



The Montessori

OBSERVER

Thinking

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Participants discuss Montessori principles during lunch break at the "Creating the New Education" conference in Columbia, South Carolina — October 14-15, 1995

Conference in Columbia, South Carolina — Experiments and Experience, October 14-15, 1995

"...you can no longer walk as you please...you think it is easy! You will have to stop, then go to the left...or to the right, in whatever way the rules are made...Man becomes every day more tied up..."

Dr. Maria Montessori — from *Voice of Dr. Montessori*, p. 302-03

On October 14-15, 1995, the Society held its latest "Creating the New Education" conference in Columbia, South Carolina. As always, the conference offered much productive dialogue and "inner preparation" for Montessori teaching with children.

The conference featured a special experiment in "observation" — to experience more directly how to gain better awareness and control of our "adult personality" in being with children. The conference also included experiential learning through role playing various "moments of peril" with children — to help clarify and resolve the critical distinction between the "child" and the "environment".

Participating in the conference were school owners, parents and teachers from the states of South Carolina, Georgia, Maryland and North Carolina. Lee Havis, Society executive director, led the wide-ranging discussion into many aspects of Montessori teaching — to help participants experience and experiment with the idea of "control the environment, not the child".

After the conference, Havis consulted with staff and parents at the local College

of Early Learning. He expressed his appreciation for their support and cooperation in organizing local participation for the conference — and for their determined efforts over the years for the "normalized" child. Havis stated that "I am particularly encouraged by the progress I see at the school each year I return — the children being ever more calm and orderly in their concentrated work and harmonious in their relations with each other."

Interested participants are being issued a "certificate of attendance" to acknowledge their completion of 15 clock hours of continuing Montessori teacher education. A tape of excerpts of the conference will be available in the near future. (Tape of the 1994 conferences is still available at the reduced rate of \$12.00 ea.; \$9.60, member rate)

Havis also expressed his hope for further "creating the new education" conferences in South Carolina and elsewhere. The Society invites interested persons to complete a special "interest" form to help plan the specific locations and dates in the future.

Gingerbread House Montessori in Stillwater, Minnesota

Chrystal Mueller established her "family child care" program in Stillwater, Minnesota in 1972. Since then, she has improved her program and expanded its impact on the local community in many ways.

In 1988, Chrystal instituted a support group for family child care providers, and has served as its co-leader to the present time. The group supports training and assistance for providers, to improve and enhance their professional recognition and preparation in the field of child care. She believes that "there is no more important work and responsibility than family child care provider" and states that this has been strongly affirmed through her many studies in early childhood education.

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MONTESSORI CONFERENCE

Creating the New Education Inner Preparation for Montessori teaching

The Society's two-day weekend conference, "Creating the New Education" provides a psychological "inner preparation" for Montessori teaching — in-depth study and experience in applying Montessori principles with children

Date/Scheduling: Based on interest in local area. Complete and return "interest" form to participate in planning.

Location: Hotel most convenient to majority of those planning to attend.

Registration: \$200 per person (\$160, member rate) one month before conference date; (\$130, member rate) 8 weeks before conference date. Further group discounts provided.

Certificate of Attendance: recognized by Society for 15 clock hours of continuing Montessori teacher education.

Call or write for details or
to express interest:

International Montessori Society
912 Thayer Ave.
Silver Spring, Maryland
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Thinking

by Lee Havis

"The great majority of teachers, in the absence of sufficient training and experience, end by thinking that the 'new child', so eagerly expected and of whom so much has been said, is nothing but a myth or an ideal."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Absorbent Mind*, p.270

Thinking about Dr. Montessori's new "normalized" child does not necessarily result in its actual emergence in reality. "Unknown errors" within are always active to divert and distract our thoughts from the child's true natural love of order, spontaneous self-discipline, and complete harmony with its environment. These errors arise from our being as "personality" — a constant stream of self-defeating prejudices and unconscious thinking which oppose even our best efforts at Montessori teaching with children.

Prejudices

"Many people...cannot help themselves from having their judgments affected by their prejudices."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Voice of Dr. Montessori*, p.201

Prejudicial thinking is the legacy of our own "unnormlized" treatment during early childhood — fixed within our "personality" today as a system of limiting beliefs and reactive behavior with others. To counteract this destructive automatic way of being, we must consciously create a new way of being committed to infinite and eternal laws of nature. Otherwise, our reasoning tends to reflect only those most superficial aspects of our thinking as "personality".

Reasoning

"...do not think that when the mind is not attracted to reality it ceases to function. On the contrary, it is very active...This type of man can reason very very well upon certain topics but this reasoning is not upon reality but upon their imagination."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Voice of Dr. Montessori*, p.197

Since we see only a portion of the total truth in the present moment, our reasoning is built on imperfect and impartial knowledge. We simply filter out and reason away those aspects of the truth that do not fit within our particular expectations and assumptions about what is possible. Although we must certainly apply our imperfect reasoning to make the best judgments we can with the limited knowledge we have, we must also question and expand our reasoning to include and value the many mysteries that life presents around us every day.

