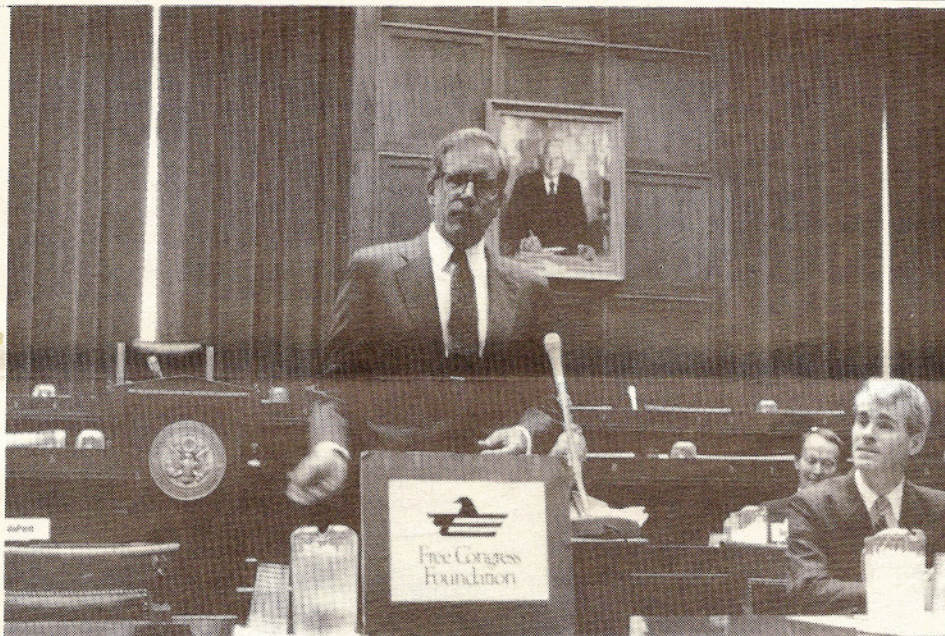




# The Montessori OBSERVER

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Governor Pete du Pont presenting comments on "Education Restructuring" at the Free Congress Foundation Symposium held in Washington, D.C. on September 11, 1989.

## Free Congress Foundation Offers 'Lessons from the States'

On September 11, 1989, the Free Congress Foundation sponsored a symposium on "educational choice" to enable a sharing of experiences at the state level with those associated with the federal government. Various non-governmental groups and individuals interested in "educational choice" were invited to attend. Lee Havis was invited to represent the Society at these proceedings.

Styled as "Lessons from the States", this symposium included commentary from several prominent public figures, including: Governor Lamar Alexander (*Keynote Address*); Governor Pete duPont (*Education Restructuring*); Jack Foster, Secretary of Education, State of Kentucky (*Education Accountability*); Congressman Steve Bartlett (*Federal Policy Implications*). Discussion with the speakers raised such issues as "goals" and "definition" in the matter of "educational choice"; e.g., the extent to which a truly private "free market" condition of competition could be established for education in the foreseeable future.

Some speakers questioned whether "freedom" leads to "education" or vice versa. Havis indicated that both must come together since the true purpose and definition of "education" is essentially a "freeing of the human spirit".

After the symposium, Havis stated that "discussions like these are important to keep the debate for 'educational choice' moving beyond the relatively inconsequential goals of options within the existing structure of government-run schools and excessive control over private education. We need a freedom from this type of unnecessary government control—to allow a real choice for a new education which is a 'freeing of the human spirit'."

### Montessori Conferences

Atlanta, Georgia  
February 17-18, 1990

San Leandro, California  
March 10-11, 1990

Pre-paid registration for the full two-day conference is \$200 per person (\$160 for Society members). The payment due date is four (4) weeks before the scheduled date of the conference. A late fee of \$50 applies for registrations submitted after the payment due date.

