



The Montessori

OBSERVER

Vision

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Montessori in Lilburn, Georgia

In August, 1989, *Montessori of Lilburn* was established as a three-day weekly program for children aged 2-5. Directed by Virginia Jones (*IMS '86*), this Montessori school meets each week from 9-1 on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. The class sessions are conducted in a special room which Virginia prepared for this purpose in her home.

Virginia indicates that the program was somewhat difficult to advertise in the beginning because of its small capacity and home-based facilities. She states that "now the program is full to capacity because the original parents have told others. I particularly appreciate the courage of those initial parents who gave the program a chance." She also adds that "parents understand and care about the "normalization" purpose of the program. I encourage parents to read Society literature to grow in their understanding of this purpose on a continuing basis."

Montessori of Lilburn offers an environment which includes a wide assortment of constructive learning materials for children. Virginia equips the classroom on the basis of the needs of the particular children attending – not the expectations of parents for special "Montessori" apparatus. She states that "all the materials are goal-oriented and many were found in local stores. The success of the children in working with these colorful, durable, safe materials shows that one can definitely



Children working at Montessori of Lilburn (Lilburn, Georgia)

start a real Montessori school without the enormous funds which are usually allocated for expensive, specially-designed 'Montessori' equipment. The children find the practical life material among their most enjoyable on a regular basis. However, the program also includes materials in such areas as math, language and other advanced cultural subjects."

For further information about Montessori of Lilburn, contact: Virginia Jones, Montessori of Lilburn, 1441 Sandford Trail, Lilburn, Georgia, 30247. Tel. (404) 979-4463.

Controlling Physical Objects

by Lee Havis

Controlling "physical objects" in the Montessori environment is a specific application of the general idea of "control the environment, not the child". The "environment" here refers to that which surrounds the individual child in question, and consists of precisely three elements: (1) "adult personality"; (2) "other children" and (3) "physical objects". Montessori teaching must "control" these three elements by removing their various detrimental influences which otherwise deter the process of "normalization".

Effective control of "physical objects" requires the teacher's constant moment-to-moment judgment of what is needed as a priority action and attention for the overall well-being of the entire group under supervision. In exercising this judgment, a "hierarchy of priorities" for action is useful to follow; i.e., (1) physical safety of children; (2) harm and abuse to physical objects; (3) fantasy.

Where physical objects are involved in some issue of serious "physical safety" of children, the highest priority must be given for the adult's intervention with direct action. Issues of "physical safety" of children with physical objects may arise when young children are inclined to "wander" out of the room or otherwise beyond the space provided for safe adult protection and supervision. In such a case, a lock or firm hand on the door may be the most vital and necessary action to take to resolve this particular issue of "physical safety". The teacher may well position herself at or near the



George Stevens, new member of Society's Review Committee.

George Stevens appointed to Review Committee

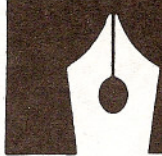
On May 14, 1991, Dr. George Stevens (Hyattsville, MD) accepted the Society's appointment to serve on its accreditation "Review Committee". The Review Committee, which also includes Virginia Jones (*Lilburn, GA*) and Laurie Zeisler (*Woodbridge, VA*), functions within a larger accreditation process to assure the integrity and effective operation of all Montessori teacher education conducted by the Society.

Dr. Stevens holds a Ph.D. in Human Development with a Masters Degree in English from the University of Maryland. He has worked, over a period of twenty-five years as an Educational Psychologist specializing in helping adults improve their skills in learning and human relations. Dr. Stevens has concentrated his efforts in the area of communication and has been especially active in reading and study skills, and memory and listening training.

Dr. Stevens has written several articles in the field of education. In May, 1963, he co-authored an article with Glen Doman and R. C. Orem, "You Can Teach Your Baby to Read" which appeared in the *Ladies Home Journal*. In 1968, he co-authored "The Case for Early Reading" with R. Buckminster Fuller and R. C. Orem.

Cont'd. on Page 4, Col. 1

Cont'd. on Page 4, Col. 3



Vision

by Lee Havis

"To have a vision of the cosmic plan, in which every form of life depends on directed movements which have effects beyond their conscious aim, is to understand the child's work and be able to guide it better."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p. 147

Dr. Montessori saw a great cosmic vision for humanity unfolding in the simple self-directed activity of young children — the emergence of man's true natural being in complete harmony with one's entire environment. She observed this "normal" being arise in children with such striking qualities as spontaneous self-discipline, independence, order and sentiments of kindness and cooperation towards others. This vision of true "normality" in children arises as a great light and lesson for all mankind.

