



The Montessori

OBSERVER

Positive Attitude

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ACE Offers Alternative to Federal Recognition of Accreditation

In May, 1993, the "Americans for Choice in Education" (ACE) urged U.S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley to withdraw recognition standards of private accrediting agencies — relying instead on more limited means to control federal funding in higher education. ACE specifically suggested the alternative of state government approval and minimal financial parameters and reporting procedures for the individual institutions. As ACE president, Lee Havis urged the adoption of such "less restrictive, more efficient means" as an alternative to the existing intrusive recognition regulations applied to private accrediting agencies.

In his initial response to this ACE petition, Secretary Riley cited Department regulations required under new 1992 federal legislation. He stressed that the new legislation institutes various alternatives to approval from "recognized" accrediting agencies. Mr. Riley therefore urged a review of these regulations when

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Montessori Conference

Creating the New Education
Hammond, Louisiana
April 23-24, 1994

The Society's two-day weekend conference, "Creating the New Education" is for parents, teachers and others interested in improving their Montessori teaching skill and ability with children. Led by Lee Havis, the open-discussion format of the conference has evolved from the successful completion of over thirty-five (35) similar conference held throughout the United States and elsewhere since 1986.

Registration: \$200 per person (\$160, member rate) by March 23, 1994. A \$50 late fee applies to registrations after deadline. Send registration fee to:

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Children at the Casa Internacional in Yucatán, México (Mérida, México)

Casa Internacional in Yucatán, México

— Montessori applied to Conservation Outreach

Located on the Yucatán peninsula of México (Mérida, Yuc.) the *Casa Internacional de los Niños* was established as a Montessori school in 1993 by Patricia Rodriguez de Wood. With 23 years of experience teaching children, Ms. Wood directs this school for English speaking families in southeastern México — and also for Mexican families wishing to expose their children to a second language from an early age.

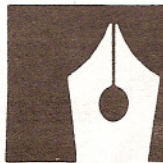
The school operation also includes a *conservation outreach* project conducted at the nearby Sandoval Ranch (Campeche, México). Sponsored by the Fundacion Sandoval-Caldera, the project is being closely coordinated with environmental research conducted on the ranch by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

Ms. Wood is supervising this outreach effort for conservation and environmental awareness by providing Montessori educational experiences to children in the isolated rural setting of the Sandoval Ranch. In this way, she hopes to improve the level of literacy in the local community — and also to teach basic physical, geographical, biological, and ecological concepts about the delicate ecosystem surrounding the Sandoval Ranch. Topics such as animal and plant reproduction, man's relationship to the environment,

evolution, habitat loss, contamination, hygiene and sickness, will be included. Reflecting on her recent work with the *conservation outreach project*, Ms. Wood states that "we have found that applying Montessori principles, techniques and materials to this situation to be an extremely rewarding experience for all involved."

The conservation project also contemplates the direct participation of USFWS research personnel in certain activities to expand the learning and understanding of the children involved. Ms. Wood plans to extend her outreach program eventually to the local schools and other organizations in the region — through the active involvement of the children in her program. She states that "this could be achieved by preparing a small *traveling exhibition* of the work on the ranch with materials made by the children themselves. In this way, the community itself will be the main proponent of conservation objectives on the ranch".

For more information about the *Casa Internacional de Los Niños* or the work of Ms. Wood and her conservation outreach project at the Sandoval Ranch, contact: Patricia Rodriguez de Wood, Casa Internacional de los Niños, Calle 18 No. 102 21 X 23, Chuburná, Mérida Yucatan, México Tel. 81-03-42.



Positive Attitude

by Lee Havis

"...the attitude of the teacher should be at once positive, scientific and spiritual."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Spont. Act. in Ed.*, p. 37-38

Montessori teaching to "control the environment, not the child" requires a most positive attitude in response to the various situations of misbehavior and disorder that commonly arise with ordinary children. At such times, the teacher's "personality" must be carefully controlled along with "other children" and "physical objects" around the particular "hub" child in question. Otherwise, negative thoughts lead to detrimental reactive behavior with children — reflecting the typical adult attitude to directly suppress and punish misbehavior.

Typical Attitude

"A typical attitude of the adult is to be always looking for vice in order to suppress it. But the correction of errors is often humiliating and discouraging..."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.240

Punishment and other negative communication is the typical adult response to a child's disobedience and misbehavior. Whatever short-term gains may be accomplished by this "control of the child", such a negative attitude tends to fundamentally disturb a positive, trusting adult-child relationship. Even without punishing and physically restraining the child, a well-meaning teacher may nonetheless humiliate a child through various more subtle forms of repressive behavior.

