



The Montessori OBSERVER

Abandonment

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Society Plans for First Organizational Meeting of IMAC

In Spring, 1993, the Society began its formal organization and planning for the operation of the *International Montessori Accreditation Council (IMAC)*. The *Montessori School of Rowland Heights* (Rowland Heights, CA) and *Peter Hesse-Stiftung* (Germany) have now joined with the Society in this organizing and planning process for a new "umbrella" accrediting agency for Montessori teacher education.

Current planning includes the identification of qualified individuals to serve on the various basic accreditation committees—particularly, the Generic Review Committee and the Advisory Committee. At present, Lee Havis, Society executive director, has already identified several qualified persons to serve on the Advisory Committee—i.e. impartial persons with a legal, business, or non-Montessori education background who are willing to volunteer their time for this type of public service activity.

Designed for non-affiliated Montessori institutions, the IMAC Generic Review Committee will include persons directly involved in Montessori teacher education. In August, 1993, Havis met with Carol Barratt, a representative of *Peter Hesse-Stiftung*, to discuss the composition and work of the Generic Review Committee. Director of the Hesse Montessori program in Haiti, Ms. Barratt was particularly interested in how her program could be effectively included in the accreditation process. To minimize paper work and

financial investment, Havis suggested that much of the work of the Generic Review Committee could be conducted effectively through teleconference communications. In this way, international representatives could meet together by telephone to accomplish the essential work of the committee—without the considerable expense of long distance travel arrangements. Havis stated that "whatever on-site program inspection may be required might be accomplished through local personnel, following the direction and guidance of the Generic Review Committee. The on-site visit could then be conducted at a minimum of expense and inconvenience—without jeopardizing its essential value and purpose in the accreditation process."

Once suitable candidates for the various accreditation committees have been identified, Havis indicated that these persons would be made known to all participating IMAC organizations, and a suitable agenda and date set for the first organizational meeting. He indicated that if all essential conditions, committee membership, and other specifications are agreed to in advance by consensus, the first organizational meeting could be accomplished without undue cost or inconvenience.

For further information, to participate or to receive a copy of the IMAC agency proposal and resolution statement, contact IMS, 912 Thayer Avenue, Suite #207, Silver Spring, MD 20910 Tel. (301) 589-1127.



Jean Wilson (IMS '92), new member of Review Committee for Society's accreditation of its "Independent Study Course".

New Members for Review Committee

In July, 1993, the Society appointed two new members to its Review Committee for accreditation of Montessori teacher education. Jean Wilson (IMS '92) and Bonnie Sanders (IMS '90) will now serve on the committee which oversees accreditation criteria for the Society's "Independent Study Course".

A 1992 graduate of Society teacher education, Jean Wilson presently owns and operates the *Stone Mill Montessori School* (Lawrenceville, GA). For many years, she has been active in Montessori classroom teaching and in organizing and participating in the Society's various "Creating the New Education" conferences.

Bonnie Sanders graduated from the Society's teacher education program in 1990 and has served since then as a Montessori teacher in various classroom situations. Ms. Sanders has also been active with the Society as a member and through her numerous articles written in the "Montessori Observer".

Lee Havis, Society executive director, believes that the Review Committee's work will be considerably enhanced by having the participation of these two course graduates and active Society members. He stated that "course graduates can refer to their own direct experience in the teacher education program—and this adds a very practical value to their comments and reflections on the Society's unique course goals and criteria."

Powder Mill Children's House

"...in the human psyche, there exists an enigma, not yet touched upon by our interest..."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Formation of Man*, page 10

The operation of *Powder Mill Children's House* from December, 1990 to July, 1992 yielded some interesting results and valuable lessons in the operation of a Montessori educational program. These results can now be analyzed in retrospect since the Children's House ceased its operation in Spring, 1993—due to low enrollment and termination of its lease for facilities in Beltsville, MD.

A proper analysis of this experiment would now only begin to touch upon the many far-reaching issues and obstacles involved in operating an effective Montessori school. In

... Analysis of Results

brief, an unresolved enigma of vast and complex proportions continues to exist at the core of "creating the new education" at the institutional level in society.

