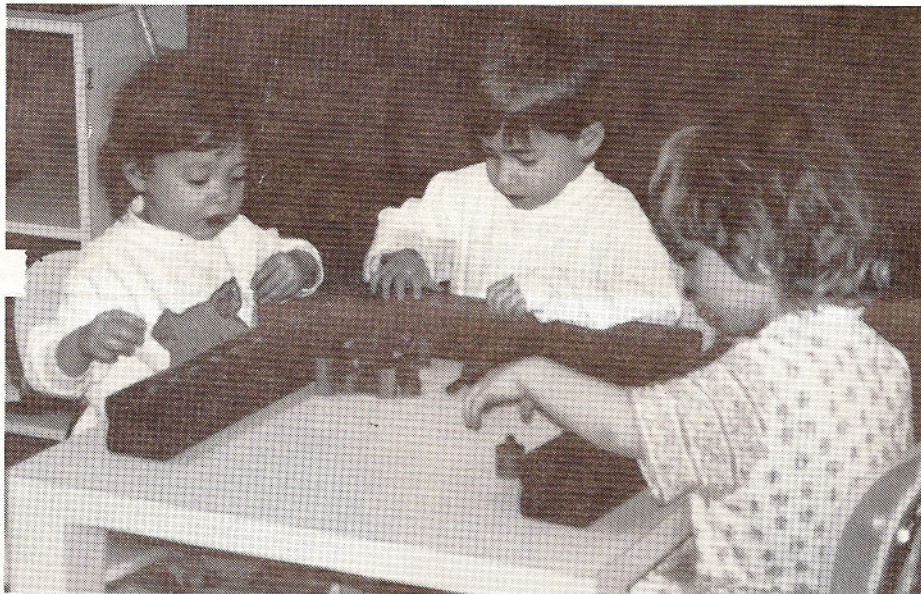




# The Montessori OBSERVER

Community

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Children working at the Powder Mill Children's House (Beltsville, Maryland)

## Progress at Powder Mill Children's House

On December 10, 1990, the Powder Mill Children's House (Beltsville, MD) began its program operation under the personal direction of Lee Havis, Society executive director. Sponsored by the International Montessori Trust, this model of "commitment to Montessori principles" has already revealed some very useful knowledge about the progress of "Normalization" in children. As supervising adult of the children since its beginning, Lee Havis has particularly noticed significant changes in the duration and form of "fantasy".

### Fantasy

Havis has observed many fantasy dramas changing in duration and intensity as the children gradually become more interested and involved in work with the materials. By engaging each fantasy scenario with careful observation through such means as "eye contact", open-ended "questioning" and adult activity directing the children's attention to more orderly opportunities in the environment, Havis states that he has learned much about the delicate, exacting manner of controlling the "adult personality" in such situations. He states that "one's 'active' personality must extend far beyond the application of mere mechanical techniques, such as 'questioning' or 'control of physical objects'."

Havis emphasized that an "active" per-

sonality expression does not mean that one is "rude" or "unfriendly" towards children. He states that "interrupting some disruptive misbehavior among the children is a 'lesson' in the same sense as any other "practical life" Montessori teaching and must be offered with no more outward movement, language or other 'personality' involvement that is absolutely necessary to achieve a successful result. Sometimes, mere physical movement to approach the scene of the disorder is sufficient to resolve the misbehavior. At other times, a more intrusive type of adult 'activity' must be offered; e.g., music ('what song would you like to sing?'); physical exercise ('can you do this?'); change environment ('shall we go outside?'); moving furniture (putting chairs in place very quietly); etc. This effective use of the "adult personality" during times of 'fantasy' is vital to awaken the child to the real-life opportunities in the environment and to assure a relative calm and outward order during the "normalization" process—to help enable further successful parent enrollment."

### Parent Enrollment

Parents usually enroll their children on the basis of a favorable observation of the program in operation. When the children are misbehaving or disorderly during this observation, parents may be less likely to

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## The Montessori Sub

by Paul Posillo  
(Ashaway, Rhode Island)

Paul Posillo is a student in the Society's Montessori teacher education program. He relates here his experiences of applying Montessori principles as a "substitute" teacher in a public school in his area.

...some of the conflicts between the children were so gross and potentially dangerous that I chose not to move on to the intended work. I chose to work on the social lives of the children instead. It seemed to me that one child was obviously the hub to the physically dangerous behaviors that were quite persistent. Some of the children would escalate the "hub" child's misbehaviors by either cheering or jerring him on. Another child, who was the most intimately involved in the hub child's misbehaviors and who for quite a while thought that the physically violent behaviors were funny, eventually began to get the worst end of the violence between him and the "hub". In an attempt on my part to "control the environment (the so-called victim) and not the child (the so-called hub)", I tried to draw the "victim" child's attention to the observation of his/her own behaviors and how those behaviors were "causing" the hub child to act in ways that were both physically and emotionally hurtful.

