



The Montessori

# OBSERVER

Controlling the  
Adult Personality

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Child working in Claire's House Montessori - Edinburg, Texas

## Montessori in Edinburg, Texas

*Claire's House Montessori*, was established in Edinburg, Texas by Claire Van der Put in a renovated warehouse in 1980. In 1985, this Montessori school was relocated to its present site on the ground floor of a two-story house. The second floor serves as the Van der Put residence.

*Claire's House* provides a full-day and half-day program for children aged 1-6. The school features a homestyle environment with facilities for swimming nearby when weather permits.

Since 1987, Claire has been quite active in support of the Society's work on behalf of the emergence of the "new education" in the world. In 1988, she was instrumental in organizing local support for the Society's "creating the new education" conference, held in Harlingen, Texas at that time. Many of her staff and parents attended this two-day weekend conference. She has attended several other Society conferences elsewhere, and plans to attend the South Carolina conference in October, 1991 with one of her staff, Gracie Cobretti, who is also enrolled in the Society's teacher education program.

As administrator and classroom teacher, Claire has indicated a considerable expansion of her abilities and skill since she first began working with children. She states that "I have come a long way to where I am not controlling, but rather listening more to the children.

Communication with children is now more as equals, like friends". Claire indicates her strong belief in every child and that with respect, time and patience, all children can blossom.

For further information, contact: Claire Van der Put, *Claire's House Montessori*, Rt. 4, Box 823, Edinburg, TX 78539, Tel. (512) 381-1297.

### Verbal Communication ... Finding your Voice

*"the teacher . . . must call a child's name before he can answer . . . Calm, firm and patient, her voice reaches their hearts in praise or exhortation."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Absorbent Mind*, p. 268-69

Before "normalization", the teacher's verbal communication with children is employed primarily to interrupt various patterns of misbehavior and to help guide the child towards basic contact with reality. Thereafter, verbal communication continues to provide lessons in "grace and courtesy" among the children, and to explain the proper use of equipment.

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## Society Conference in Columbia, South Carolina

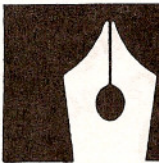
The Society's next "Creating the New Education" conference is scheduled for Columbia, South Carolina on the weekend of October 5-6, 1991. South Carolina has hosted prior successful Society conferences on a regular basis for the past several years, with attendance of about 30-40 persons on each occasion. Since 1986, the conference has been conducted over thirty (30) times in many different locations with the same essential purpose "to expand awareness and practical application of Montessori principles".

Lee Havis, the Societies executive director, will be present to guide the conference discussion and analysis of various practical problems that arise in the Montessori approach of "controlling the environment, not the child". As before, the discussion format of the conference will allow for a maximum of interaction among the participants - with particular attention to the immediate, practical problems of communication and misbehavior which arise in the many everyday circumstances in Montessori schools and at home with parents, teachers and children.

Havis states that "I hope the October, 1991 conference will help clarify and communicate some important new awareness and useful knowledge about Montessori teaching which has emerged from our various experiences with children during this past year. While the basic communication of "commitment to Montessori principles" remains consistent in its ultimate nature and purpose, this communication has certainly expanded considerably from the time of the last conference in August, 1990."

The conference fee (*regular*, \$200; *members*, \$160) is due and payable by September 21, 1991 - and includes all written study materials, refreshments and lunch on both days. The Society will provide information about sleeping room reservations at the hotel where the conference is being held; however, specific arrangements and costs are the responsibility of each participant.

For every three registrations submitted at the regular rate from the same school, a fourth person may attend at no extra charge. Registrations submitted after September 21, 1991 are subject to a late fee of \$50. To register, submit the proper payment to: International Montessori Society, 912 Thayer Ave., Silver Spring, MD 20910.



# Controlling the Adult Personality

by Lee Havis

*"... adults are also a part of a child's environment ... they should not be an obstacle to a child's independent activities, nor should they carry out for him those activities by means of which a child reaches maturity."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Secret of Childhood*, p. 110

Montessori teaching must effectively control all elements in the child's environment, including particularly the "adult personality"; i.e., the adult's thought patterns, values, reactive tendencies, feelings, attitudes, beliefs, etc. If the Montessori approach of "controlling the environment, not the child" is limited only to "physical objects" and "other children", the child will not emerge as fully "normalized" with such extraordinary qualities as spontaneous self-discipline, independence, love of order and complete harmony with others. However, controlling the "adult personality" is usually quite difficult in practice because of its complex, intangible nature within oneself -- a default "being" of unquestioned, stable reality which tends to generate a constant flow of unknown errors with children.

