



The Montessori

OBSERVER

Child's Personality

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Naptime

"... in the case of little children . . . a long day should be interrupted by at least an hour's rest in bed."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Montessori Method*, p. 120

Montessori schools which provide care for children throughout an entire day must necessarily assure some opportunity for quiet rest -- a naptime which is sometimes even required by government day care regulations for children aged 2-6. The practical problem of offering this naptime according to Montessori principles is that it not be arbitrarily or harshly imposed in opposition to the children's individual normal needs and interests.

Complete individualized sleeping opportunity for children during the entire day might well interfere with the well-being of the total group -- to interrupt the daily schedule of necessary school routines and late afternoon pick-up by parents. Therefore, a mid-day group naptime period, right after lunch, may be the most suitable time to assure that all children

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Reflections...

by *Connie Miles*
(Grayson, Georgia)

Connie is reflecting here on her experience with her young son after attending the Society's "Creating the New Education" conference held in Columbia, South Carolina on October 5-6, 1991.

Excess Baggage

I'm having to work really, really hard on the "excess baggage" from my past issue. Awareness is the first step and boy, am I becoming "aware" of it in my life. I do, however, have a positive baggage experience. This week I was taking my oldest son to his orthodontist appointment. Jacob (younger son), who is just starting to show signs of having motion sickness was with us. We were in my car that I have kept like brand new for five years . . . I've suffered with extreme motion sickness all my life and I have a lot of painful memories of Daddy pacing outside his new car while my mother cleaned up from my sickness. I always thought my father loved my sister

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Proceedings of the Society's "Creating the New Education" conference in Columbia, South Carolina (October 5-6, 1991)

Montessori Conference in Columbia, South Carolina

. . . . October 5-6, 1991

On October 5-6, 1991, the Society conducted its latest "creating the new education" conference in Columbia, South Carolina. Attending were teachers, school owners, parents and other interested persons from South Carolina, Georgia, New York, Texas and Kentucky.

Since 1986, over 30 such conferences have been held in various locations to expand awareness and practical application of Montessori principles. As before, Lee Havis served as discussion leader to consider and resolve various issues in Montessori teaching; e.g., how to resolve specific misbehavior situations by following the approach of "control the environment, not the child".

The Columbia conference discussion focussed especially on verbal communication and eye contact with children as the primary means to work through various misbehavior scenarios. Havis emphasized that in the "moment of peril", the adult must carefully restrain the use of negative, judgemental language which otherwise tends to automatically emerge. He stated that "effective verbal communication must be limited and primarily focussed on helping the child to connect with its

present-moment interests for constructive activity."

Toni Hammond, school owner attending from Roswell, Georgia, pointed out during the conference discussion that social issues in the education of children may be more important than "materials" in today's cultural setting. She also indicated that "misbehavior" is better seen as "communication" -- so that one is attentive to underlying feelings which must be recognized and validated as often as possible.

Lee Havis summarized the "creating the new education" conference as "an important means for renewal, encouragement and support for persons who are working to really apply Montessori principles in their various regular daily experiences. Without this type of penetrating group discussion and inner examination, many hidden limitations in society tend to restrict the visionary possibility for one's own effective individual Montessori teaching."

To help the Society schedule further "creating the new education" conferences, contact the Society to indicate interest as to preferred date and location: International Montessori Society, 912 Thayer Ave., Silver Spring, MD 20910, Tel. (301) 589-1127.



Child's Personality

by Lee Havis

"An adult . . . even though he may be convinced that he is filled with zeal, love and a spirit of sacrifice on behalf of his child . . . unconsciously suppresses the development of the child's own personality."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Secret of Childhood*, p. 16

Even the most well-meaning of parents and teachers can substantially deter the child's own normal development of personality. When adults neglect, abandon or otherwise repress such development, they unconsciously reflect their own deeply entrenched negative habits of thought and prejudicial beliefs in the child. The child's ordinary way of being then becomes distorted and warped according to the adverse external conditions presented to the young child during its most critical formative period of life.

Adverse Conditions

" . . . ailments and distortions, defects and shortcomings . . . have all been produced in the personality by conditions adverse to its normal and healthy development."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p. 198

Adverse conditions in the young child's environment result in habituated patterns of disorder, inattention, discouragement, attachment to fantasy and lack of self-discipline — an abnormal way of being which can become quite firmly fixed and identified with the child itself. Teachers and parents unconsciously reinforce these various abnormal development tendencies during infancy according to their prejudices about children as being essentially weak, dependent and disorderly. The child's efforts to develop a stable, independent way of being then becomes hidden and distorted by many subtle forms of camouflage.

Camouflage

" . . . camouflages conceal the true soul of the child. The whims, struggles and deformations hide his efforts to realize himself, and prevent him from revealing his true personality."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Secret of Childhood*, p. 109

Natural instincts for order and harmony in the child are usually hidden by an external drama of "acting out" various internal barriers to normal self-expression. This defensive camouflage hides the child's underlying efforts for normal development, and the adult is faced with the child's external pattern of generalized fear and mistrust of the environment. A distorted superficial personality is usually all that appears active in children when they first enter the "normalizing" surroundings of a Montessori school classroom.

