



The Montessori OBSERVER

Learning

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Discussion of Montessori principles during the Society's "Creating the New Education" conference in Hammond, Louisiana — April 23-24, 1994

Creating the New Education in Louisiana — The Hammond conference, April 23-24, 1994

On April 23-24, 1994, the Society conducted its latest "Creating the New Education" conference in Hammond, Louisiana — the first such conference ever held in the state of Louisiana. **Teri Bickham**, Director of the local Oaks Montessori School was instrumental in planning for this event which she particularly sought for her school staff and others interested in this type of personal inquiry and "inner preparation" for Montessori teaching.

Many scenarios were presented to show how the "adult personality" can impose either undue dependency or excessive adult control with children. Directing the discussion towards Montessori principles, **Lee Havis** pointed out how giving "permission" and setting up "rules" for the children are subtle ways of imposing undue adult authority and control over children. He noted that "rather than giving 'permission', we can question children on the wisdom of some action — to return the problem to their own independent process of resolution."

After the conference, Havis observed at the Oaks Montessori School — to consult and work with many of the teachers who attended the conference. He later indicated how impressed he was with the quality of independence and self-direction of so many of the children..

Portions of the Hammond conference were transcribed on audio tape for possible sale to the general public. In this way, the Society hopes to enlarge the value and contribution of the conference to others who did not attend. The next Society conference is scheduled for Columbia, South Carolina, October 8-9, 1994

Montessori Conference

Creating the New Education
Columbia, South Carolina
October 8-9, 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 September 8, 1994. A \$50 late fee applies to registrations after deadline. Send registration fee to:

International Montessori Society
912 Thayer Ave.
Silver Spring, Maryland
Tel. (301) 589-1127

New IMAC Agency Formed for Montessori Accreditation

On May 16, 1994, **Lee Havis** of the International Montessori Society and **Sharmini DeZylva** of the Woodlands Training Centre (Sri Lanka) met to initiate operation of the new International Montessori Accreditation Council (IMAC). This new accrediting agency will accredit any teacher education program in the field of Montessori — according to broad standards designed to include the entire Montessori community.

At the May meeting, it was agreed that Lee Havis would serve as IMAC Board chairperson, and Sharmini DeZylva as treasurer. The International Montessori Society will function in the IMAC structure as a "collaborating organization" with its own review committee. The Woodlands Training Centre will function as an "unaffiliated training program", with accreditation provided through a "Generic Review Committee". The May meeting also confirmed acceptance of the membership of the IMAC Advisory Committee and Generic Review Committee — two bodies which have major responsibility in the IMAC accreditation process.

The IMAC board is planning its next meeting for July, 1994, to verify preliminary accreditation status of the various IMAC programs, and to initiate further accreditation activities. At that time, the board will also consider response and action on the matter of "recognition" of Montessori accreditation by the US Department of Education. Havis indicated his concern that a non-IMAC agency has recently submitted its petition for "recognition" in the field of Montessori teacher education — and that such "recognition" would adversely affect efforts of IMAC to promote quality, harmony, and constructive cooperation in the Montessori community.

Havis stated that "IMAC provides a structure for the widest possible diversity of programs in the field — protecting innovation and creative alternatives which are vital to the continued growth and progress of Montessori education. If there is to be any government recognition

Learning

by Lee Havis

"...it is not by teaching that the child learns, but that the child learns without wanting consciously to learn and therefore learns without effort and without being forced."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Voice** 10 Dec. 41, C

From birth, children begin to learn about the most basic aspects of their physical reality—exploring the environment with a burning intelligence that consumes their every waking moment. Committed to nurturing such inborn instincts for intellectual development, Montessori teaching offers the young child many opportunities to gain important academic and cultural knowledge in such areas as language and math. With the support of such a committed environment, the child emerges as a great worker in constant pursuit of ever increasing knowledge and understanding.

Great Worker

"...the child is a great worker ... who can learn by himself, teach himself, and who possesses discipline within himself..."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Formation of Man*, p. 66

Based on such fundamental principles as (1) *Observation*, (2) *Individual Liberty* and (3) *Preparation of the Environment*, Montessori teaching is guided by the child's own unique interests for goal-directed activity; i.e., "work". Young children are allowed and encouraged to follow their own inner plan of study and learning — to take their time to concentrate intensely on objects they themselves chose to study. In such a moment of profound concentration, the young child becomes "normalized" — fixing within itself habits of self-discipline and mental order that permeate its whole being as personality.