A Light and a Lesson

"... the child can give us a light and a lesson, a new vision and a solution for inextricable problems."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Formation of Man*, p. 43

The "normalized" child is the central focus and purpose in Dr. Montessori's great contribution to education — a lesson which lights the way towards the eventual resolution of the most complex and entrenched obstacles to man's progress in the world. Without this vision of true "normality", education tends to revolve around a restrictive learning process which is essentially dependent on various forms of repressive adult control and teaching.

Such traditional education is typically built around an underlying structure of external rewards and punishments.

Rewards and Punishment

"... vision has been restricted to a concern for trivialities, for rewards and punishments."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Discovery of the Child*, p. 15

The rewards and punishment of ordinary education reflect a restricted outlook on children as essentially reactive beings devoid of any positive inner guidance. By contrast, Dr. Montessori found that children have their own inherent instincts for constructive self-development; i.e., inborn tendencies which constantly seek to express themselves through various forms of contact and interest in the surrounding environment. This visionary discovery of true "normal" being has been communicated in society through its association with the widespread idea of "Montessori".

Widespread Ideas

"... ideas lose strength in becoming widespread."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *From Childhood to Adolescence*, p. 34

Over 80 years of "Montessori" has let to its widespread acceptance as a "methodology" with specified materials and teaching techniques — a popular idea that may have little real association with the original central vision of true "normal" being in children. Confused with other popular concepts and ideas in education, "Montessori" tends to express only a very limited portion of its power and purpose as a transforming "new education". Separated from the original experience and focus on the "normalized" child, the practice of Montessori teaching tends to limit itself by the common human tendencies towards envy and competition.

Envy and Competition

"Envy and competition are signs of a restricted mental development. He who has a vision of a 'paradise' to be conquered... easily renounces transitory and limited possessions."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Formation of Man*, p. 49

Envy and competition in Montessori emerges among the various institutions and groups in the field — a diversity of opinion which cannot be resolved by mere conformity with specified content of classroom materials or teacher certification. Only the visionary new "normalized" child can provide an adequate basis for true unity in the work of creating Dr. Montessori's "new education". The practical work of creating this "new education" depends therefore primarily on the vision of the individual teacher or parent.

Vision of the Teacher

"The vision of the teacher should be at once precise like that of the scientist, and spiritual like that of the saint."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Spontaneous Act in Ed.*, p. 137

The teacher's vision of the "normalized" child leads naturally to action with children in conformance with such fundamental laws of nature as: (1) "Observation"; (2) "Individual Liberty"; and (3) "Preparation of the Environment". These three underlying Montessori principles imply direction for one's moment-to-moment judgment with children — but they cannot be followed like a precise, mechanical "formula". True Montessori teaching reflects a very delicate, flexible approach to action with children which constantly allows children to develop their own lives through such means as a profound and exacting memory.

Memory

"... the memory of the young child... was of a different nature from that of older children. It created a kind of vision in the mind and the child reproduced this clear and fixed vision with certainty."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Formation of Man*, p. 36

The young child has an "absorbent mind" which memorizes in exact detail all the intricate aspects of its surrounding environment. In the Montessori "normalizing" environment, this visionary memory creates a basic form of mental order from which all later learning and intelligence ultimately develops. In the older child, the "absorbent mind" is replaced by a form of mental functioning which develops itself through an expansive, imaginative vision.

Imaginative Vision

"Imaginative vision is quite different from mere perception of an object, for it has no limits... we can go backwards through the epochs, and have the vision of the earth as it was..."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *To Ed. the Human Potential* p. 15

Cont'd. on Page 3, Col. 2

Look for the
September Observer
featuring
Controlling the
Adult Personality

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Lee Havis, Executive Director

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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

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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Moment of Peril

Spilling the Beans

from *Observer*, March 1991
by Lee Havis

Children who abuse materials as a group; e.g., spilling and throwing beans around the floor (see *Observer*, March, 1991), are reflecting a detrimental influence of "other children" and "physical objects". When this type of collective misbehavior seems to increase after the adult's intervention to caution "care" in the use of materials, the "adult personality" is also quite prominent as a "detrimental influence".

The basic analysis of "control the environment, not the child" is to choose the most suitable element in the environment to "control" — and then proceed accordingly to remove its detrimental influence from around the "hub" child. Since the "adult personality" is always difficult and slow to remove as a detrimental influence in any case, we must ordinarily choose between "control" of either the "other children" or "physical objects".