Send registration fee to: International Montessori Society, 912 Thayer Ave., Silver Spring, Maryland 20910. Tel. (301) 589-1127.

## Montessori Accreditation to Define "Montessori Teacher"

Since its founding in 1979, the Society has consistently offered its cooperation with others in the field of Montessori education to identify uniform standards and criteria for accreditation of teacher education programs. The Society believes that any "essential standards" to define and measure the qualities of a "Montessori teacher" in a Montessori "umbrella" accrediting agency must be sufficiently broad to include the entire range of possible program approaches and curriculum format in the field. In October, 1989, the Society offered its comments regarding various "competencies" which have been proposed to define a "Montessori teacher" for such an accrediting agency.

Rather than defining a "Montessori teacher" by these "competencies" in the essential standards as proposed by some, the Society favors a brief authoritative description which would provide a maximum opportunity for diverse emphasis, interpretation and choice by the various participating teacher education organizations and institutions. The Society has specifically proposed the following:

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## Reflections...

By Paul Posillo

### Conservation of Power

... much of my being with children in the past was trapped within my limited notions of 'allowing' and 'trusting'... I saw in them and in their relation to each other my old way of being with children (my former ubiquitous personality that could not get free from those two limited ways of being with children and that I am now shedding and trying to convert to being as commitment to Montessori principles). If I had to put it into graphic words, I would call what I realized, "The conservation of power".

I lived in the "conservation of power" in its deviant form and it brought disgust in several ways to me. What it means is that there is always going to be power lopsided to one person in a situation or to another... if I took all power to myself, then I would become a tyrant and violate the child's individual liberty completely. If I went to the other direction and

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# Lesson Presentation

by Lee Havis

*"Lessons, exact and fascinating, given in an intimate way to each child separately, are the teacher's offering to the depths of the child's soul."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Absorbent Mind*, p. 271

Montessori teaching offers lessons to children in a manner which is quite distinct from the ordinary group instruction of traditional education. Arising as any interaction between the child and the adult, a Montessori lesson presentation reflects a most delicate and refined way of being according to a commitment to the three fundamental Montessori principles: i.e., (1) "Observation"; (2) "Individual Liberty"; and (3) "Preparation of the Environment". Principles such as "individual liberty" direct one's lesson presentations to children to be generally quite simple and brief.

## Brevity

*"... we admit that every lesson infringes the liberty of the child and for this reason we allow it to last only for a few seconds."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Spontaneous Act*, in Ed., p. 43

The most effective lesson presentations in Montessori teaching are often nothing more than a momentary "eye contact" interaction with a child from across the room. Responding to the child's spontaneous interest in having this brief adult attention, these "eye contact" lessons provide a valuable support and encouragement to the child's own independent path of self-directed activity in the environment. The typical lengthy collective lesson of traditional education is therefore rarely seen in the Montessori environment.

## Collective Lessons

*"The collective lessons... are of very secondary importance, and have been almost abolished by us."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Montessori Method*, p. 108

Since subject matter curriculum in the Montessori environment is based on the spontaneous interest of the individual child, collective lessons are generally infrequent with young children—useful only when the attention of all is necessarily required. Montessori teaching with the total group is therefore primarily a matter of stationary observation—visual scanning and eye contact with individual children as they may occasionally look up from their self-directed activity for this type of momentary attention from the teacher. With the materials, the most constructive lessons are usually those given not by the teacher directly but rather by the children themselves.

## Lessons by Children

*"... children of different ages help one another. The younger ones see what the older ones are doing and ask for explanations... There are many things which no teacher can convey to a child of three, but a child of five can do it with utmost ease."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Absorbent Mind*, p. 226

With children in a mixed age social group, working together with "individual liberty", lesson presentations by the children themselves arise as an ordinary and natural part of their normal social harmony. When a child does ask the teacher directly for "help", the adult's lesson presentation is then ordinarily to return the child to its own independent solution or to obtain help from another child; e.g., "who can help you with that?" or "what child knows how to do that?". To support this type of constructive social helping among the children themselves, the teacher's primary task and purpose is directed to a careful and discerning "observation" of the total group.