Fixing Habits

"... There are periods in childhood for gaining some impressions and fixing habits which, if they are neglected can never be redeemed."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Discovery of the Child*, p. 171

Before the age of six, the child fixes its basic habits of thought and action for life — using its "absorbent mind" to receive and internalize a great mass of information through an intimate sensory interaction with the environment. During this critical early learning period, sensory experiences have a profound influence on the child's whole success in later learning. Vital constructive mental development occurs in every aspect of the young child's physical activity and movement.

Movement

"...by a habit of work a child learns to move his hands and arms and to strengthen his muscles more than he does through ordinary gymnastic exercises."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Discovery of the Child*, p. 81

Movement guided by the intelligence is the way of normal being in early childhood — a constant learning process of action directed to a preconceived goal or objective. Montessori teaching must therefore prepare the "normalizing" environment to meet the many diverse expressions of physical movement — offering an assortment of well-ordered, attractive materials and exercises which invite exploration and concentrated attention. In such a stimulating environment, the child's natural instinct is to learn by the continuous repetition of various specific physical actions.

Repetition

"... repetition is natural way of learning..."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Voice** 17 Nov. 41, p. D

The young child's learning occurs by absorbing the surrounding order of nature — a process of mental activity that requires a considerable repetition of certain external actions; e.g., simple hand movements associated with an intense eye focus, interest and concentration. Such repetition seems to bond the child's mind with reality — to reinforce and establish an inner sense of order, integrity and self-confidence. Before the age of six, children are uniquely sensitive to such intellectual activities — particularly to develop the basic language skills of reading and writing.

Language

"...the child, who just by skipping and playing learns the language in all its grammatical forms."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Voice* 12 Nov. 41, p. 3

From the age of about two, children have a natural interest in extending their spoken language knowledge to its written representation as well. Until about the age of six, their special "sensitivity" to language development makes the learning of reading and writing much more logical and inviting than in later childhood when the "absorbent mind" is no longer active for effortless learning. This natural language learning in early childhood occurs by simply observing and interacting with others — even perhaps without the benefit of formal lessons given by the teacher.

Cont'd. on Page 3, Col. 2

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featuring
Responsibility

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Lee Havis, Executive Director
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Moment of Peril

by Lee Havis

Buzz Off

When five year old Jacob says "buzz off" to a teacher's effort at friendly communication (see *Observer*, March, 1994), the teacher tends to back away as an immediate impulse and reaction. However, such "abandonment" of Jacob in this situation seems only to encourage this "hub" child to later increase his negative behavior with others. Unless the teacher confronts this child's "acting out" of hostility towards the environment at an early point, the misbehavior will likely continue and increase in intensity.

In this present "moment of peril", the teacher's "personality" reflects a detrimental presence — tending towards either "abandonment" or "negative" words and actions. Now, the teacher must carefully control her own "personality" — and perhaps stay active with Jacob in a friendly, positive way — even as Jacob seems to be showing a negative reaction and even open hostility to this adult attention.

To control the "adult personality" in such circumstances, the teacher may question the child about what it is doing or would like to do at this time. Even if the child appears passive in outward response, there is likely an inner being of considerable hostility — discouraging, negative thoughts and emotions that require some very skillful adult attention. By continuing to voice words of comfort and reason with the child, the teacher is offering a real choice for contact with reality and goal-directed activity.

In response to "buzz off" from the child, the teacher may ask such leading questions as "would you like to be alone?" or "are you thinking about something?". Knowing that the child's mind is always active in a conscious state of being, the teacher should persist with the questioning in the face of apparently "nothing" from the child — until the child appears to respond in a more positive, friendly manner. Usually, the presence of other children in a friendly conversation is a good beginning to lessons in "grace and courtesy" or some other "practical life" activity — and Jacob will begin to find his way back to reality and normal being.

Group Disorder

While the children seem to be working along in a calm, peaceful manner, a sudden "group disorder" seems to arise from no where — drawing to it increasing

Cont'd. on Page 4, Col. 1

Learning

Cont'd. from Page 2, Col. 3

Learning without lessons

"Some individuals learn without even having received any lessons, solely through listening to the lessons given others."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Montessori Method*, p. 293

Learning occurs indirectly in the Montessori environment — by the spontaneous interaction and self-directed activity of children following their various motives and interests for intellectual activity. The best lesson presentations by the teacher are usually brief — consisting perhaps of only a single word such as "look", or some brief moment of eye contact from across the room. Such indirect teaching avoids the ordinary traditional approach of attempting to motivate children through punishment and rewards.