Control of "other children" is often difficult in a situation of collective misbehavior as evident here because the "hub" child is not readily apparent. In addition, the children involved in the disorder may have evolved a very entrenched form of mutual dependency and imitation. Control of the "physical objects" is therefore often the best place to begin to apply the approach of "control the environment, not the child".

To control little tiny "beans" that are being scattered around the floor cannot be accomplished directly. So, the best that one may be able to do in this situation is to put a firm hand over the bean container to assure that no further beans will be taken out. Once there are no further beans to throw from the container, the adult may then offer some verbal guidance for positive constructive activity; i.e., to help "control" the detrimental influence of "other children". The teacher may say, for example, "let's get the beans picked up off the floor . . . would you pick up those over there and bring them here please so we can put them back in the container?"

As the adult remains calm, firm and patient in this process, the misbehaving children will eventually give up their interest in throwing beans, and return to more goal-directed activity elsewhere in the environment.

Returning Materials

The children take out materials and do not put them away. Although the teacher has consistently ordered the materials neatly on the shelves each morning, the children seem oblivious and uncaring about this order. The teacher's example and encouraging lessons to the children to "put away" materials before going on to something else is generally ineffective, as the disorder and abusive disregard of materials continues and even seems to increase day after day. What to do?

Answer in *Observer*, September, 1991

Vision

Cont'd. from Page 2, Col. 3

The child over six is normally able to see well beyond the superficial form of objects — to envision their expansive purpose and far-reaching relationships in the universe. Such an imaginative vision enables the child to organize a vast quantity of knowledge which extends from the long-distant past into the yet unknown future. From the simple facts of children working freely in her "normalizing" environment, Dr. Montessori evolved a vast and far-reaching vision of the future.

Vision of the Future

"My vision of the future is . . . of individuals passing from one stage of independence to a higher . . . which constitutes the inner evolution of the individual."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *From Child to Adolescence*, intro.

Dr. Montessori envisioned her "new education" in the future as gradually expanding one's capacity for independent functioning — from early infancy to adulthood. Montessori teaching therefore provides children of all ages with a constant challenge and opportunity for self-help in their own individual growth and learning process with others. Beginning with the young child's "normalization" experience of deep concentration on some physical object, independence develops thereafter through many forms of self-motivated conquest of the infinite.

Conquest of the Infinite

" . . . the man predestined to undertake the conquest of the infinite . . . Such is the vision that we see in the real facts of today."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Peace and Education*, p. 29

Montessori teaching enables children to gradually conquer the infinite number of obstacles and barriers that otherwise deter one's normal functioning in the world. The new "normalized" child provides a constant central focus and reference point with which to measure the success of one's actions and efforts with children. From this great vision of true "normal" being arises a "new man" in the world to overcome the otherwise massively insoluble problems of modern civilization.

A New Man

" . . . a new man . . . will have the clarity of vision to direct and shape the future of humanity."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Ed. for a New World*, p. 3

Since 1907, Dr. Montessori's discovery of the "normalized" child has offered a direction and focus for one's purposeful action on

Cont'd. on Page 4, Col. 2

The Power Struggle

. . . An Analysis by Lee Havis

"A deviated child . . . realizes that his own power will be great if he can act through an adult. He begins to exploit the adult so that he can obtain far more than he ever could through his own unaided efforts . . . there comes at last a clash and violent struggle."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Secret of Childhood*, p. 165-66

The "power struggle" scenario with children arises primarily as a matter of undue dependency on the adult presence — a detrimental influence of the "adult personality" in which the child is reacting to the adult's presence, rather than according to its normal needs and interests in the environment. In such a "moment of peril", the adult generally feels great tension and a frantic, impatient need for some immediate resolution to the child's disobedience or defiance of adult direction. Feeling confused, tense, frustrated and discouraged, the adult tends to automatically react at such times to an inner "need to control" which usually has the effect of escalating the child's defiant misbehavior even further in length and intensity.

Since the "power struggle" scenario is set in motion or "triggered" at the unconscious level of needs, feelings and beliefs within the adult, its prevention before the fact of its existence is almost impossible. Effective control and resolution of the "power struggle" must therefore concern itself primarily with an analysis of its "disengagement" — to correct one's reactive involvement with the child as soon as it is noticed.

The "power struggle" drama may first arise as awareness of some negative reaction to the adult's presence; e.g., the child moving away to avoid the adult presence; unfriendly physical contact; physical dispute over some physical object; excessive negative commentary about a child's misbehavior; the child's apparent inability to perform some simple activity. "Power struggles" may also be noticed as a certain disconnection of the adult from the child's immediate interests or an undue attention to some past misbehavior or fear of further misbehavior in the future.

