



The Montessori

OBSERVER

Memory

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Participants during lunch break at the "Creating the New Education" conference in Columbia, South Carolina (November 7-8, 1992)

Montessori Conference in South Carolina

... November 7-8, 1992

On November 7-8, 1992, the Society conducted its "Creating the New Education" conference in Columbia, South Carolina. Teachers and parents from Georgia, South Carolina and Florida attended this free-flowing discussion of "how to be" with children to support their full "normal" development.

Led by Lee Havis, the conference discussion focussed attention on how the adult could be in "observation" of an entire group of children while still being effectively engaged with a single "hub" child. Havis indicated that observing children one-by-one is a delicate process that is often disturbed by the various reactive tendencies and limited perceptions of one's own "personality". He stated that "while dealing with a single child, teachers may become distracted by the 'acting out' misbehavior of other children. Then, the teacher may feel compelled to leave the first child in an effort to resolve some other more serious misbehavior elsewhere. However, if the teacher can stay with the original scenario to complete its cycle of activity - a valuable connection with the total environment may well be established. By serving the needs of a single child, the whole group of children is favorably effected."

The conference participants also considered how a teacher can gain the cooperation of "other children" while still remaining firm for the resolution of a single "hub" child. Havis stated that "all problems with individual children have a 'social' component in their ulti-

mate resolution. This means that verbal communication with 'other children' and social conventions in the possession of objects are vital aspects of each child's own individual development of personality and basic intellectual learning."

Before and after the conference, Havis personally visited and consulted with the staff of the College of Early Learning (Columbia, South Carolina). The College provided the primary local coordination and support for this and other prior Society conferences in the Columbia, South Carolina area. For further information about scheduling a similar Society conference in this area, contact College of Early Learning, P.O. Box 711, Columbia, South Carolina 29202, tel. (803) 772-3317.



Pitigala named to Review Committee

In October, 1992, Gricilda S. Pitigala was named to serve on the Society's "Review Committee" which helps oversee the accreditation of its Montessori teacher education program. Mrs. Pitigala (Arlington, Virginia) brings to this three-member committee her experience of over 20 years of Montessori teaching in both her own native country of Sri Lanka as well as in the United States.

Mrs. Pitigala's background includes specialized teacher education from the Depart-

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Linkages and Transitions in Early Childhood Education

On November 5-6, 1992, a "National Policy on Early Childhood Education" was held in Washington, D.C. to discuss and improve the "linkages and transitions" between early childhood programs and elementary schools. Sponsored jointly by the U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the forum extended the similar dialogue on this topic which was originally raised in the first such forum in September, 1991. Attending this latest forum were representatives from diverse public and private educational organizations throughout the United States including various Head Start programs, local public school districts, universities, parent groups, and licensing agencies. Lee Havis attended as representative of the International Montessori Society.

The forum included presenters, seminars and workshops to consider how early childhood programs could be better coordinated with elementary schools to assure a greater support for the child's whole development; intellectual, psychological, physical, emotional. One speaker, Mr. Martin Gerry (Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, Department of Health and Human Services) emphasized the primary overriding goal of assuring a "permanent and nurturing family for the child's development" - and that all services for children should provide "ready access for support" to meet this primary goal.

Mr. Gerry noted also that a systems approach, rather than implementing separate "programs", would seem most likely to meet the indicated goals. He indicated that a change of approach is needed from the present assortment of separate government programs for children. Four areas of needed change were indicated as: (1) de-categorize eligibility for government services, (2) support voluntary, private programs, (3) assure accountability by measurement/evaluation of outcomes, and (4) focus on family strengths.