Punishment and Rewards

"...teachers do not believe that children are active learners. They drive and encourage, or give punishment and rewards, to stimulate work."

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

Ordinary teaching encourages specific performance in children to either please the teacher (reward) or to avoid her disapproval (punishment). However, such adult manipulation discourages children from their own self-directed and independent learning. By contrast, Montessori teaching trusts the child's own "teacher within" to guide the learning process for a natural development of true intelligence.

Intelligence

"Our care of the child should be governed not by the desire 'to make him learn things', but by the endeavor always to keep burning within him that light that is called the intelligence."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Spont. Activity in Ed.*, p. 240

Montessori teaching aims for the long-term benefit of life-long learning — to encourage a natural intelligence from within the child itself. To support this natural intellectual development, the supervising adult must carefully observe to interpret the child's specific interests for spontaneous activity — and then provide the most suitable means to meet these interests with various objects and

exercises. Such insightful "observation" helps the young child to acquire a strong and self-reliant character in harmony with the needs of the surrounding situation.


Character

"...a child of six may show an accumulation of characteristics which are not really his own, but are the results of earlier misfortunes ... then we have a child devoid of character and unable to learn."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p. 196

Character develops during early childhood as basic patterns of thought, beliefs and attitudes are built up and stabilized within the personality. By age six, character flaws such as diminished self-image, lack of integrity and habits of dependency on others may become very evident in outer behavior — the legacy and result of prior neglect and negative influences from adults during early childhood. Montessori teachers with young children must therefore carefully notice and correct these unconscious impositions of "personality" — a process of constant inner preparation of the spirit.

Cont'd. on Page 4, Col. 2



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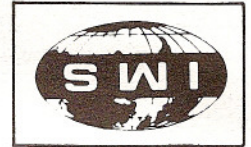
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New IMAC Agency

Cont'd. from Page 1, Col. 3

of accreditation in the field, I believe it should be for IMAC — which reflects an inclusive service and purpose for the entire Montessori community. The IMAC board is already in agreement to strongly oppose the petition for recognition of the current non-IMAC agency — as being exclusionary and unreliable authority to adequately measure quality in the field. At our July meeting, I believe we should consider IMAC's own petition for recognition — to offer an alternative to the current exclusionary efforts."

For further information about IMAC, its standards and criteria, and how to apply for accreditation, contact: Lee Havis, IMAC chairperson, 912 Thayer Ave., Silver Spring, MD, 20910 USA. Tel. (301) 589-1127.

Moment of Peril

Cont'd. from Page 3, Col. 1

attention and involvement from other children. As the children are racing around after each other in a wild frenzy, the teacher's initial response has been to raise her voice to call for calm and to redirect attention to orderly activity. However, unless the teacher becomes harsh and punitive, the children seem to ignore her words and continue in their "group disorder" even more. *What to do?*

Answer in September, 1994, *Observer*

Learning

Cont'd. from Page 3, Col. 3

Preparation of the Spirit

"The training of a teacher ... is something far more than a learning of ideas ... it is a preparation of the spirit".

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p. 13

Controlling one's own "personality" in the child's environment is a vital priority in following the approach of "control the environment, not the child". Such an "inner preparation" requires adults to objectively observe their own "personality" as any other element in the child's environment — to prepare one's own spirit by a constant process of self-examination, study and analysis. In this way, we must notice and carefully control our own words and actions with children.

Words

"Since children are so eager to learn and so burning with love, an adult should carefully weigh all the words he speaks before them."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Secret of Childhood*, p. 104

"Personality" defects readily emerge in our ordinary words with children — unconscious self-expression which tends to reflect our various reactive thoughts and subconscious failings. In moments of stress and inattention, we can easily react in negative and thoughtless ways — even though our conscious desire may be quite the opposite. We must therefore learn to carefully listen to our words — to notice the reality of our "personality" being reflected by our beliefs, attitudes and methodology with children.

Methodology

"The child does not learn better from one method or with another method when he is affronted by the teacher who imposes herself ..."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Voice** 17 Nov. 41, p. B

Hidden errors, defensive reactions and prejudicial thinking tend to distort our commitment to Dr. Montessori's vision of the "normalized" child — forming instead a type of "methodology" which becomes deeply ingrained in our total way of being. The essential truth of "Montessori" as a transcendent way of being therefore tends to erode and distort itself according our limiting patterns of "personality" — to become a mental obstacle to the full "normalized" being of children. We must therefore constantly prepare ourselves within by questioning our most fundamental ideas, beliefs, and understanding of the life and reality — to free the child to learn according to its own true normal plan of creation.

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

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