Once a "power struggle" scenario is noticed as being "triggered", its disengagement requires primarily a careful "observation" of the child — to generally cease one's physical activity and talking around the child, while listening and watching the child for signals of resolution or communication. After a brief pause or once the child finally ceases its particular reactive misbehavior, the adult may then distract the child away from the problem situation by offering some positive opportunity to work in the environment. (In this way, any "negative" communication arising in the "power struggle" scenario may be neutralized or reduced by the "positive" result of the child's new interest and respectful association with the environment). Disorder that may have resulted from the "power struggle" situation may eventually be resolved later on by the

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Controlling Physical Objects

Cont'd. from Page 1, Col. 2

door to assure that this "physical object" is effectively controlled at all critical times during the day.

Physical objects which may be used as potential "weapons" against other children likewise pose a "physical safety" issue. If verbal direction to return the materials to their proper place is not effective, the teacher may need to control the object by placing a firm hand hold on the object itself. (However, this "holding" is only momentary to draw the child's attention to the potential danger involved. If children show a tendency to repeat this dangerous behavior, the object at issue may be entirely removed from the environment until such time as the children become more calm and orderly)

With "fantasy", physical objects are used in a manner which is inconsistent with their connection with reality. Objects which are not returned to their place after use is a common problem of "order" which at times requires the careful attention and intervention of the teacher. If children refuse to return physical objects to their proper place after use, the adult may offer a lesson for this purpose. If children still show by their actions a general disregard for "left out" materials, the objects in question may be entirely removed from the environment. With fewer "physical objects" to care for, children will gradually acquire a greater sense of order and respect for what is provided.

Adults who routinely "put away" materials for children during the day create a type of order in the physical environment which unduly depends on the "adult personality" — and children become insensitive to their own actions and response to the "physical objects". However, children acquire this "order" as a gradual process wherein issues of "disorder" must not be taken by the teacher with undue or excessive concern for immediate resolution. "Physical objects" which are left out at the end

of the day when the children have gone may be returned to their proper place in the environment by the teacher at this time, so that the next day begins with a definite, clear impression of the environment's basic external order.

New programs and those that are enrolling new children at various times during the year must be especially prepared to control the amount and type of "physical objects" in accordance with the changing composition and response of the group. Sometimes, a radical reduction of the amount of physical objects is necessary during the year as disorderly new children unsettle whatever order may have been established before.

Very young children, before they have been introduced to the proper use and general order of the physical objects, present a special problem of "physical safety"; i.e., the tendency to place small objects in their mouth or nose. If direct verbal warning and immediate physical control of the misused objects is ineffective in these situations, then the objects must be removed from the environment until the new children have acquired a higher degree of attention and contact with reality.

Vision

Cont'd. from Page 3, Col. 2

behalf of a new humanity. A "new man" arises from this Montessori teaching with far greater maturity, freedom and independence that is otherwise possible within the restrictive outlook of conventional schooling. The beginning of this purpose of creating the "new education" is one's conformance with the three fundamental Montessori principles — a committed way of being which promises to ultimately reveal to the world the truth of Dr. Montessori's great vision of the new "normalized" child.

Power Struggle

Cont'd. from Page 3, Col. 3

child itself or other children — when the various feelings of frustration and disharmony are less intense in the adult-child relationship.

"Power struggles" with children tend to become less intense and frequent as they are noticed and resolved at the earliest possible point. To "disengage" may require only a brief moment to pause and reflect on what the child is doing — to gain a clearer outlook and perspective for any further communication that may be necessary thereafter. The adult will then gradually feel a new confidence, joy and harmony from this more patient "disengaged" presence — to allow children to follow their own independent path of normal functioning in the environment.

George Stevens

Cont'd. from Page 1, Col. 3

At present, Dr. Stevens is active as an educational consultant with government and business organizations. He is presently working with the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, as psychologist; the General Accounting Office, as a writing consultant; and the Naval Intelligence Center, as a reading and learning instructor.

The Society is proud to include Dr. Stevens on its Review Committee to have the benefit of his broad experience and counsel in the accreditation process for its Montessori teacher education.

Positions & Placements

Montessori Teacher: to teach English as a second language for 1991 school-term. B.A. in education, one to two years experience, fully bilingual (English/Spanish). Send resume to: Sra. Amaro Rivera, Directora, Escuela Montessori de Humacao, Calle Font Martelo #125, P.O. Box 117, Humacao, PR 00661