



The Montessori OBSERVER

Completion

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Lee Havis directing discussion at the Montessori conference in Great Britain—Wimbledon, London, England (June 24-25, 1989).

Montessori Conference in Great Britain

On June 24-25, 1989, Lee Havis conducted the first "Creating the New Education" conference in Great Britain. Organized and sponsored by Isabel Hodgson, owner and director of the Montessori 3-5 Nursery (Wimbledon, London, England), the conference was held at her school for various teachers, school owners and other persons interested in Montessori education from throughout England and Ireland.

This first British Montessori conference directed particular attention to the critical importance of language to express oneself with children and adults; e.g., the danger of excessive or manipulative words where fewer words or perhaps even total silence might serve as a more effective application of Montessori principles. One participant indicated that after attending the conference, she now had "words" to put to her experience of

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Society Conferences in United States

Washington, D.C.
May 6-7, 1989

A Society "Creating the New Education" conference for the Washington, D.C. area was held in Alexandria, Virginia and included the participation of persons from the states of Virginia, Maryland and Washington, D.C. Robert Destro, new member of the Society's accreditation committee for teacher education was also present as an observer during a portion of the conference proceedings.

The conference communication particularly emphasized the nature of "being" and "reality" as one's own individual mental creation; i.e., not the common outward representation of such which is ordinarily associated with prevailing social habits of thought and action.

During the discussion, Lee Havis emphasized that one's thoughts can be changed from that which prevails in society—to challenge and alter the conditions of repression and prejudice against the child's true nature. Havis stated that "change in society begins with one's own immediate circumstances in small acts in the present moment to express one's being with others as a 'commitment to Montessori principles.'" Others must accordingly either conform to this new reality or resist this change of circumstance. Even such 'resistance' is a positive result by bringing more attention and importance to the 'new education' than otherwise would result from the ordinary pattern of continuing indifference and inattention.

Reading, Pennsylvania
May 20-21, 1989

The Society's conference in Reading, Pennsylvania examined particularly the distinction between "being" and "personality"; i.e., how one can at the same time "have" a personality and yet "be" a commitment to Montessori principles.

Lee Havis specifically indicated that thinking of the three Montessori principles has the effect of "replacing" the ordinary thought patterns of "adult personality" with that of "commitment to Montessori principles"—the idea being that no two things can occupy the same space at the same time. He stated that "by thinking of Montessori principles, ordinary random thoughts and feelings associated with 'adult personality' are thereby necessarily separated from one's 'being' so that these thoughts and feelings can be more objectively observed and managed. This process of specific 'thought replacement' must be repeated actively over time since the tendency of 'adult personality' is to always occupy the space of 'being' as a matter of default conditioning from the past."

Following the conference, Havis visited a local Montessori school which participated in the conference to help work out the practical resolution of various problems of applying Montessori principles with children.

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Reflections . . .

by Paul Posillo
(Ashaway, Rhode Island)

Fantasy

I have developed a healthier attitude toward fantasy lately. As a zealous new Montessorian, I used to want to crush it out. I suppressed children's fantasies as one would crush a butterfly under one's foot. Fantasizing was a crime to be punished.

I see now that fantasy has a natural role to play in the life of the child. As fever, pain, swelling and other physical symptoms are signs of the condition of a sick body, so too are fantasies signs of a sick psyche. Suppressing symptoms does not change the underlying cause. What is needed is to diagnose to a greater or lesser degree based upon the symptoms, prognosticate, prescribe and then administer the remedy (to let the child give vent to its underlying feelings through a friendly questioning process).

I have come to the conclusion that fantasy has a very important role to play in the process of normalization which will eventually make

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Completion

by Lee Havis

"There is a vital urge to completeness of action, and if the cycle of this urge is broken, it shows in deviations from normality and lack of purpose."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from Ed. for a New World, p.57

Dr. Montessori recognized completion as inherent in the child's development of true normality; i.e., being in complete harmony with one's entire environment. Unless this inborn urge for complete normal development is supported by a suitable "normalizing" environment, fundamental deviations of character tend to emerge, resulting in behavior such as sloth, dependency, violence, disorder, greed and timidity. To assure normal development during the critical early childhood period, the vital process of completion must be allowed to proceed unhindered within the child's mental activity which is spontaneously creating the child's entire unique human personality.