Mr. Havis noted the difficulty of achieving substantial change for a "systems approach" without decisive political action and positive leadership for this purpose through appropriate legislation. He specifically pointed out that "special interests are build into the present programatic approach, with competing and conflicting concerns for jurisdictional control and government jobs. This is the reason for the gridlock against change which is reflected by the overlapping functions and ju-

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Memory

By Lee Haviv

"Conscious memory, how blurred and indefinite are its impressions; . . . the unconscious - or sub-conscious - mind remembers everything, so memory takes on the aspect of a vast mystery, needing close study for its elucidation."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *To Educate the Hum. Potential*, p.19

Memory enables us to learn from the past – to analyze and correct our continuing errors with children so that their true "normalized" nature can emerge in complete harmony with the environment. Through memory, we can recognize the repeating patterns of prejudice, repressive thoughts and reactive tendencies in our "personality" – to expand our knowledge and insight about the three fundamental Montessori principles; i.e., (1) "Observation"; (2) "Individual Liberty"; and (3) "Preparation of the Environment". Regrettably, we often forget these principles in practice when powerful negative feelings and passions overcome our conscious desire for Montessori teaching with children.

Passions Overcome

"We cannot become moral by committing codes and their application to memory, for memory might fail us a thousand times, and the slightest passion might overcome us."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Spontaneous Act. in Ed.*, p.326

When emotions overcome us in the present moment, we can easily forget to follow Montessori principles with children – instead, to "act out" the hidden drama of fears and mistrust from our own early childhood past. At such times, we feel only the emotional turmoil and unmet needs of our wounded "inner-child". How can we remember the reality of that earlier "normal" child who actually formed us?

The Child who Formed us

"We do not admire or even give a thought to that child who formed us. Why? Because we cannot remember anything about him. We are not conscious of anything that happened during that time. . ."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Volce*, Nov. 12, 1941. p.6

Distorted by an inner drama of unmet emotional needs, memory of our true "normal" nature is imperfect and limited at best. We tend to remember our past only through the filter of our "personality" with all of its various patterns of limited thought and reactive tendencies. We therefore remain largely unaware of those events which formed our personality before the beginning of memory at about the age of three.

Beginning of Memory

" . . . development continues till the child is three . . . as a part of life which falls into oblivion . . . on the one side are happenings we can no longer remember: on the other side is the beginning of memory."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.165

"Memory" requires that type of conscious awareness which is possible only after a certain basic mental structure has been formed. Before the age of three, events are only vaguely associated with emotional phenomena such as confusion, fear and sadness. At the unconscious level, we nonetheless retain traces of all of our past experiences in what has been called the 'mneme'.

The "Mneme"

" . . . sub-conscious memory . . . is called the 'Mneme' . . . Only a small part of the mneme penetrates the conscious limits, and that part is what we call memory. All the experiences through which an individual passes in life are retained in the mneme, not only the infinitesimal part that enters the consciousness."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *To Educate the Hum. Potential*, p.20

The "Mneme" retains a complete, accurate record of all our past – stored within us as traces of prior experiences from the moment of birth. Largely unconscious, this comprehensive library of past events is a valuable resource of useful knowledge – a means of solving the most complex problems in our lives today as the unconscious mind works for this purpose during restful periods of meditation or sleep. In early childhood, the "mneme" is built up by registering our experiences as an integral aspect of our basic mentality.

Registering

" . . . the child does not understand all he is registering but he registers. But it is not that he remembers, because memory is conscious and this function of registering is unconscious."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Volce*, 10 Dec. 1941. p.a

The young child's "absorbent mind" registers within itself all experiences which are encountered in the environment – to integrate these experiences into the very fabric of our being as "personality". Such registering occurs without the child's conscious effort – to build up its entire basic mental structure of thought, reasoning and understanding. Memory is thereby incorporated by registering itself into the total unity of the child's whole being.

A Unity

" . . . the mind is unity, a whole, not divisible into a number of separate mental faculties, such as Memory, Reason, Attention and Association of Ideas, each to be consciously trained."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *To Educate the Hum. Potential*, p.19

The young child absorbs its total environment to form a single unitary being with all of its many diverse and interrelated aspects. Mental qualities such as attention, will and character work together with memory for the single purpose of adapting the child to its entire surrounding environment. The substance of such memory is a vast array of interrelated traces of experience from our past.