Lee Havis, director of the *Children's House*, reflected on several aspects of his program operation which have now become considerably clarified and resolved. He stated that "at the *Children's House*, we were able to successfully comply with government regulations to establish all the physical requirements necessary for an effective Montessori school; e.g., acceptable lease agreement for facilities, government licensing, and manufacture and installation of necessary furniture and materials. In addition, the basic financial aspects

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Abandonment

by Lee Havis

"Leaving the child free without giving him any of the means which he needs, this is abandonment..."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Voice 13 Nov 41 p. E

Even when the adult is physically present and there is an abundance of well-ordered physical objects, a type of psychic "abandonment" tends to occur in the adult-child relationship—to deter the child's true normal development in complete harmony with its environment. By allowing idle play, random fantasy and other forms of deviation from the child's path of true normal being, parents and teachers "abandon" their children without regard to its long-term detrimental consequences. Such abandonment is ordinarily reinforced by well-established social customs under the guise "freedom".

Social Customs

"Parents today abandon their children to social customs as if they were inevitable. No voice is raised in their defense."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Secret of Childhood*, p. 216

Social customs and institutional authority to "abandon" children are built into traditional education—to either "repress" the child's own natural instincts and interests by adult-directed "teaching" or to leave the child alone to "play" and "fantasy" under the guise of "freedom". Children are thereby hindered and distracted away from their own true interests and need for goal-directed, intelligent activity in the environment. Many complex inner prejudices deter the adult's awareness of this type of psychological neglect.

Neglect

"...giving freedom to the child does not mean to abandon him to his own resources and perhaps to neglect him."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *The Child*, p. 9

Adults neglect the psychic development of children in many ways; e.g., by giving priority attention to their own competing personal need and interests. Even though a child's physical safety and health may be assured, adult care must also attend to the delicate inner development of the child's intelligence and character. Montessori teaching serves this higher purpose with children by offering many positive opportunities for interaction with reality in the present moment—an application of the fundamental principle of "individual liberty".

Individual Liberty

"The principle of liberty is not therefore a principle of abandonment, but rather one which, by leading us from illusion to reality, will guide us to the most positive and efficacious 'care of the child'..."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Spontaneous Act. in Ed.*, p. 9-10

In Montessori education, "individual liberty" guides the teacher at times to interrupt the child's ordinary random fantasy and chaotic movement; to offer reality through some form of positive non-coercive direction, questioning or various goal-directed activities. Without this type of interruption and constant opportunity to work, the unnormalized child is distracted by many negative influences in its environment. The teacher's action must therefore offer an alternative to the child's various superficial whims, abnormalities and deviation.

Deviation

"If freedom is understood as letting the children do as they like, using or more likely misusing, the things available, it is clear that only their 'deviations' are free to develop; their abnormalities will increase."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *The Absorbent Mind*, p. 206

Within a disorganized, unstable environment, the young child's "absorbent mind" can only internalize this outer pattern of chaos and confusion. The child's personality must then begin to take on such deviations as timidity, violence and other forms of "acting out" deviation from normality. Without the adult's positive attention and interaction during the early formative years, the child cannot fully overcome the fear and danger of being left all alone.

Left all Alone

"...What affects the child greatly is when you say to him that a certain person is left all alone in the world...other types of sorrow mean nothing to him."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Voice 19 Jan 42 p. F*

So great is the young child's psychological need for an adult's attention, that even the threat of its being withdrawn can bring about great fear and anxiety in the child. Left all alone, the child tends to feel great inner turmoil that eventually results in many forms of abnormal being. Unless parents and teachers of young children effectively respond to this

dangerous abandonment, they can only look back later with regret at the missed opportunities and failures during the critical period when nature was helping in the child's fundamental mental formation.

Nature was Helping

"Humanity has let pass that period in which nature was helping...a whole period of abandonment."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Voice 13 Nov '41 p. I-J*

Prior to 6 years of age, the young child's "absorbent mind" is a uniquely powerful learning resource—a great natural help to early educational development. When adults disregard or oppose this natural learning process, the young child becomes limited in basic intelligence and learning ability for its entire life. By adjusting instead our being to work in cooperation with natural laws of development, we can profoundly contribute to the child's basic education in life.