## Observation

*"... when the control and correction of error is yielded of the didactic material, there remains for the teacher nothing but to observe... the teacher teaches little and observes much."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Spontaneous Act*, in Ed., p. 131

The teacher's observation is generally conducted from a stationary position with all the children in clear view—to visually "scan" their various activities and involvement with each other. Such "visual scanning" allows the most favorable opportunity for the teacher to conduct the more effective brief spontaneous "eye contact" lessons with individual children. Such "observation" also enables the adult to "prepare the environment" by discerning the ever-changing needs and interests of the children for the presentation of various new materials.

## Presenting Materials

*"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."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Discovery of the Child*, p. 151

Montessori teaching to present materials to children requires first a careful discernment of each child's true interest. Such discernment is based primarily on the most objective evidence available as seen in the child's specific external expression and activity; e.g., the child watching specific materials used by other children, looking at particular materials on the shelf, verbal expression of interest, questioning about various materials or attributes in the environment, such as color, size, shape or number.

When priority "misbehavior" scenarios have been satisfactorily resolved, the teacher might then approach a child to give a lesson on some particular piece of material about which the child has indicated some genuine interest.

## Approaching a Child

*"A teacher makes an almost timid attempt to approach the child whom she believes is ready to learn the lesson."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Discovery of the Child*, p. 106

The teacher may effectively approach a child to offer a lesson on some particular material only after a clear potential interest has been demonstrated and all other priority considerations for the well-being of the total group have been met. Beginning with the child's voluntary eye contact or specific request for some lesson, the teacher would then ordinarily respond with a hand gesture to "come"—coupled with a phrase such as "I have something to show you". For initial introductory lessons, the materials are best shown from their place in the environment where they are kept when not in use.

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## Moment of Peril

### Controlling other Adults

from *Observer*, October/1989  
by Lee Havis

When other adults in the Montessori environment are violating Montessori principles (see *Observer*, October/1989), the responsible authority must "control" this detrimental influence of the "adult personality". In such circumstances, one must exercise the same essential objective control over the "adult personality" as would be applied to control the "physical objects" or "other children".

Controlling the personality expression of other adults is primarily a matter of observation and clear direction. If the detrimental influence of the other adult(s) is of a relatively low priority; e.g., not physically harmful to children, one's "control" may generally proceed through such passive means as eye contact, observation and example. Personal experience, practice and observation of the responsible authority will gradually teach the disruptive adult how to conform her behavior to the three Montessori principles. Efforts to control other adults through extensive academic debate or emotional arguments are usually counterproductive.

In time, the disruptive adult will usually question any obvious differences of adult behavior in some specific situation. At such times, the responsible authority can most effectively offer some word of specific advice or helpful comment on applying Montessori principles.

When the other adult's behavior involves some obvious physical harm to children, the responsible authority must intervene with clear, specific direction. One may then need to firmly address the other adult with a phrase such as "come here" to promptly disengage the person from the harmful behavior. With careful observation and thoughtful, friendly discussion, disruptive adults who are sufficiently disposed towards Montessori teaching will gradually tend to conform their behavior to the example offered by the responsible authority in the environment. Those other adults who insist on a repressive, traditional manner with children will tend to eventually remove themselves from the environment on their own initiative.