Superficial Personality

" . . . the child of three, when he first comes to school, is a fighter on the verge of being vanquished . . . All that remains active is a superficial personality which exhausts itself in clumsy movements, vague ideas, and the effort to resist or avoid adult constraint."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p. 264

The young child's superficial personality represents an elaborate defensive system against the various adverse conditions which are imposed by the ordinary repressive "teaching" of adults. In the Montessori "normalizing" environment, the adult helps children to teach themselves — to "normalize" so that their true inner nature of harmony, joy, self-discipline and order will fully emerge. Even if early abuse has built up very many obstacles to constructive activity in the environment, the young child still has a considerable capacity to correct the deficiencies which result from prior abuse and neglect.

Correcting Deficiencies

" . . . in infancy . . . there is still the chance of correcting such deficiencies of the personality as have been produced by obstacles encountered in the first three years . . ."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind* p. 181-82

Montessori education helps the child in correcting its prior deficiencies of environmental experience through the process and event of "normalization" — to harmonize with the environment by concentration on some object of interest. The Montessori teacher creates such a "normalizing" environment by her commitment to the fundamental natural laws of (1) Observation, (2) Individual Liberty and (3) Preparation of the Environment. These three basic Montessori Principles guide the adult in helping children to regain their own natural plan for personality construction

Plan for Construction

" . . . nature lays down a plan for the construction both of personality and social life, and this plan becomes realized only through the children's activities when they are placed in circumstances favorable to its fulfillment."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p. 233

The child's true personality unfolds according to its own individual plan for construction — a plan which is built into the child at the moment of conception. The child's external behavior reflects this plan by individual work and cooperative formation which arises in a different way with each child — a process of external activity guided by one's own unique attractions.

Inborn Attractions

" . . . we all have inborn attractions which cause us to grow and to develop, in accordance with that nature which is one's own alone."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p. 182

Each personality follows a process of formation consistent with its own special interests and needs for interaction with the environment.

Each child is attracted from within itself to find a harmony with external stimuli and opportunities to explore and experiment with orderly physical objects and other children. The adult learns how best to support this natural self-development process by closely observing the child's external behavior.

Child's Behavior

"The child's way of doing things has . . . shown us how impossible it is to guide him by a priori principles, because he is an unknown quantity. Only the child himself can teach us to know him, and that by his behavior.."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p. 179-80

The child as an "unknown entity" cannot be observed directly, but must be perceived im-

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Lee Havis, Executive Director

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Moment of Peril

Out of Communication

from Observer, September, 1991

by Lee Havis

A child who is "out of communication" with the supervising teacher (see *Observer, September/1991*) is likewise dangerously out of contact with reality and constructive opportunities for its own self-directed learning in the environment. Since the teacher's efforts at verbal communication and "eye contact" have been largely ignored in the present situation, a more active form of intervention to gain the child's attention may be necessary.

The approach of "control the environment, not the child" here may require some very active direct control of "physical objects" – to hold some object being mistreated by the child to return the child's attention to constructive goal-directed activity. The teacher may also firmly take the child's hand in a friendly, supportive manner to lead the child to some object of special interest.

If the child refuses to be led to the new object of interest, the teacher may engage the child in verbal communication centered around the question: "What work would you like to do?". (If the child answers "nothing", further interaction and persistent inquiry is indicated)

Controlling the "adult personality" in this manner — to approach or withdraw from the child — is the primary means of applying Montessori principles in this "moment of peril". Such "control" offers "individual liberty" by giving the child some opportunity for positive contact with reality — to resolve the dangerous condition of children who are otherwise completely "out of communication".

Grabbing Materials

Four year old Jennifer is only lightly occupied with work in the environment — preferring instead the company of others in various types of fantasy activities. When the teacher attempts to present materials, Jennifer usually grabs the materials and carries them away to use as a sort of prop for her various fantasy situations. The teacher's efforts thereafter to regain control of the misused objects is met by Jennifer's stubborn insistence that she already "knows" how to use the materials; whereupon she pursues her various vague mental wanderings. *What to do?*

Answer in *Observer, March/1992*.

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perfectly and gradually discovered through indications given by its various external behaviors. Montessori teachers apply the principle of "observation" to become more and more aware of the child's particular needs and interests — to judge when and how best to withdraw or approach the child in each new situation. However many faults and weaknesses an adult may have in this way of Montessori teaching, such limitations need not unduly harm the child's opportunity for true normal self-expression.

Faults and Weaknesses

"A good teacher does not have to be entirely free from faults and weaknesses. In fact, one who is constantly seeking to perfect his own interior life may not notice the various defects that prevent him from understanding a child."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Secret of Childhood*, p. 149

When the adult "personality" imposes itself as a detrimental influence in the child's environment, Montessori teachers must control its expression by becoming aware of one's pertinent faults and weaknesses. Such "awareness" is a way of detached observation of one's own personality which provides a vital support to the child's own inner guidance towards "normalization". Through purposeful self-directed work with other children in the group, the child thereby becomes "normalized".