This "victim" child eventually got the courage (at least that is how it appeared to me) to stop his involvement in the misbehavior and to resist the will of the "hub" who, along with others in the class, had been egging him on. The "hub's" misbehav-

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## Reflections...

by Bonnie Sanders  
(Fredericksburg, Virginia)

### Workshop in Beltsville, Maryland

On December 15, 1990, I attended a Materials Workshop in Beltsville, Maryland at the Powder Mill Children's House. This Workshop was directed by Lee Havis. I had pushed for such a workshop for quite a while, and was delighted when Lee finally agreed to share this time with us.

So much attention seems to be given to the materials in the Montessori community.

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# Community

by Lee Havis

*"There is among children an evident sense of community . . . the emotional life reaches a high level, and the children's personalities are normalized, a kind of attraction makes itself felt."*

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

Children in the Montessori "normalizing" environment gradually develop a great mutual respect and complete harmony with each other—a natural community spirit of true affection and friendship which is far beyond any ordinary expected level of social behavior. Such a cooperative way of being together emerges spontaneously from the psychological event Dr. Montessori called "normalization"; i.e., a fundamental shift in young children from general fantasy and disorder to a "normalized" state of complete harmony with the entire environment. In ordinary traditional education, this "normalized" community does not arise with children because group activity is centered only on the most superficial social aspirations of the past.

## Social Aspirations

*"The social aspirations handed down to us by past generations; the idea of minimum working hours, of having others work for us, of idleness ever more complete . . . are signs of repression in the person who was not helped in the first days of his life to his environment . . ."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Absorbent Mind*, p. 91

Social aspirations built on greed, status and competition arise in the ordinary personality as a result of the repressive conditions imposed on children by traditional teaching during the early formative years of their development. Within such restrictive conditions, the child is either forced to comply with adult-controlled group instruction or abandoned to idle "play". By contrast, the Montessori environment enables children to create their own "normalized" community—a natural state of social harmony which arises from an innate sense of one's own value.

## One's Own Value

*"The realization of one's own value is just the thing that urges association."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *From Childhood Adolescence*, p. 99

To value oneself is the necessary beginning point of any positive association with others. Without this positive sense of self-worth, social behavior assumes a form of considerable disharmony, fear and hostility towards others. During the "normalization" process, these ordinary anti-social feelings diminish and eventually disappear as the new "normalized" children show their deep

friendship and cooperation with each other in the group.

## 'Normalized' Children

*"Only 'normalized' children, aided by their environment, show in their subsequent development those wonderful powers that we describe; spontaneous discipline, continuous and happy work, social sentiments of help and sympathy for others."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Absorbent Mind*, p. 85

Children "normalize" through concentration on physical objects as described and reported by Dr. Montessori. Ordinarily, this "normalization" occurs only after a considerable period of anti-social behavior involving much misbehavior, disorder and fantasy. These "normalized" children show a profound mutual respect and affection towards one another.

## Respect and Affection

*" . . . there is a mutual respect and affection between the children, a sentiment which unites instead of separating . . . the sentiment that must accompany the order of a community."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Spontaneous Act in Ed.*, p. 94

Mutual respect and affection arise naturally among "normalized" children as they spontaneously interact with each other through their various interrelated interests and activities. A large group of mixed-age children with freedom of choice in the Montessori "normalizing" environment affords many positive social opportunities which are simply not available in the single-aged grouping of the traditional classroom. In the Montessori environment, group activity proceeds in complete harmony with the basic order of infinite and eternal laws of nature.

## Laws of Nature

*"Before we can reach the point where we are 'good' we must first enter into the 'order of the laws of nature'. Then from this level we can raise ourselves and ascend to a 'super-nature' where the cooperation of consciousness is necessary."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Formation of Man*, p. 45

Montessori teaching creates the unique "normalizing" environment in its way of being committed to fundamental laws of nature; i.e., (1) "Observation"; (2) "Individual Liberty"; and (3) "Preparation of the Environment". These three fundamental Montessori principles are applied in practice as expanding concepts which guide one's moment-to-moment judgment and action with the children. For example, the principle of "individual liberty" is expanded beyond its ordinary sense of "do what you want" to recognize its limitation by the interests of the total group.

## Interests of Group

*"A children's liberty should have as its limits the interests of the group to which it belongs."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Discovery of the Child*, p. 49

"Individual liberty" is limited in practice by various group interests that necessarily arise in deciding such matters as the physical facilities, availability of materials, cultural customs, and schedules and routines of daily activity. Decisions about these community concerns can be effectively made by such means as group consensus and the thoughtful judgement of the supervising teacher. Within the limits prescribed by these group decisions, each child expresses its unique contribution to the total community through one's own individual form of specialized work.