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*Voice is "Voice of Dr. Maria Montessori"
(Joy Hardinge, ed.)

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Moment of Peril

Disturbing the Group

from *Observer*, May 1993

by Lee Havis

A child who is disturbing the group presents a "moment of peril" that requires a careful control of "other children" in the environment (see *Observer*, May, 1993). However, applying the idea of "control the environment, not the child" in this situation tends to directly contradict the ordinary adult reaction to (1) make some negative comment to the "hub" child about its behavior or (2) attempt to avoid the issue altogether by some form of "abandonment".

In the present situation, the teacher must control the "other children" to allow the disturbing child to correct its own behavior and return to a state of true "normalized" being. "Control" in this sense implies some form of positive attention and interaction with the "other children"; e.g., calling attention to the proper behavior of certain children, calling a child's name in a friendly way, or using eye contact and non-judgmental conversation to draw attention to the adult and away from the disturbing "hub" child. The "other children" may even be invited to help the "hub" child by demonstrating their patience and self-discipline in their own behavior.

If the group is extremely "unnormlized", it may be very difficult to identify and acknowledge positive behavior in even a single one of the "other children". The adult's own "example" of proper behavior may then provide the only basis for positive communication and encouragement to the "other children"—to imitate the teacher and begin to restore order to the total group situation. In any case, the teacher's positive verbal interaction with the children would be very useful and necessary in this situation—to control the "other children" and help return the "hub" child to a state of calm normality.

Talking to a Child

3 year old Mary is the first child to enter the environment in the morning—and she usually begins her day by holding on to a small toy that she brought from home and staring out the window. When the teacher approaches to help Mary become interested in the classroom materials, Mary appears mute and uninterested in response. The teacher feels awkward in talking to the child about the toy and missing "mother"—and yet she realizes that saying nothing in this situation might be a form of "abandonment." What to do?

Answer in *Observer* November, 1993

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Education

"...Education is not difficult. It is merely this. Do not abandon the child."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Voice* 13 Nov. 31 p. C

By following such natural laws as: (1) "Observation", (2) "Individual Liberty" and (3) "Preparation of the Environment", the adult collaborates with nature in the child's own normal way of learning. This delicate approach to education follows the general approach of "control the environment, not the child." The teacher must particularly control her own "adult personality" in the environment—to provide instead a supportive, positive presence which must be felt at times throughout the entire classroom.

The Teacher's Presence

"...the teacher...must take care never to turn her back on the class while she is dealing with a single child. Her presence must be felt by all these spirits..."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *The Absorbent Mind*, p. 270-271

In the Montessori environment, the teacher's presence must sometimes provide a most assertive encouragement to the children's various effort for self-directed activities. While the teacher's attention must be given to an individual child, one must never therefore abandon the other children in the group—so the adult must constantly glance up and around the room on a regular basis to assure effective eye contact with any child seeking this type of momentary interaction and support. In this way, the adult's observation is much more than passive inactivity—presenting instead one's personality as a responsive presence to each child in need of this rich material of caring, warmth and encouragement.

Rich Material

"...We, too, should wait; not coldly, but rather making the child feel that we contain a rich material which is at his disposal..."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Spontaneous Act. in Ed.*, p. 332

The adult's sensitive encouragement and positive interaction with children is a rich material resource for children to meet their various needs and interests for encouragement and support from the environment. However, the adult must constantly guard against the tendency to intervene unduly to "help" a child or the opposite extreme of passive psychic indifference. The teacher must particularly learn to withdraw her presence completely at the moment when the child has entered into a state of profound concentration.

Concentration

"The great principle which brings success to the teacher is this: as soon as concentration has begun, act as if the child does not exist."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *The Absorbent Mind*, p. 280

When a child first concentrates profoundly on some physical object, the teacher's conversation, encouragement and direct attention is no longer necessary or productive. At this delicate moment of concentration, the child is not "abandoned" at all by this apparent inattention—but rather released to enter into a normalization of productive interaction and natural cohesion with its environment. As children are guided increasingly by their interest to come into such deep concentration, the activity of the teacher must decrease even more.