### Communicating with Parents

Three year old Stevie approaches a new three year old child in the environment who is quietly engaged in its own peaceful activity. Stevie then proceeds to spit in the new child's face. The mother of the new child is still in the room and sees the incident. Distressed and angry, the mothers speaks to the teacher: "What are you going to do to protect my child and the other children from this type of unjust abuse and physical harm? Do you just let bullies go around the room and hurt other children whenever they feel like it?" What to do?  
*Answer in Observer*, January/1990

## Lesson Presentation

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### Independence

"If teaching is to be effective with young children, it must assist them to advance on their way to independence."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Discovery of the Child*, p. 57

Since materials in the Montessori environment are designed to communicate order and to enable the child's own independent use, their introduction and handling by the teacher must proceed accordingly with extreme care and attention to small details. Before any specific lesson with materials is offered, it is therefore important to verify in advance that all the pieces of the apparatus are complete and ready for use in its customary place in the environment. Once the work space is determined by the teacher, the child is then ordinarily directed to "watch" as the teacher carries the materials to this designated location where the specific brief instruction will then be offered.

### Instruction

"The instruction of the teacher consists merely in a hint, a touch—enough to give a start to the child. The rest develops of itself."

Dr. Maria Montessori

Dr. Montessori's Own Hand, p. 58-59

The actual "instruction" of the teacher is extremely limited in purpose and format—to take out the materials and to show a brief "example" of their proper handling. When there is repetitive movement in bringing the materials from the shelf or in laying them out in some way, only the first few movements need to be conducted by the teacher—the child may then be invited to continue on its own: e.g., "would you like to do the next one?". In all cases, the teacher focuses attention on the materials by reducing in so far as possible the involvement and distraction of her own "adult personality".

### Adult Personality

"The lesson must be presented in such a way that the personality of the teacher shall disappear."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Montessori Method*, p. 108

Exaggerated movements, repetitive actions and excessive language from the teacher are avoided in a lesson presentation since they tend to distract the child away from its own interest and independent discovery with the materials. Such excessive adult "teaching" reflects the "adult personality" as a detrimental influence at such times so that the child is less able thereafter to freely explore and experiment with the materials on its own. Too much verbal explanations and discussion during the lesson presentation process is a serious problem for ordinary adults who are unaware of the powerful effect of their language on children.

### Language

"The best instruction is that which uses the least words sufficient to the task. The fewer the words, the more perfect will be the lesson."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Discovery of the Child*, p. 106

With children, language reflects a power and influence well beyond that which is ordinarily

experienced in adult society. Since the adult's customary tendency is to unconsciously impose prejudicial limitation through verbal expression with others, language with children must be carefully chosen and generally quite limited. The word "watch" is therefore much preferred over the ordinary "explanatory" phrases which are so common in traditional lesson presentation. Use of "generic" phrases such as "would you like to do the next one?" (rather than "select a matching card to trace like I just did") will give the child the best opportunity to explore the materials according to its own independent interest.

### Interest

"When the child begins to show interest . . . the teacher must not interrupt, because this interest corresponds with natural laws and opens up a whole new cycle of activity."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Absorbent Mind*, p. 279

As soon as the child shows an "interest" with the materials, the teacher "disengages" herself from the lesson presentation process. Sometimes, the child will simply "take over" the exercise by its own initiative at the suitable moment. At this point, the adult may then redirect her attention to "observation" of the total group of children. Any necessary intervention thereafter with the child to show some further skill in handling the materials can be introduced by the phrase "watch"—followed by the teacher's brief showing of the particular movement at that time. The last step in lesson presentation with materials is ordinarily to have them returned to their proper place in the environment.

### Returning Materials

" . . . when a child has spontaneously given up an exercise . . . the child puts the material back in place and everything is left in perfect order."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Discovery of the Child*, p. 155

The normal child instinctively returns the materials on its own initiative to their proper place in the environment—as an expression of its inherent inner need for order and completion. Since the teacher has usually introduced the materials before to the child from their proper place in the environment, the child is normally quite able to accomplish this return of materials without further involvement of the teacher. If not, a further lesson can be offered by the teacher according to the basic process given before; i.e., eye contact, "I have something to show you" and "watch". Of course, if the child shows a lack of interest in following the lesson of the teacher at any time during the process, there is no basis for further involvement with that particular child on the matter in question.

