child and its environment may be located where in the child's true interest may become intensely focussed and in harmony with environmental experience at that precise moment of time.

Point of Contact

"Point of contact . . . a psychological bridge which puts the soul of the individual child in contact with some definite, limited piece of external reality."

Maria Montessori

from *Maria Montessori:**Her Life and Work*, p. 239

Cont'd. on Page 4, Col. 2

Address correction requested

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OBSERVER
The Montessori



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Announcements

The Montessori Teacher's Assoc. of Pennsylvania (MTA-PA) will sponsor a workshop on Saturday, April 11, 1987 featuring David Brown from the Academy of Natural Sciences Science Workshop. For further details, contact: Debbie Eastwood, % Greene Towne School, 2013 Appletree St., Philadelphia, PA 19103, Tel. (215) 674-9420.

Montessori Conference in Pennsylvania

The Montessori Country Day School in Wyomissing, Pennsylvania (near Philadelphia) is sponsoring a Montessori conference on the weekend of March 28-29, 1987. Conducted by Lee Havis, executive director of the International Montessori Society, this conference will address the practical teaching problems associated with one's expansive being with children as a commitment to Montessori principles.

This Pennsylvania Montessori Conference will feature the presentation and analysis of specific misbehavior scenarios with children according to the approach of "control the environment, not the child." In addition, other teaching problems and concerns about Montessori education will be discussed and considered as they arise from the interest and everyday practical experiences of those in attendance.

Celia Reed, director of the Country Day School, indicates that Montessori teachers from all different walks are expected to attend. The school is also extending a special invitation to the principals and teachers of the public school sector.

The conference is open to the general public. To obtain further information or registration form, contact: Celia Reed, Montessori Country Day School, 2200 Bern Rd., Wyomissing, Pennsylvania 19610, Tel. (215) 373-7828.

Interest

Cont'd. from Page 3, Col. 3

Even in the midst of some considerable disorder or wild fantasy, there exists some "point of contact" towards which the child's interest and attention may be properly directed. A scene of violent dispute with considerable hitting and grabbing may nonetheless reveal as a critical "point of contact" some specific physical object, the control of which would serve as a most constructive lesson at that moment. In a more calm circumstance, a child might find its "point of contact" in some period of profound concentration to signal the emergence of "normalization."

Normalization

"Normalization comes about through 'concentration' on a piece of work."

Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p. 206

The child's "normalization"—to profoundly shift its being from general disorder and inattention to that of completely stabilized harmony with its environment—emerges usually as an event of intense interest and sudden concentration in the use of the most simple of everyday "practical life" objects and activity. After such "normalization," the child's interest extends itself further through increasingly more complex forms of mental activity involving such academic areas as "math" and "language." The new "normalized" child then emerges to reveal a path of self-creative development which ultimately manifests the true nature of humanity as that which expresses a most constructive being on behalf of peaceful harmony throughout the world.

True "interest"—whether arising in children or adults—emerges as the first tangible impression of creative activity within oneself in the present moment. One's being a "commitment to Montessori principles" reflects that particular sort of creative activity wherein one's own individual "interest" in Montessori teaching gradually finds its ultimate expression in the emergence of the child's true "normalized" nature in the world.

Why Do Children Bite?

Cont'd. from Page 1, Col. 2

through many subtle forms of manipulative words and actions; e.g., saying "sh-sh-sh" to a crying infant rather than satisfying the basic need being expressed at the moment. With older children, this adult repression continues with the imposition of various forms of violent punishment or verbal reprimands such as "big children don't cry" and admonitions not to "whine" or not to be a "cry baby."

Even very young children have a basic urge for oral expression of feelings which normally seeks to harmoniously resolve conflict with others and to otherwise satisfy basic needs for nourishment from the environment. Lacking sufficient ability to fully communicate painful feelings through words and otherwise unable to orally express itself through such means as just plain crying, a child is virtually compelled to "bite" as its only available relief from an overwhelming frustration and pain associated with its being with others.

Expanding the principle of "observation" to a "biting" scenario generally involves an attentive visual scanning to assure effective "eye contact" with children in those moments of peril where stress in social circumstances is particularly evident. Sometimes, such "observation" requires a more determined verbal inquiry with an individual child to uncover the underlying reality of repressed feelings which are present in the "moment of peril." In any case, one's being as commitment to Montessori principles will gradually enable a child's free oral expression of its feelings to others and thereby resolve the child's tendency to "bite."

Marketplace

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