Mysteries

"...we live among many mysteries in the universe and don't stop to think about them."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Voice of Dr. Montessori*, p.259

As an "unknown entity", the child is always before us as a mystery to discover and reveal in its own good time. When the child appears in any way "unnormlized", we must look for the cause in the "environment", not the "child" — and then proceed to experiment with a suitable resolution through the approach of "control the environment, not the child". Since our own "adult personality" is perhaps the most difficult element to control in the child's environment, we must develop a particularly keen interest in the process of its observation and control with children.

Interest

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

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Formation of Man*, p.10

Since we cannot see our "personality" directly, interest in its observation and analysis is difficult to develop. Our automatic thinking as "personality" is self-defensive on the question of who we are — so that pain from incomplete early childhood experiences tends to remain well hidden and repressed in our present day life. To effectively control this "adult personality", we must disengage from its unconscious hold on our thinking — by a probing "inner preparation" which is vital to what Dr. Montessori described as the approach of scientific pedagogy.

Scientific Pedagogy

"I was so far from thinking of it as my method that the first book I wrote had the title 'Scientific Pedagogy Based on Experiences in the Houses of Children'."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Voice of Dr. Montessori*, p.295

Dr. Montessori emphasized that her scientific pedagogy requires teachers to study their own behavior and thoughts with the precise objectivity of a true scientist. In the classroom laboratory, teachers must apply the principle of "observation" to discover and resolve whatever may be detrimental in their own being with children. If a "thought" is the quantum of the universe; i.e., the most basic element of its composition, then perhaps our thinking is the creative act itself — a power that we must willfully

exercise to create a true "normalizing" environment for children.

Power to Create

"...when imagination starts from contact with reality,...thought begins to construct works by means of which the external world becomes transformed; almost as if the thought of man had assumed a marvelous power; the power to create."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Spontaneous Act*, in *Ed.*, p.241

Thinking about the child as an "unknown" leads us invariably to explore the ultimate perfection of infinite and eternal laws of the universe. Phrases such as (1) "Observation"; (2) "Individual Liberty" and (3) "Preparation of the Environment" are expansive thoughts that give us some idea about these fundamental laws — a starting point to help guide our

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Lee Havis, Executive Director

The *Montessori Observer* is mailed four times each year, in March, May, September and November, to Society members throughout the world. The purpose is to provide news and information about the Society's work in Montessori education, and to extend awareness of Montessori principles throughout the world.

INTERNATIONAL MONTESSORI SOCIETY

The International Montessori Society is sponsored by Educational Services, Inc., a non-profit corporation organized in Maryland, USA. The Society's purpose is to support the effective application of Montessori principles throughout the world.

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Advertising space is available for services and products relating to Montessori education. Market-place ads are \$7/line. Position and placement ads are \$20 each and will be set and edited by the Society to conform to space requirements. Write for the Society's advertising outline for details about design advertising rates.

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Moment of Peril

by Lee Havis

Communicating with Parents

When parents defensively resist communication to support Montessori teaching with their children, (see *Observer* Sept., 1995), the teacher's ability to conduct a "normalizing" environment at school is significantly deterred. In such a "moment of peril", the "adult personality" is most definitely implicated as detrimental in the environment. The teacher's primary fault here is an attitude and approach to the parent which is either "negative" or tending to "abandon" the effort at communication altogether. She has prejudicially assumed that the parents are "not interested" in Montessori education, and so she reinforces and promotes a continuing negative mind-set in the relationship with parents.

As with children, the Montessori teacher here must approach the parents more prepared to "observe" and "listen" for interest; i.e., not to "teach" in the traditional sense of the word. If possible, she could use the arrival or dismissal time for a brief "lesson" for the parent, to "watch" the teacher offer some positive, supportive communication to the child — to have the parents notice some aspect of her "being" which they might otherwise overlook on their own. If the parent appears too busy at that moment, ask to call at home for a discussion on the child's progress at school.

In communicating with parents, keep the focus on the school's duty and responsible for creating a "normalizing" environment at school. Listen carefully for evidence of personal interest, and proceed accordingly to expand this interest with practical examples and suggestions for the parents to experiment with at home on their own.

As with children, avoid any "negative" judgment about the parent's behavior, but do confirm and acknowledge any errors that the parents may themselves voluntarily notice. Also, be prepared to suggest new possibilities for the parents to try out at home to "control the environment, not the child". In time, the parents' own experiences will teach them to more consistently control and adjust their being with the three Montessori principles.

No Interest

9 year old Marie is a bright capable student, but seems to show little interest for

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Thinking

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thinking for the emergence of the "normalized" child. These three Montessori principles can provide a most useful framework for our careful analysis of the various detrimental influences in the child's environment.