## Unknown Error

*"The adult must find within himself the still unknown error that prevents him from seeing the child as he is. If such a preparation is not made ... he can go no further."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Secret of Childhood*, p. 15

The "adult personality" is detrimental in the child's environment whenever unknown inner errors or repressive thought patterns, feelings or prejudices emerge in outward action as various forms of harsh punishment, neglect or abandonment. The child thereby tends to emerge in conformance with one's prejudicial expectations; i.e., disorderly, fanciful, unstable, dependent and lacking in self-discipline. To control this detrimental adult presence, Montessori teaching requires a very delicate and constant inner control of error.

## Control of Error

*"... We come to a scientific principle which is also a path to perfection. We call it 'control of error' ... If this principle is realized ... then it does not matter whether teachers and mothers are perfect or not."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Absorbent Mind*, p. 248

Montessori teachers may find a useful inner "control of error" for their actions with children by constant reference to three fundamental principles of nature; i.e., (1) "observation"; (2) "individual liberty"; and (3) "preparation of the environment". These three

Montessori principles help to return one's thoughts towards the "child" as an "unknown entity" -- as distinguished from the child's superficial personality associated with one's own various limited and prejudicial expectations. Being as a "commitment to Montessori principles", the Montessori teacher views one's "personality" as a separate objective element in the child's environment to control -- to serve the child's spirit as a good valet would serve one's master.

## Good Valet

*"... the teacher can find a very good model for her behavior in the way a good valet looks after his master ... The master whom the teacher serves is the child's spirit."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Absorbent Mind*, p. 281

As a "good valet" to the child's spirit, the Montessori teacher must restrain the ordinary impulses and reactive tendencies of "personality" -- to intervene or withdraw instead only according to the needs of the child's spirit. Such a humble and patient function must therefore constantly act to support the child's own interests for independence and self-directed activity. Even in the face of severe provocation and misbehavior, the "good valet" appears as gentle and graceful as possible.

## Gentle and Graceful

*"The teacher's appearance is the first step in gaining the child's confidence and respect. The teacher should study her own movements, to make them as gentle and graceful as possible"*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Absorbent Mind*, p. 277

The adult's gentle and graceful presence is an important starting point for a comfortable and respectful relationship with children. Calm, firm and patient, the Montessori teacher may determine one's priority for action according to the general "rule of thumb" guidelines of: (1) physical safety of children; (2) abuse of materials; and (3) fantasy. In each "moment of peril" with children, the teacher may apply the "priority action" rule of thumb to reflect a bright manner of "personality" expression to encourage contact with reality and constructive involvement with the various materials provided in the environment.

## Bright Manner

*"The teacher needs to be seductive ... a bright manner in suggesting activities is the chief necessity."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Ed. for a New World*, p. 87-88

Montessori teachers use their "personality" as a tool to call the child's attention to various choices of activity in the environment --

to brightly entice children towards the opportunities of real-life activity. Such a bright manner may well begin with a friendly interruption in the child's disorderly behavior by calling the child's name, asking "what are you doing?" or otherwise showing some positive interest in the child's situation or activity; e.g., "I see that you are really want ...". In each case, the teacher's own judgment to explain some situation or encourage the child in some way may follow the general guidance of the "priority action" rule of thumb with respect to the well-being of the total group.

## Judgment of the Teacher

*"The details must be left to the judgment of the teacher ... It is for her to judge whether it is better for her to raise her voice amid the general hubbub, or to whisper to a few children."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Absorbent Mind*, p. 268

Once the teacher has determined that the total well-being of the group requires some

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Look for the  
**November Observer**  
featuring  
**Child's  
Personality**

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Lee Havis, Executive Director

The Montessori Observer is mailed four times each year to Society members throughout the world. The Observer is sent during the months of March, May, September, and November. The purpose of this publication is to provide news and information about the development of Montessori education to extend awareness of Montessori principles and to promote harmony within the Montessori community.

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## Moment of Peril

### Returning Materials

from *Observer*, May 1991  
by Lee Haviv

"... the teacher, if need be, can, and indeed must, intervene so that the child puts the material back in place and everything is left in perfect order."