Traces of Experience

" . . . In order to gain something from life, we must retain traces of experiences undergone, and here comes memory to our aid."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *To Educate the Hum. Potential*, p.19

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Lee Haviv, Executive Director

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Moment of Peril

Playing with the Teacher

from *Observer*, September, 1992
by Lee Havis

The child who manipulates the teacher (whether physically or verbally, or both) is "playing" in a way that implicates the detrimental influence of the "adult personality" (see *Observer*, September, 1992). Controlling the "adult personality" in this situation is then essentially a matter of detaching oneself from the undue emotionality that has been built up in the adult-child relationship.

In such a "moment of peril", the teacher is unaware of the cause of the child's "playing" manipulation and her judgement is clouded by an inner state of considerable emotional distress, confusion and embarrassment. To "control" one's personality therefore requires a very delicate type of creative action; i.e., to detach one's being from that of "personality".

One way to accomplish this detached type of being is to create an alternative expansive being; e.g., by thinking about the phrases (1) "Observation"; (2) "Individual Liberty"; and (3) "Preparation of the Environment". However, if the emotional attachment is too great, this simple "thinking" action may not be enough. When overwhelming emotions are in turmoil, even such expansive words as "observation" may bring only empty gestures; e.g., a frozen, vacant stare or totally passive inaction.

When the "adult personality" is primarily detrimental, our emotional state is acting out our own wounded "inner child" - and this is taking place at a pre-verbal level of pure emotion. Saying words at this time may fail to detach from this inner emotional turmoil, leaving the child effectively "abandoned" in its continuing 'acting out' fantasy.

Another means of detaching from one's emotional state of "personality" is by being aware of one's own wounded "inner child"; i.e., the metaphor for one's total hurt and confused emotional state. (see John Bradshaw, "Healing the Inner Child", *Observer*, September, 1992) This awareness may effectively distinguish one's "adult" being from that of the wounded "inner child". As a comforting "adult" parent, one can speak to this wounded "inner child"; e.g., "I know you are feeling confused, afraid and alone, but I am here with you now to take care of you. I am working this out, so you don't have to worry." In this way, the teacher's own "inner child" is comforted in much the same way as one might comfort any other child in the group.

With a more calm, poised and "centered" being, the teacher may then be able to take the "adult" action that is necessary to resolve the particular "playing" behavior at hand; e.g., to bring attention to some aspect of reality ('look at this'); or asking some useful question ('what are you doing?'). As the child is brought into contact with reality in this way,

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Learning and understanding occurs when we relate our present-moment being with a trace of some previous experience. Awareness of these relationships gradually build up a web of knowledge that enlarges our capacity for successful functioning in many new and strange situations. Scientists study the formation of these traces of experience; i.e., "engrams", to improve our capacity for knowledge, intelligence and learning.

Engrams

"... it is not the experiences in themselves, but the traces of them left behind in the mneme, which make a mind powerful, such traces being known as Engrams."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *To Educate the Human Potential*, p.20-21

Forming "engrams" in the mind is the basis for expanding intelligence and mental capability. As such engrams arise from goal-directed experiences, the young child takes on the character and nature of "normalized" being; i.e., independent, self-disciplined, poised, orderly, self-confident, sympathetic towards others. This "normalized" development is considerably enhanced by the child's active classification of diverse objects and patterns in its environment.

Classification

"... classification... aids the memory."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *From Childhood to Adolescence*, p.39

The Montessori environment contains materials arranged for classification by size, shape, color, function, etc., so that children can develop an accurate and resourceful memory. As "engrams" of these classification experiences are formed, the young child becomes more able to employ its memory to solve may challenging new problems. Adults too can acquire "engrams" for effective Montessori teaching by experiencing the pertinent essential phenomenon of the "normalized" child.