Humiliating a Child

"The greatest source of discouragement is the conviction that one is unable to do something. An adult, by constantly humiliating a child and making him aware of his weaknesses, dampens the child's desire to act."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Secret of Childhood*, p. 169

Constant adult criticism and negative attention to error tends to humiliate and discourage a child — lowering the child's self-worth and creating undue dependency on adult authority. The humiliated child tends to lose faith in its own ability to act in a positive and successful manner — questioning and hesitating in its every action and effort for self-directed development. Over time, the child may develop

a very false idea about life and the process of correcting errors.

A False Idea

"When the teacher correct and states that that error must not be made, it gives a false idea and throws no light on the subject, and only discourages the pupil."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Voice*, p. J, Nov. 1941

The young child's "absorbent mind" tends to internalize adult criticism as self-condemnation — creating an internal obstacle to learning and positive change. Unable to understand or defend itself against such criticism, the young child develops a false idea of perfection — denying the possibility of error and completely avoiding any attention to its correction. Subjected to constant negative influences during the early childhood period, the child develops a pattern of deep discouragement which permeates and defines its entire "personality".

Discouragement

"There is nothing more harmful than discouragement when new formations are being made..."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.256

Absorbing the adult's constant negative criticism, a young child acquires an attitude of discouragement that affects its every action and thought. The discouraged child tends to avoid any significant effort at correction or self-improvement — and may develop a defensive pattern of acting out fantasy and various types of anti-social behavior. By contrast, Montessori teaching responds to the child's behavior by giving space for its more positive, constructive interests and tendencies.

Giving "Space"

"The usual concept of direct correction and suppression of defects is wrong...Correction is possible only by expansion, by giving space, by opening up the means for the expansion of the personality."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Formation of Man*, p.49

Montessori teaching creates a type of psychological "space" to the misbehaving child — by offering various alternatives and encouragement for "normalized" behavior; i.e., consistent with the child's true

nature in complete harmony with its environment. The adult's attitude reflects a positive, friendly distraction and non-judgmental questioning in the circumstance of some misbehavior activity — to lead children towards some more constructive activity in the environment. Such "indirect" teaching ultimately leads to a true way of correcting errors through the process of "normalization".

True Way of Correction

"The true way to correction is always the same: through exercising himself the child will arrive at the possibility of perfecting his obedience."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Voice*, 8 Jan., 1942, p.B

The approach of "controlling the environment, not the child", directs the adult to seek out some point of interest for the child — to experience a moment of profound concentration in the psychological event of "normalization". Once "normalized", the young child begins to follow its

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Lee Havis, Executive Director

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INTERNATIONAL MONTESSORI SOCIETY

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Moment of Peril

Mutual Mischief

from *Observer*, November 1993

by Lee Havis

"Mutual mischief" arises when the misbehavior of a single "hub" child is significantly supported and encouraged by another child (see *Observer*, November, 1993). In applying the approach of "control the environment, not the child", we recognize at first the difficult and confusing task of distinguishing the "child" from its "environment".

In this type of "moment of peril", the "hub" child is the one that seems to be taking the most initiative and leadership in the situation. The "other child" may then be identified as an element in the "environment" — and the teacher may approach this "other child" with various forms of positive, distracting interaction.

The first most passive form of adult interaction e.g., eye contact or non-verbal gestures may not be possible because of the intensity of the involvement between the two children, therefore, perhaps a direct statement to the "other child" would generate some positive response: e.g. "come over here Tim, I have something to show you" or "Tim, bring that over to me and let's take a look at it". Otherwise, it may be suitable to briefly hold the "other child" or some "physical object" which is at issue in the situation. Since the "adult personality" is also involved in the environment as a "detrimental influence", be sure to avoid the tendency towards "negativity" in the communication — or outright "abandonment" as the situation seems to escalate in emotional intensity.

Although "separation" of the children is usually the most effective possible solution, a more "social" solution may also emerge spontaneously by listening carefully to the children in their verbal expression. Sometimes, another child will intervene in the scene — and this is often an opportunity to engage with this new "other child" in some form of positive "social interaction". Perhaps the new child will suggest some idea that the misbehaving child will accept as an alternative — and the entire scene of "mutual mischief" will seem to disappear all by itself.