Work in a Group

"... the formation of the personality ... is brought about by work and living in a group."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p. 236

The Montessori "normalizing" environment provides many opportunities for the child to work both individually and with others in a group — to pursue his own path of personality formation in harmony with the surrounding circumstances. In a social setting of mixed ages and freedom of choice, the child is able to ex-

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LETTERS TO IMS

November 13, 1991

Dear Lee,

Thank you once again for a great and insightful conference (Columbia, South Carolina, October 5-6, 1991). . . My understanding of the Montessori principles increased both during and after the conference . . . I feel I am very conscious of applying the three principles we learned in the classroom . . . The conference was a miniature version of the real world, many different interpretations mostly based on the preconceived notions of the role of the adult. My feeling — Montessori cannot be applied without total dedication to the facts of reality. . . Thanks again for the conference. You were the perfect director.

Sincerely,

Mary Carmen Roldan
Taylors, South Carolina

November 5, 1991

Dear Lee,

Thank you so much for the encouragement and knowledge you have given me both during the conference (Columbia, South Carolina, October 5-6, 1991) and in the note you sent . . . if I cannot do great things, I want to do small things in a great way . . . I set up an area in my classroom with Montessori materials . . . We're now exposing some of my daycare children to the "special class". . . I can't wait until my whole classroom can be Montessori . . . I have such a long, long way to go but I'm working on it day by day. Thank you for your support . . . I really look forward to the next conference . . . there was a little article in your "Vision" publication (*Observer, September/1991*) on the power struggle that has helped both me and my husband with Jacob (young son) . . . We have noticed that the power struggles have become less and less . . . Jacob still tries to lure us into it but he seems to give up sooner because he's not getting the responses he used to get . . .

Sincerely,

Connie Miles
Grayson, Georgia



Nell Rollo (New York) and Sunila Tejpaul (New York) at the Society's conference,
— Columbia, South Carolina (October 5-6, 1991).

Address correction requested

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Jean Wilson (Georgia) and Toni Hammond (Georgia) at break in the Society's onference,
—Columbia, South Carolina (October 5-6, 1991).

Child's Personality

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perience constructive forms of personality expression. This freedom of self-expression results in the remarkable emergence of "normalized" personalities.

Normalized Personalities

"... under conditions in which the emotional life reaches a high level... the children's personalities are normalized, a kind of attraction makes itself felt..."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p. 231

As children become "normalized" through concentration on physical objects, their true personalities gradually emerge as a stabilized being in complete harmony with each other and the entire environment. Such "normalized" personalities reflect a group experience of cooperation, balance and harmony — a state of peaceful being with each other which later expresses itself with similar qualities in adult society. Montessori teaching thereby works for the promise of a new and better society in the the future by allowing the child's true personality to fully form itself during the critical years of early childhood.

Reflections. . .

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more than me because she didn't get sick in the car or at the fair or on the school bus. As you would guess, Jacob threw up in my car. Along with being late for the orthodontist appointment there was a mess in the my car. I suddenly had all the feelings of frustration and stress that Daddy must have had. It was all I could do to hold back the words that ring in my ears from my childhood, "Why didn't you tell me you were going to throw up?" Though Jacob did see my anxiety, the important thing is I became the small child in the front seat of the car that had just gotten sick and tears came to my eyes and I held back those words. I tried to explain as I was cleaning him up that I was upset over being late and it had nothing to do with him. I comforted him and told him how sorry I was that he was sick. I cleaned the car the best I could but it really didn't matter anymore. Jacob mattered more. During all this I felt a peace about the whole thing of getting sick and being embarrassed and I really, really forgave Daddy. I called him and told him . . . a small thing but didn't I do it in a great way!

Naptime

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have a genuine opportunity to rest in conformance with the needs of the overall well-being of themselves and others. Naptime would then be set to begin when the children have completed their lunch and bathroom procedures -- at which time the lights may be dimmed and resting cots or mats provided. (Before that time, children who finish their lunch and bathroom procedures might be working quietly with materials. For children who do not go to their resting place at the beginning of naptime, their activity with materials must be carefully supervised to assure a respectful quiet in the environment.) With patience and firmness, the teacher must encourage each child to maintain a respectful quiet during naptime so that non-sleeping children will not distract and interfere with the naptime rest of others.

The teacher may help to create a restful calm for children while they are on their cots by reading some children's story of poetry in a slow, soft voice. (This reading creates an interest for non-sleeping children to rest in their cots to cooperate with the younger children who might otherwise be stimulated by their activity and involvement elsewhere in the environment). The teacher may then continue reading to children who remain awake and interested until naptime is over; e.g., an hour.

The end of naptime is signalled by turning on the lights, at which time the unused cots or mats are returned to their storage place in the environment. The children who are still sleeping are allowed to continue sleeping on their cots undisturbed until they awaken by themselves. (Since sleep cycles arise generally in 45 minute intervals, a period of two such cycles, 1 1/2 hours, is an approximate guide to help a sleeping child to awaken at a suitable time, in case they have not already done so on their own.)