Completing Human Personality

"Just as there is no complete man already formed in the original generative cell, so there seems to be no kind of mental personality already formed in the newborn child."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from Absorbent Mind, p.51

The newborn infant's basic "urge" to form its being as "personality" is expressed in its early childhood years through profound creative activity and a diversity of sensory experiences with the environment. By about the age of six, this essential "personality" formation is finally completed and remains thereafter permanently fixed as a stabilized state of being with which one is uniquely identified throughout life. Completing such a development of personality during early childhood is accomplished through a process of considerable stimulation by the environment.

Stimulation by Environment

"... the human embryo must be born before completing itself. . . Its potentialities, in fact, must be stimulated by the environment."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from Formation of Man, p.82

Stimulated by the environment, the young child builds up within itself a basic mental order which perfectly conforms to its own unique time, place and group. The child's personality thereby acquires its complete set of basic distinctive attributes of language, cultural habits and qualities of character. Prior to the age of about six, the child's special "absorbent mind" is particularly sensitive to certain environmental stimuli which become deeply integrated into its whole being as "personality." Through such sensory stimulation, the young child is constantly engaged in the process of absorbing the environment.

Absorbing the Environment

"... the child absorbs his environment, takes everything from it, and incarnates it in himself."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from Absorbent Mind, p.66

Absorbing the environment is the young child's spontaneous means of completing its formation of essential personality. Such an intimate incarnation of the child's total environment is achieved through a wide diversity of external activities which may appear at times to the ordinary adult as quite boring or perhaps even useless; e.g., simple hand movements or ordering exercises, repeated over and over again. Nevertheless, it is just this type of apparently "useless" activity which provides the child with vital experiences of order and concentration which are so critical to its completely normal development. Such a profound adaptation to one's environment is realized through a continual process of completing various cycles of tangible external activity.

Completing Work

"... the completion of an entire cycle (of work) will exercise an influence more and more far-reaching in the personality of the child. . . it is from the completed cycle of activity. . . that the child develops equilibrium, elasticity, adaptability, and the resulting power. . . of obedience."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from Spontaneous Act. in Ed., p.104-105

By completing various cycles of spontaneous goal-directed activity; i.e., "work," the young child mentally internalizes the order and nature of its total environment which may then in turn reflect itself outwardly as complete "normalized" being; e.g., spontaneous self-discipline, sympathy for others, attachment to reality, independence, harmony and adaptation to one's entire environment. Such "normalization" arises initially in a moment of profound concentration on some specific object or exercise with which the child takes an intense personal interest. Adults create a proper "normalizing" environment for such vital completion experiences by following a path of general "non-intervention."

Non-Intervention

"... an intense effort. . . must be fully expanded—the cycle must be completed. Adults should therefore not interfere to stop any childish activity however absurd. . . The child must carry out his cycle of activity."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from Ed. for a New World, p.57

Montessori teaching with young children is essentially the path of "non-intervention"—a way of being which is quite distinct from the ordinary adult-directed instruction usually found in traditional education. The Montessori method of "non-intervention" must even

sometimes allow behavior which may appear as quite "absurd" or purposeless. By allowing such apparently "absurd" behavior, the adult is helping the child to resolve for itself some inner need or interest which may be most critical to its proper normal development. The approach of "non-intervention" with children may be more precisely defined as a way of being committed to three specific Montessori principles—a process of expansive being which is constantly completing itself in the emergence of the "normalized" child.

Completing Montessori

"Although our system of education. . . is not yet entirely complete, it already constitutes a sufficiently organic whole. . ."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from Discovery of the Child, p.20-21

As a system of education, "Montessori" completes itself as a continuing expansion of one's being to allow the new "normalized" child to fully emerge in the world. Such an expansive being with children most effectively begins within oneself as awareness of the three

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Lee Havis, Executive Director

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LETTERS TO IMS

June 5, 1989

Dear Lee,

When I came to the latest conference (Meriden, CT, June 3-4, 1989), I was not 'high', but I was 'higher' than I have been most of my life. The conference lifted me just a little higher by confirming the path that I have been on and by clarifying and expanding many truths that I already believed. . . . The important changes are that now I can do it better, i.e., commitment to Montessori principles, and that it is now time to set my sights beyond my immediate circumstances and begin . . . to prepare the way for the emergence of the normalized child in society at large. I have no doubt about your support in this effort.