A Phenomenon

"... it is difficult to obtain of the teacher a wholehearted concordance with the technique, before she has actually witnessed a phenomenon..."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Voice*, 21 Jan., 1942, p.7

Beginning with an awareness of the central phenomenon of the "normalized" child, adults continue their "inner preparation" for Montessori teaching as a process of constant renewal and memory of this transcendent experience. Such "inner preparation" develops through experience and constant consideration of "how to be" in accordance with the three Montessori principles. Montessori teachers must constantly analyze their "being" in each new problem

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Disobedience

By Lee Havis

"... the child may or may not obey, one can never be sure about it... Often disobedience is due to the fact that he does not know how to do a certain thing, that he is not sure of an action."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Voice of Dr. Maria Montessori*,
8 January, 1942, p.A

Leaving aside coercive threats, punishment and neglectful "abandonment", Montessori teachers must deal with a child's disobedience with respect for the underlying "normalized" child. However confused and frustrated may be one's emotional state, the Montessori teacher must find a solution for the child's "disobedience" by controlling some aspect of the environment.

When adults misinterpret "disobedience" as willful and intentional, they may be falsely assuming that the child understands or knows what is proper to do in the situation. At such times, we may completely fail to notice that our words and actions are too complicated for the child's level or understanding. Then the child stops paying attention to the teacher's direction, and the adult's confusion and frustration becomes even more intense and distressful.

One effective response to a child's disobedience may be to 'simplify' our directions and communication with the child; to slow down our words and actions. In this way, we avoid the complexity of abstract reasoning, attending instead to basic physical actions. A phrase such as "take my hand" may be much more useful in resolving some disobedience than "handle that carefully".



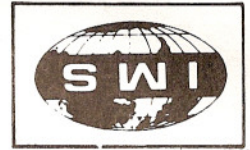
Left to right, Kathy Macedon, Glenn Harrison and Christie Roddey during break at conference in Columbia, South Carolina

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Linkages and Transitions

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risdiction of the two departments which are sponsoring this forum. The Society believes that 'educational choice' for parents is the best means to assure quality and program coordination for the benefit of the individual child's development. To this end, vouchers and tax credits may be given to dependent, poor parents who need government assistance for their children - to choose the particular services they need from the available private options."



Memory

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situation with children; to con it lightly so that the solution will eventually reveal itself in the emergence of the "normalized" child.

Con it Lightly

"... we are now advised not to labor at memorizing some important piece of work, but rather to con it lightly and then set it aside without quite forgetting it, so allowing the engrams time to organize themselves in concentration."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *To Educate the Hum. Potential*, p.23

Complex, frustrating problems with children do now yield to a quick or easy solution. When faced with such a problem, if we can "con it lightly", the solution will eventually reveal itself as a result of our steady, committed process of expanding awareness of the three Montessori principles. Observing young children develop their "normal" memory in complete harmony with their environment, teachers and parents can recall their own inner "normalized" child - to use this memory to sustain their continuing committed work for the "new education" in the world.



Teacher showing trinomial cube to children at College of Early Learning (Columbia, South Carolina)

Pitigala

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ment of Education in Sri Lanka. In addition, she holds a diploma in Montessori teaching from Woodlands Training Center (Sri Lanka). In the United States, she was recently awarded a C.D.A. credential for her continuing work and preparation to supervise young children in a Day Care setting.

The Society believes that Mrs. Pitigala will lend a uniquely valuable and insightful perspective to the important work of its Review Committee - to maintain the high standards of excellence in the Society's Montessori teacher education program. Mrs. Pitigala recently participated in proceedings of the Review Committee to consider the Society's self-study report and other program documentation. The Committee is presently preparing its formal recommendation for accreditation for submittal to the Society's Advisory Committee.

Moment of Peril . . .

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the undue attention and distracting emotional presence of the "adult personality" is effectively controlled and reduced in intensity. Then, the child becomes more able to return to its normal state of goal-directed work with the physical objects and other children.

Individual or Group

As the teacher is showing some object to three-year old Jerry, several other children begin to race around the room, threatening physical harm to each other. The teacher does not want to leave Jerry to attend to the other children because she believes that Jerry would then lose concentration and become distracted to the disorder of the other children. And yet, she feels concern for the potential harm that might occur because of her inattention to the other children. What to do?

Answer in *Observer*, March, 1993.