## Specialized Work

*" . . . as the community develops, work becomes more specialized. Each person chooses one kind of work and becomes psychologically unfitted for other kinds."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Absorbent Mind*, p. 43

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Look for the

## May Observer

featuring

# Vision

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Lee Havis, Executive Director

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## Moment of Peril

### I Want Mommy

from *Observer*, November/1990

by Lee Havis

A child who is crying for "Mommy" without any apparent cause in the immediate circumstances (see *Observer*, November/1990) is nonetheless reflecting some detrimental influence in the environment. Since "other children" and "physical objects" surrounding this child are not detrimentally involved in this scenario, we must look to the detrimental influence of the "adult personality". (Responsible Montessori teaching requires a solution-oriented approach to the problem as a matter of one's own being in the present moment of peril, rather than explaining away the situation as some sort of "home" problem outside of the classroom.)

To control the "adult personality" in this moment of peril suggests an active form of "questioning" to resolve the child's emotional distress. Such an inquiry proceeds with a series of questions that seek to uncover the specific reasons and feelings associated with the emotional distress; e.g., "why are you crying?" (ans. "I want Mommy!"); "why do you want Mommy?"; etc.

If the child's crying at some point deters verbal communication altogether, the adult may expand awareness of the situation by touching the child in a warm, comforting manner. Whenever possible, the adult may persist with the verbal questioning as before—even if there is no immediate resolution or response from the child. As the questioning process uncovers the child's underlying feelings and thoughts associated with the apparent need for "Mommy", the emotional distress will tend to subside as the child returns to goal-directed work in the environment.

### Spilling the Beans

Several children begin to reach into the bean scooping bowls, spilling out the beans on the table and then on to the floor. The teacher approaches the children and tells them in a firm, sincere manner to be careful to keep the beans in the bowls. However, the children react to the teacher's cautionary remark with hysterical laughter, spreading more beans on the floor and throwing them around the room. What to do?

Answer in *Observer*, May/1991

## Community

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As children "normalize", their work becomes more specialized to serve the larger purposes of the total community. With "normalization", the children show less inclination to imitate the behavior of others—and more of a tendency to follow their own individual inner-guidance for specialized work in harmony with the total group functioning. Elementary aged children show a particular interest in their social functioning by studying the customs and laws of the surrounding culture and civilization.

### Customs and Laws

"Soon after the age of six . . . children want to know the customs and laws which men have adopted to guide their conduct; they seek to have someone in control who can govern the community."

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Absorbent Mind*, p. 234-35

The normal outgoing child of 6-12 years of age seeks to know the customs and laws of its surrounding society—to apply this knowledge in building an effective community in the immediate group situation. Elementary children naturally seek to establish themselves as a self-governing body which follows the basic form of their larger cultural setting. The orderly operation of such a "normalized" community of children reveals the underlying true nature of all effective social construction.

### Social Construction

"Only when we hold to these (cosmic laws) as basic can we judge and modify the multitude of human laws which deal with the passing moments of external social construction."

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Formation of Man*, p. 14

"Normalized" children form a social construction among themselves which is built on infinite cosmic laws of the universe—principles of natural order which are only imperfectly reflected in the present-day structure of adult society. Adults who work for this new "normalized" social construction must therefore challenge many deeply engrained prejudices and limiting beliefs which have become well-established in various restrictive social institutions. Montessori teaching challenges these social restrictions as they arise with children in one's own practical daily experience—a process of expansive being that is also indirectly creating Dr. Montessori's "new education" in the world as a vital contribution to a transcendent environment which is shared by all humanity.

### Transcendent Environment

" . . . man has to obtain from other men what he needs. We are all dependent upon each other, and each one of us contributes through his own labors to that transcendent environment in which we all must live."

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Secret of Childhood*, p. 187

Beyond the conscious purpose of attaining one's immediate goals and personal needs, there is a greater unconscious pur-

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## Powder Mill Children's House

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proceed with the enrollment. Havis believes that for this reason alone, it is particularly important to have proper supervision of the children by another qualified staff member while the director is otherwise engaged with classroom visitors.

Havis also believes that effective parent enrollment into a new program requires constant attention to advertising in local news media, open house opportunities and direct mailing to prospective parents. He states that "advertising may effectively highlight the program's unique purpose of 'normalization'—beyond the basic interest of parents for 'child care' or 'group experience'. 'Normalization' as a policy and purpose must also be demonstrated in practice by the selection and proper development of program staff."

### Staff Development

The Children's House staff are hired on the basis of their patience and humility as demonstrated by an initial interview and pre-employment observation period. Havis believes that staff development is an integral continuing aspect of the employment relationship—a process of attendance at special conferences, study of Society publications and direct "observation" of skilled staff in the classroom. He states that "inexperienced new staff may be effectively viewed in the classroom as one of the other children. They may then be engaged in various forms of 'eye contact' and 'questioning' to support and enhance their proper functioning."