Paul Posillo
Ashaway, Rhode Island

June 18, 1989

Dear Lee,

I want to thank you for a wonderful conference (New York, NY, April 29-30, 1989) and for the insight, support and encouragement that you offered during the conference sessions. I was delighted to have had the opportunity to participate along with Sisters Marie Gabrielle and Rosa. I know that a lot of what they are experiencing in the classroom is due to their attendance and participation at the conference. We have had many fruitful discussions and we are trying to help one another in our commitment to the Montessori principles.

Sister Elizabeth Pinto
Parsippany, New Jersey

July 17, 1989

Dear Mr. Havis,

I thank you for your courage and conviction in the possibilities of creating the New Education. The conference in Oakland (July 15-16, 1989) is an experience that will not only impact me, but with my own degree of courage and conviction impact the children and others with whom I come in contact.

Sincerely,

M.A. Bove
Gilroy, California

July 18, 1989

Gentlemen:

. . . I would like to thank Lee Havis for the conference this last weekend (Oakland, CA, July 15-16, 1989). My husband and I have already spent hours discussing its content. It is the guidance we have been praying for. We both believe it answers many of the problems we've been having with our children. Thank you, again.

Sincerely,

Susan Hunt
Grants Pass, Oregon

Moment of Peril

Multiple Misbehavior Scenarios

from *Observer*, May/1989

by Lee Havis

When many misbehavior scenarios threaten within the environment (see *Observer*, May/1989), one must make "priority" choices in the process of giving one's attention and consideration to specific situations. Since the teacher's responsibility is the entire environment, no single misbehavior scenario can be isolated for analysis and resolution without a proper judgment of its relative priority with respect to all other activity within one's total scope of responsibility.

A logical "hierarchy of priorities" to judge one's need for attention may be effectively established according to the relative severity of

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fundamental Montessori principles; i.e., (1) "Observation"; (2) "Individual Liberty"; and (3) "Preparation of the Environment." These three Montessori principles implicate a directionality of expansive being on behalf of corresponding basic laws of nature which taken together provide a complete basis for one's continuing effective action with children—a vital inner control of error to guide one's being even in the face of the numerous practical problems and difficulties which arise with children concerning such matters as "managing misbehavior." Completing Montessori in one's own experience therefore primarily requires a very precise continuing inner preparation of thought.

Preparation of Thought

"When the right preparation of thought is complete, discoveries may take place by the organization of many minds in this suitable mental atmosphere."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *To Ed. the Human Potential*, p.57

Centered on the three Montessori principles, adult thinking becomes completely prepared so that one's corresponding actions with children will tend to emerge as spontaneously effective in the present moment and naturally self-corrective over time. Such a delicate preparation of thought must be further sustained and supported by its communication and association with others through such means as pertinent conferences, consultation and various other forms of continuing education. Without this type of supportive continuing education, "Montessori" tends to become disconnected from its vital purpose to reveal the reality of the "normalized" child—to reflect instead yet another form of expression of one's limited being as "personality." "Montessori" may well then represent only words without action; limited and incomplete in substance at its core, consisting of merely an essential confusion associated with various vague ideas, certain specified materials and rigid teacher qualifications based on such superficial criteria as "certification." Ultimately, one's inner preparation of thought as "commitment to Montessori principles" must therefore clearly distinguish itself from such being as "personality"—extending beyond mere words of agreement and belief to complete itself in actual practice through substantial acts of committed movement.

Movement

"Movement is the last part that completes the cycle of thought, and spiritual uplift is attained through action and work."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Ed. for a New World*, p.49

Movement in Montessori teaching arises in various specific forms of committed action; e.g., a subtle control of some physical object, simple eye contact with a child, or more delicately still, the inhibition of some reactive tendency to "intervene." In the immediate circumstances of dealing with some specific

"misbehavior" with children, one's committed Montessori teaching may at first seem quite "incomplete" and insubstantial to meet the apparently urgent need for some superficial resolution. At such times, one may perhaps feel strongly compelled to force a premature "completion" to the situation—resulting only in the continuing drama of misbehavior to arise in some other more disguised form in the future. By contrast, true completion of such practical teaching problems must arise of itself as a spontaneous resolution—consistent with the three infinite Montessori principles of nature. Such complete resolution is therefore seen as part of a long-term process of being in harmony with the totality of all human development.