Activity of the Teacher

"...The more the environment corresponds to the needs of the child, the more limited becomes the activity of the teacher."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *The Child*, p. 9

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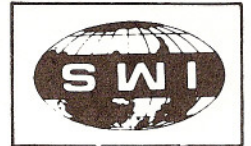
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The activity of the teacher in a Montessori environment must constantly adjust itself and respond to the child's changing needs and interests—from active intervention to passive observation. At first, the "adult personality" is usually quite active and evident to assure that the child will not be "abandoned" to various forms of illusion and superficial distraction. Thereafter, effective Montessori teaching must gradually assume a less active role as the children acquire more self-directed independence and true natural harmony with their environment.

Independence

"Blessed are the teachers who have brought their class to the state where they can say, 'whether I am present or not, the class carries on. The group has achieved independence'".

Dr. Marie Montessori from Ed. for a New World, p. 86

"Normalized" children function independently from the teacher's constant direction and imposing presence—and this is the ultimate end result of effective Montessori teaching. Confident in themselves and self-disciplined in their actions, "normalized" children are bonded with each other as a cohesive social form which extends far beyond the ordinary unity and cooperation of adult society. These "normalized" children have then successfully overcome the fear and danger of "abandonment" in their lives.

Creating the New Education Atlanta, Georgia October 2-3, 1993

Powder Mill Children's House

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would seem to have been resolved as well, since parents were able and willing to afford the necessary tuition to maintain the program operation in an efficient and effective manner." Havis also indicated that the essential business and advertising needs of the program were also satisfactorily met by the creation and distribution of suitable promotional materials and various supporting documents—assuring an effective communication among all adults concerned with the program's operation.

Havis indicated however that the program's ultimate failure presents a fundamental mystery of "unknown inner error" which requires much further study and experimental action. He stated that "the intensity of a long-term, daily relationship with the children seemed to bring out a certain problematic psychology in the adult—child relationship. Looking back, I can now see this intense emotional drama with children as similar in nature to the typical parent-child relationship; i.e., unduly emotional in content and investment, blinding one's ability to perceive and resolve those inner obstacles which are most central to one's effective being with children." Havis suggested that while certain aspects of these "unknown inner errors" could be generally associated with "negativity" and "abandonment", their specific nature and remedy still remain a fundamental mystery.

The Children's House experience also revealed that although the basic approach of "control the environment, not the child" remains valid as before, certain refinements and clarifications are necessary to avoid an over-rigid application of Montessori principles. For example, the "child" must be very carefully distinguished from the "environment"—so that the "child" is seen as an "unknown entity" rather than its superficial "personality" or "physical body". For example, in controlling the "physical objects", an undue or prolonged holding of an object might well become an

improper control of the "child". Havis stated that "a child's attention to the adult at such delicate moments is an important point of contact to recognize—to value the opportunity for verbal interaction in this particular moment of peril."

Havis indicated that these various unresolved psychological issues will now be studied in the operation of Trust Tutoring and elsewhere. He indicated that unless and until these fundamental obstacles can be more fully examined and resolved, the creation and operation of effective Montessori schools will remain uncertain and limited to a very considerable extent.

New Members

Cont'd from Page 1, Col. 3

The latest Society accreditation was completed by its Advisory Committee in June, 1993. Havis expressed his hope that the new members of the Review Committee will work closely with the Advisory Committee, indicating that "we must recognize that the Society's Review Committee will eventually function within the larger IMAC umbrella agency. Although its function will remain much as before, the Review Committee would then have to submit its recommendations and other communication to the new IMAC Advisory Committee for final action. This new IMAC structure will include a broader mission—to consider many non-Society teacher education programs."

Havis expressed his appreciation for persons such as Jean Wilson and Bonnie Sanders who generously volunteer their time and energy for the benefit of better Montessori teaching. He stated that "I hope the Society's Review Committee will serve as a good example to other review committees associated with the new IMAC agency—to help us work together in our respective roles to improve the quality and value of teacher education throughout the entire Montessori community."