Havis also indicates that "verbal explanations are often rather ineffective with inexperienced staff who tend to react to scenes of misbehavior with their own prejudices and superficial feelings. The director or other skilled staff must therefore supervise the new staff by personal example and 'questioning' to assist in resolving any pertinent detrimental influences of 'adult personality' in the classroom. Specific staff development issues seem to emerge primarily in the areas of 'language', 'teaching' and 'Montessori principles'."

### Language

Most adults are accustomed to speak to children in terms of their own "opinion", "judgment", "rules" or "conclusions"; e.g., "we don't...", "you should..."; "we must..."; "you are supposed to..."; "the rule is...". New staff must therefore be guided by example and otherwise to use such alternative means as open-ended "questioning" in circumstances of misbehavior; e.g., "what are you doing?"; "why are you... (behavior described as objectively as possible)"; "what is this for?"; "where does this go?".

### Teaching

Some new staff may come to the classroom with certain detrimental "teaching"

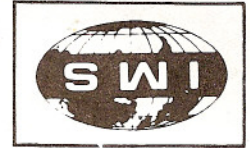
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## Powder Mill Children's House

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tendencies; i.e., to interrupt children engaged in concentrated activity, while failing to effectively interrupt various patterns of misbehavior. Havis believes that these detrimental "teaching" or "abandonment" tendencies may be resolved by a gradual process of observing a good example and seeing the results of "normalization" as a matter of one's own personal experience.

## Montessori Principles

Where new staff have acquired various distorted, prejudicial ideas and concepts about "Montessori principles" from prior experience, a personnel manual or other employment contract may be particularly useful. Such policy guidance for the supervision of children will help to establish and clarify the proper conditions for continuing education and learning to expand one's limited existing knowledge and awareness of Montessori principles.

Havis states that "by selecting persons who have demonstrated their ability and willingness to patiently 'observe' children, and who have shown real interest in the employment opportunity, staff development is a natural aspect of the program's operation."

## Model Environment

The Powder Mill Children's House is serving as an effective 'model environment' to resolve various issues in the progress of "normalization" and other pragmatic aspects involved in the operation of any Montessori school. Teachers, parents and other interested persons are invited to observe the Children's House in operation at any time. To schedule a time for observation or to obtain further information, contact: Lee Havis, Director, Powder Mill Children's House, c/o International Montessori Trust, 6812 Dartmouth Ave., College Park, MD 20740, Tel. 301-572-9761; 301-589-0733.

## Marketplace

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## Reflections . . .

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The value of the Montessori materials to young children is unquestioned. Yet, these materials are not always met with the true spirit of Montessori as she intended. The materials can even go so far as to become objects of disdain to the precious little ones instead of a source of benefit and enjoyment.

As a recent graduate of the IMS course, I wanted to make sure I was not falling into the "Montessori is the materials" trap. Therefore the materials workshop materialized. It was a convergence of eight people who share a common interest—the education of children.

Here, I felt the true spirit of Montessori as we discussed, among other things, *Montessori Matters*. I can't remember ever feeling such support among a group of people. I also reached a new level of personal enlightenment as I stood watching Lee kneel in order to show each and every step of the table scrubbing exercise. I felt such support from each member of the group as they allowed this process to unfold, even though their own concerns and questions had to be put on hold.

Again, I would like to thank each one who attended, some from great distances. I saw clearly afterwards that a coming together in the spirit of Montessori is a way to keep that wonderful spirit of Montessori alive within us so that children can experience their education with love and peace.

## The Montessori Sub

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iors did not completely disipate during that one, short period I had with him; the misbehaviors did however, diminish to a less dangerous degree due to the movement towards normalization of the other children.

But what was the most interesting and valuable to me was what was revealed about the real life drama hidden beneath the seemingly mean and careless behaviors of the "hub". This "revelation" was a direct result of letting nature straighten itself out through being completely committed to Montessori principles.

Toward the end of the period, a third child made some negative comments to me about the "hub" child's behaviors. I sympathetically asked the child if he knew why the "hub" child was acting the way he was. He said he didn't know. I simply said to him that there was probably something going on in the "hub" child's life that was real difficult or painful and which he wasn't able to express in words. I also made the comment that his behavior was the only way that he had to tell us that he was hurting. This third child looked up at me and said thoughtfully, "O...K...(drawn out as he was processing the revelation himself) *Maybe its because his father is dying of cancer and he feels real angry about it.*"

## Community

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pose to life which is serving a transcendent environment upon which all must depend for their basic growth and survival. Montessori teaching directly serves this ultimate community purpose by creating the "new education" as an indirect result of one's own daily process of committed being with children. By being a "commitment to Montessori principles", one is thereby gradually allowing a true "normalized" community to arise in the world for all humanity.