### Lack of Interest

"We not only do not force a child, but we do not even invite him, or in any way attempt to coax him to do that which he does not wish to do."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Montessori Method*, p. 302

A lack of interest in the materials being presented can occur at any point in the lesson—at

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## Lesson Presentation

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which point the teacher must necessarily disengage from further efforts to proceed. If materials have been taken out before the lack of interest arose, these can then be returned to their place in the environment as a separate lesson to another interested child. Errors of judgment in discerning a child's particular interest reflect the inherently "experimental" nature of any lesson presentation.

## An Experiment

"the lesson corresponds with an experiment."

Dr. Maria Montessori  
 from *Montessori Method*, p. 107

Since the successful result of a given lesson is only seen in the child's eventual interest and concentrated work with the materials *after* the lesson is offered, each presentation amounts to a real "experiment". Offering lessons can therefore be based only on one's best judgment of the child's possible interest—wherein the greatest care and reserve must be exercised in the showing of various materials to children. Following always a path of commitment to Montessori principles, the adult is thereby able to experimentally serve and support the child's normal development of interest and exploration of its environment through the necessary offering of various lesson presentations.

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## Montessori Accreditation

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*A Montessori teacher is one whose being with children effectively supports and nurtures the children's normal growth and development. Such normality of growth and development is based on the observations and discoveries of Dr. Maria Montessori as reported in her various pertinent writings and publications since 1907. Montessori teaching broadly reflects an adult function of observing children with freedom in a prepared environment.*

Using this basic description of a Montessori teacher as an "essential standard," organizations and institutions could then employ their own specific "criteria" and "guidelines" to more precisely identify the "outcome results" which they particularly wish to emphasize in measuring the relative quality, content and success of their programs. Such "criteria" might include "competencies" or "qualities" which identify certain specific characteristics, skills and abilities which the particular organization or institution wishes to emphasize.

The Society has urged patience in the process of setting a definite "time-table" for formal establishment and "recognition" of any Montessori umbrella accrediting agency—to assure a satisfactory resolution of all significant issues beforehand through means of "consensus." Lee Havis, the Society's executive director, has expressed his particular concern that "majority rule" in major decision-making in the new agency will tend to prejudice or significantly disregard important minority interests. He stated that "the most innovative and distinctive Montessori programs are those that would be seriously threatened by such majority rule in the operation of a Montessori accreditation agency. 'Consensus' decision-making in such an 'umbrella' agency is therefore vital to properly protect the healthy diversity and creative growth of new programs in the field. This 'consensus' is particularly important in

Montessori education where the spirit of harmony and social cohesion is so integral to any true cooperative effort."

For further information about the Society's position and proposal for an umbrella accreditation for Montessori teacher education, contact: IMS, 912 Thayer Ave. #207, Silver Spring, Maryland, U.S.A.

## Reflections . . .

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"allowed" or gave over all power to the child in an attempt to loosen my bonds to tyranny, then the child would become the tyrant and I would receive the just disdain of my fellow adults and feel myself bound and helpless with no way out.

Then there is the middle of the road expression of the deviant form of "conservation of power" in which the adult promotes a more "democratic" approach to the question of power and shares some degree of power with the child but still remains in control overall. This last approach is usually seen as the more humane and, on the surface, acceptable to most people these days.

But all of these are caught in the balance of the conservation of power. I was caught in that balance—the "conservation of power". I thought that I had to be somewhere on that scale and I ran feverishly from one side to the other trying to find my place.

What I found in my observation and reflection was that I don't have to worry about that scale. In the past that was all that I could see, and it was tied up with my deep-rooted misconception and misbehaviors of "allowing" and "trusting."

I feel now as though I have jumped off that scale and that I can now look back and see it in balance. That is what I have done. I no longer try to balance the scale. I leave that to nature. I accept the power of my commitment to Montessori principles and leave the rest to nature, and she balances it every time.