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Discovery of the Child*, p. 155

The Montessori teacher must assure that children "put away" materials which they use from the shelf - to assure an order of the "physical objects" in a manner consistent with the principle "preparation of the environment". When children do not "put away" materials on their own (see *Observer*, May/1991), there is some detrimental influence indicated at cause in the environment; i.e., "adult personality", "other children" and/or "physical objects".

In the present scenario, the excessive quantity of "physical objects" appears to represent a primary detrimental influence and obstacle to the resolution of this "moment of peril". To control this element of the environment, it may be necessary and advisable to remove all but a few of the various objects in the environment. This control of "physical objects" will help to alleviate some of the teacher's stress and distraction to the materials as she works through the process of controlling the "adult personality" and "other children" which are also implicated as detrimental in the environment here.

With many children involved in the general disorder, the teacher may have difficulty identifying the "other children" as distinguished from the "hub" child (the central misbehaving child) which is considered for purposes of analysis here as an "unknown entity". As a general guide, where there is "eye contact" with disorderly children, this generally indicates their being "other children" who may be properly directed to "pick up" objects left out by themselves and others. Such "other children" may also be receptive to the teacher's lesson presentations; i.e., the teacher picks up and returns materials as an example to show those children who are watching and interested.

To control the "adult personality", the teacher must communicate with the "hub" child (the central misbehaving child) with great care and concern for her authoritative responsibility for objects in the environment. When the teacher pursues this direct communication with the "hub", the following rule of thumb for priority action may be helpful general guidance: (1) eye contact; (2) verbal communication; and (3) physical contact. "Eye contact" and "verbal communication" lessons must be offered with patience and firmness - to allow the child to respond on its own without undue reaction or pressure from the adult

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## Controlling The Adult Personality

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form of specific adult intervention, a general "intervention" rule of thumb action may be followed: (1) eye contact; (2) verbal communication; and (3) physical contact. Following this "intervention" rule of thumb, the Montessori teacher would seek "eye contact" as the most favored intervention action to resolve the disorder. Thereafter, "verbal communication" and finally some form of "physical contact" may be employed to pursue a firm and continuing process of increasing disruption to stop the misbehavior and return the child's attention to present-moment reality. The teacher's judgment is most often exercised in this manner to communicate the basic order of "physical objects" in the environment.

### Order

"... the teacher, if need be, can, and indeed must, intervene so that the child puts the material back in place and everything is left in perfect order."

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Discovery of the Child*, p. 155

The "adult personality" must be particularly active where children are abusive to the physical objects -- to show the basic order and placement of materials when not in use. The "intervention" rule of thumb guides the teacher in offering firm verbal direction or physical contact with the child or materials to assure a proper respect for "preparation of the environment". If "eye contact" or "verbal communication" is ignored by a misbehaving child, the teacher must then be prepared to employ the final means of "physical contact", such as by extending a firm hand to the misbehaving child.

### Extending a Hand

"... the child who, having lost control of himself momentarily, needs a strong support to which he can cling... the work of assistance at such a time means extending a strong and friendly hand towards one who is weak."

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Discovery of the Child*, p. 153-54

The "adult personality" is most actively present in situations which require a "physical contact" between the adult and child; e.g., holding the child's hand or an object in the child's hand for a brief instant to get the child's attention and indicate some positive direction of movement or activity. By extending one's hand in this manner, the Montessori teacher conveys a strong contact with reality which may not be otherwise possible with the more passive means of "eye contact" or "verbal communication". As children become interested in their own self-directed activities, the Montessori teacher may then become gradually less visible and intrusive by effacing one's personality.

### Effacing Personality

"The teacher must be quiet and passive, waiting patiently and almost withdrawing herself from the scene, so as to efface her own personality and thus allow plenty of room for the child's spirit to expand."

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Absorbent Mind*, p. 263

As calmness and basic order emerge in children, the adult's presence becomes more passive to the point of completely stationary observation - effacing one's personality to allow the children to become deeply absorbed in their own self-directed activities. During this period of "calmness" (which many teachers may erroneously judge to be "normalized" behavior), children are still lacking in deep concentration and therefore require constant observation. The "adult personality" at this time is expressed through such activity as visual scanning, eye contact and occasional individual instruction in the use of materials -- ever mindful to restrain the tendency towards uninvited intervention under the guise of "encouragement" or "teaching". With the emergence of deep, sustained concentration on some object of interest, the child becomes "normalized" and fully independent in activity -- revealing the ultimate success of true Montessori teaching.