Total Human Development

"Allow the whole to function together and there is discipline, but otherwise there is not! . . . There is only one problem, and it is human development in its totality . . . everything else follows spontaneously and harmoniously."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *To Ed. the Human Potential*, p.13

With children, the Montessori teacher must always recognize that total human development is the essential basis for any completion of any individual problem situation. Since the adult must assume responsibility for the totality of all the children together, individual "misbehavior" scenarios must often be allowed to unfold without an immediate "intervention." To thereby allow a troubling scenario of some distressing "disorder" to unfold without one's immediate "intervention" may seem as quite "incomplete" for the moment—only later to reveal its own spontaneous completion in a manner which may prove quite unexpected.

Montessori teaching therefore requires a particular patience and humility to bear with and work through the many disturbing immediate circumstances of disorder, misbehavior, expectations and reactive tendencies that ordinarily emerge with children in a group situation—to recognize that one's responsibility and care for each individual child must also include all the children being together as a total harmonious group. Following this path of "commitment to Montessori principles" in one's being with children, the "normalized" child will eventually emerge to reveal the true completion of humanity's creative purpose of total human development in the world.

Reflections . . .

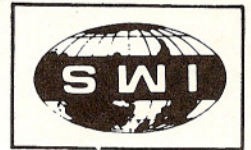
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fantasy a thing of the past, much like a fever which has broken. The unwitting but common practice of encouraging fantasies without resolutions is like doing everything one can to increase a fever and to prolong it as long as one can. When that happens one takes the risk of making fantasy the coma of the psyche.

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Moment of Peril

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danger and harm; i.e., (1) serious physical harm to children; (2) serious harm to physical objects; and (3) "fantasy" [i.e., all other forms of "unnormalized" behavior which do not involve either priority (1) or (2)].

In the current situation, a priority (1) scenario of possible serious harm to children is present; i.e., violent pushing and hitting a young child. This priority (1) scenario therefore demands one's primary attention over the less harmful circumstances of abuse of materials and "fantasy" involving a make-believe "tea party".

The priority (1) scenario of violent hitting of a child may require more than "eye contact" from across the room to result in its resolution. If so, the teacher may approach and protect the child being hit (i.e., "control" the "other child") by suitable placement of one's hands to receive the blows of the "hub" aggressor child. The "hub" child would then tend to look at the teacher and engage in some form of verbal communication to resolve the matter at issue.

Once the priority (1) scenario has been sufficiently resolved as such, the teacher may then proceed to resolve the priority (2) situation (i.e., abuse of materials) and then finally the priority (3) situation of "fantasy". As always, the process of "control the environment, not the child" requires the identification of an individual "hub" child as the basis for analysis and resolution of each scenario as it arises for specific resolution.

Multiple "Fantasy" Scenarios

Throughout the environment, various groups of children are engaged in "fantasy" behavior; e.g., drawing pictures of guns and airplanes, scribbling on paper, running around the room pretending to be "superman", using materials and props for a pretend birthday party. There is no serious threat to physical harm to children or materials. What to do?

Answer in *Observer*, October/1989



Discussion of Montessori education at proceedings of the "Creating the New Education" conference held in Oakland, California—July 15-16, 1989.

Conferences in United States

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Oakland, California July 15-16, 1989

The Oakland conference included the participation of teachers, school owners and parents from the states of California, Oregon and Washington. Several graduates and students of the Society's teacher education program were also in attendance.

The conference discussion highlighted particularly the magical nature of being a "commitment to Montessori principles." Havis stated that "one's committed being works like magic to reveal the 'normalized' child—beyond the conventional expectations of society, and even one's own ordinary understanding and logical reasoning. To master the magic, argument or explanation is not needed so much as is one's own exploration, discovery and experimentation with this communication as a matter of direct personal experience."

A considerable interest was expressed at the conference for a further such event in the area in the near future. Conference participants are being asked to help inform others about this opportunity so that a specific date and location can be definitely established.

Montessori in Great Britain

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Montessori education—to communicate more effectively this special way of being to other adults.

On Sunday, June 25, 1989, Havis was interviewed on London radio to discuss Montessori education and the purpose of his visit to Great Britain. After the conference, he visited various nearby schools to personally observe and consult with conference participants in their own immediate classroom circumstances with children.

Speaking of his first conference experience in Great Britain, Havis stated that "I was very encouraged to see the considerable interest and favorable response of the British people to this communication. This first conference and consultation in England could well lead to substantial relationships of greater support and cooperation for the Society's further work and activity in that area of the world."

Based on the interest expressed by conference participants, plans are currently underway for a further "creating the new education" conference in Great Britain for spring, 1990. A specific weekend date and location will be announced as soon as this information is available.