To avoid these scenes of "Mutual mischief" from emerging so frequently in the future, the teacher should make sure to maintain as much "eye contact" with the "hub" child as possible — particularly at

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Positive Attitude

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own true way of correcting errors — by interacting in a positive manner with its various interests in the environment. To create such a "normalizing" environment, the adult must constantly engage in a process of "inner preparation" — to uncover and resolve those various inner attitudes which otherwise result in negative, destructive behavior with children.

Inner Attitudes

"...we must check those inner attitudes characteristic of adults that can hinder our understanding of a child."

Dr. Maria Montessori,
from *Secrets of Childhood* p.153

Controlling the "adult personality" requires at first a recognition of the possibility of "being" which is separate and distinct from one's ordinary self-identification — to align one's thoughts and actions to such fundamental laws of nature as (1) "Observation", (2) "Individual Liberty" and (3) "Preparation of the Environment." From this expansive perspective, the "adult personality" can then be more objectively observed and controlled — to discover and resolve those various limiting inner attitudes, defensive thought patterns and reactive tendencies towards negative behavior. We can then more easily uncover and correct the many unknown errors that stubbornly persist within ourselves to deter our best efforts at effective Montessori teaching with children.

Unknown Error

"...men's attitudes towards their own errors have been contradictory...pained by conscious error but attracted and fascinated by unknown error."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Secret of Childhood*, p.14

Although unseen and easily overlooked, "unknown error" does exist to detrimentally affect our being with children. Evidence for its existence lies in the continuing lack of normalized behavior in the children we see around us every day. To correct such unknown errors we must question and analyze our basic beliefs, prejudices and other deeply hidden reactive patterns of thought — to become rightly disposed to the task of creating a normalizing environment for children.

Rightly Disposed

"The first thing required of a teacher is that he be rightly disposed for his task."

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

The adult becomes rightly disposed towards children by constantly correcting one's being in accordance with the direc-

tion and guidance of the three fundamental Montessori principles. Separate and distinct from one's ordinary personality, this new way of committed being tends to spontaneously moderate, restrain and otherwise control our various detrimental attitudes, negative reactive behavior and other unconscious errors with children. Our actions may then eventually lead to discovery of the normalized child — with its spontaneous positive mind in complete harmony with the entire environment.


A Positive Mind


"...children...have got a positive mind and they go to the immediate reality of things."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Voice*, 13 Nov. 1941, p.H

The approach of control the environment, not the child leads us eventually to see the child's true nature emerging with its most positive mental attitude towards others and physical objects. Committed to the three Montessori principles, the adult likewise comes into harmony with the profoundly positive instincts of the normalized child. In this way, even our

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Mutual Mischief

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times when there appears to be a potential for disturbance in the social group. In the end, the events of "mutual mischief" will become less frequent as the children individually interest themselves in positive and constructive activity on behalf of their own true "normal" development.

Buzz Off

The teacher knows that five year old Jacob is usually the "hub" child of most misbehavior scenarios in the classroom. In an effort to encourage rapport and cooperation with this child, the teacher often approaches Jacob when he is alone and engaged in some distracting fantasy. When the teacher offers some friendly comment or interjection at such times, Jacob responds with a terse "buzz off". Since the teacher senses that her presence is resisted by Jacob, she usually backs off to approach other children in a positive friendly way. However, Jacob usually finds himself in mischief with other children soon thereafter — and then the teacher must intervene more actively. What to do?

Answer in *Observer* May, 1994

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Positive Attitude

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most awkward efforts at Montessori teaching will gradually become corrected and refined in the face of negative and discouraging situations — to gradually restore and reinforce a consistently positive attitude towards children and others in our life.

Voice refers to "The Voice of Dr. Maria Montessori" (J. Hardinge, Publ.)

ACE Offers Alternative

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made available for public comment. Further ACE correspondence has nonetheless continued to urge the outright repeal of any reference to recognition of private accreditation in the new legislation. At present, the content and nature of the indicated new regulations are somewhat unclear — since they have not as yet been published and available for public review.

In 1994, ACE renewed its request for the Secretary's support of repeal of the objectionable sections of the 1992 legislation. Havis is particularly concerned about the adverse effect that such "recognition" could have on Montessori teacher education programs — and the possible result of stifling diversity, innovation and healthy competition in the field.

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