### Success

"What is the greatest sign of success for a teacher? ... It is to be able to say The children are now working as if I did not exist."

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Absorbent Mind*, p. 283

Success in Montessori teaching is most effectively measured by the extent to which the children function independently with materials and each other - without the constant need for the adult's attention and intervention. In such a "normalized" classroom, the children do not even look up for occasional "eye contact" with the adult - so that the "adult personality" is effectively "non-existent". To stand and watch the "normalized" child express itself in perfect harmony with the environment is therefore an ultimate act and result of effectively controlling the "adult personality".



Practical Life Work at Claire's House Montessori

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## Verbal Communication

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To distract a child from misbehavior, disorderly activity and fantasy, the general approach is to call the child's name, obtain "eye contact", and then offer some friendly suggestion or question; i.e., "What are you doing?"; "I see that you want to . . ."; "Have you finished your work?"; "What would you like to do?"; etc. Sometimes, a simple, clear verbal direction is most effective; i.e., "Please put the chair under the table"; "Please put this away now and let's see what else you would like to do". (However, there is a tendency to react against being told what to do.)

Positive, encouraging words directed to the child's immediate interests are most constructive with misbehaving children -- much more effective than such negative direction as "Don't do that". Even if some "negative" language is necessary, this can be followed up immediately with a positive suggestion or direction. The misbehaving child will often accept the new idea for activity in view of its relative short attention span and limited interest in the distracting negative behavior.

Firmness in giving verbal direction is particularly important when there is serious threat of physical harm to children or the materials. If there is no "eye contact" when the child's name is called, verbal communication may nonetheless proceed anyway. Repetition of the child's name, giving direction or even some form of physical contact will eventually gain the child's attention as confirmed through some positive indication such as "eye contact", affirmative corrective action or direct response by the child itself. Patience in this process implies that one's direction may not "immediately" result in the anticipated affirmative action by the child. Therefore, the teacher must be prepared to wait and withdraw after giving some suggestion or direction -- or perhaps to repeat or re-phrase the communication as often as may be necessary for a satisfactory conclusion to the matter.

The tendency to "give up" in verbal communication with children reflects how the "adult personality" may be most detrimental in the environment. When firmness in verbal communication is most vitally necessary, the teacher may find no voice to communicate the necessary support and encouragement to the child. This "give up" tendency in one's personality may then result in some eventual harsh, punitive action or neglectful total abandonment. To resolve this inner repression of verbal expression, the adult must experience one's own pain, confusion and emotional distress from early childhood in this area -- to "find one's voice" with children in the present "moment of peril".

Effective verbal communication with children is a natural, spontaneous expression -- simple, brief and direct -- to offer reality in the present moment. In this way, commenting on the child's interest, giving "reasons" for one's directions, offering friendly suggestions or asking pertinent questions are intimately responsive and interactive with "eye contact" and listening to the verbal responses of children. This verbal communication will eventually result in the child's attention, understanding and cooperation for the well-being and harmony of all.



Food Preparation at Claire's House Montessori

## Moment of Peril

Cont'd. from Page 3, Col. 3

presence. To exercise the last resort of "physical contact" with the child, the adult may take the child's hand to bring attention to her presence and to offer the necessary guidance to "put away" materials in a cooperative and friendly manner with the adult.

In time, the use of any "physical contact" with the child to "put away" materials may be replaced with the less intrusive means of "eye contact" and "verbal communication" -- to encourage the child's inherent sense of order in a positive and supportive manner. "Putting away" materials will then gradually become an integral part of the child's own routine practice in using the materials.

## Out of Communication

Judy is a new three year old child in the environment who seems to ignore or totally avoid the teacher's presence. Constantly in fantasy and distracted to imitate all the destructive and disorderly actions of other children, Judy refuses to respond to the teacher's efforts at verbal directions and friendly conversation and questions. With almost no "eye contact" or verbal interaction with the teacher, Judy is effectively out of communication with reality -- a danger to her own physical safety and a threat to the well-being of the other children and to the overall program operation itself. What to do?

Answer in Observer, November, 1991

## Marketplace

Wanted: Used Montessori Materials. Send list of items with price to: Kathleen Anderson, 513 Avenue F, Billings, MT 59102 or call (406) 259-7961