Analysis

"Separating each part of the activity and attending to them one by one...would probably never have been thought of by the adult. The observation of the child is the only thing that has given us the clue to this need of analysis."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from Voice of Dr. Montessori, p.296

Montessori teaching must objectively analyze the child's environment according to each of its separate parts — the "other children", the "physical elements", the "adult personality". We must then proceed to thoughtfully "prepare the environment" by removing their various specific detrimental influences. Since Dr. Montessori first discovered the "normalized" child in 1907, a whole new language has grown up to communicate and help our understanding of this central experience of "normalization".

A New Language

"thoughts...have been taken and fixed...in a new language..."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from Voice of Dr. Montessori, p.271-72

Our experience of the "normalized" child today is communicated with the aid of specific terms and concepts associated with the word "Montessori" — a whole new language to define "normality" and "individual liberty". We use these words to help us fix and regulate our being in harmony with the emergence of the "normalized" child. Although this new language may serve to clarify our understanding of the various "Montessori" ideas, we must still return to the pure unspoken experience itself — to renew and confirm the reality of the child's true "normalized" nature.

Ideas

"...Ideas lose strength in becoming widespread."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from From Childhood to Adol., p.34

Since 1907, a vast array of ideas, concepts and personalities has emerged around the word "Montessori" — to define and structure its appearance and distinction in society. With so much distracting complexity, the original idea itself is easily diminished and disregarded as a powerful creative experience in our individual being with children. To overcome the distorted

ideas of "Montessori" associated with popular opinion, certification or specified materials, we must constantly engage in a careful preparation of thought with others on this matter of 'what is Montessori?'

Preparation of Thought

"Where the right preparation of thought is complete, discoveries may take place by the organization of many minds in this suitable mental atmosphere."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from To Ed. the Human Pot., p.81

Montessori teaching requires us to prepare our thoughts to study the various beliefs and opinions we have about "Montessori" itself — to expand and question the many divergent opinions, beliefs and ideas that have emerged in others about the word "Montessori". Through this committed dialogue and discussion, we see the reflection of our own "personality" — to observe the projections of its various defects and limitations that deter our effective being as a "commitment to Montessori principles".

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Gingerbread House

Cont'd. from Page 1, Col.3

In 1990, Chrystal received "Child Development Associates" certificate, and since then has served as a mentor, trainer and teacher for others involved in this recognition program for professional child care development. In April, 1995, she enrolled into the Society's Montessori teacher education program and is now seeking to help organize interest for a "Creating the New Education" conference in the state of Minnesota.

For further information, contact: Chrystal Mueller, Gingerbread House, 242 Deer Path Ct., Stillwater, MN 55082, tel. (612) 439-2927.



Children working with language materials at the Gingerbread House in Stillwater, Minnesota.

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Only with this type of "inner preparation" can we then move into effective action to try out our new thinking with children.

Movement

"Movement is the last part that completes the cycle of thought, and spiritual uplift is attained through action and work."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Ed. for a New World*, p.49

Movement completes the cycle of our thinking for effective Montessori teaching with children — to test out, confirm and validate the real value and impact of our ideas in practice. Between each thought, we can choose our actions — to either create new expansive thoughts about Montessori principles or to automatically repeat our old habits of prejudicial thinking as "personality". By choosing to think about Montessori principles instead of action according to the reactive being of "personality", we can see real progress in the more positive, normalized behavior of the children we supervise each day.

Progress

"Progress consists in seeing what has not been seen before and in doing what was once thought unnecessary or even impossible."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Secret of Childhood*, p.23

Progress for the "new education" outside ourselves reflects our own active, clear thinking about the "normalized" child. The three Montessori principles are powerful thoughts which can help us discipline our minds for effective action with children — to visualize the "normalized" child in even the most discouraging of disruptive situations. In such "moments of peril", we have the power to choose a

new way of being as "commitment to Montessori principles" — to adjust our thinking to allow the "normalized" child to freely emerge in the world.

Moment of Peril

Cont'd. from Page 3, Col. 1

the "easy" work that others her age are doing. When the teacher approaches her with a possible new project, she reacts defensively with an indication of "no interest". Although Marie does the work that others her age are doing, she seems to lack enthusiasm and a lazy attitude about new work. What to do?

Answer in *Observer*, March, 1996



Children working at the Sweet Garden School in Houston, Texas.

My Sweet Garden in Houston, Texas

In 1994, Lili Morales opened her "My Sweet Garden" Montessori school in Houston, Texas — a "family day care" program for children ages 2-6 which she directs in her home.

The Morales school operates from 6:30 am to 6:30 pm daily — providing a long period for time for work and concentration on a wide variety of interesting activities. Special activities for the children include Spanish language instruction, art, planned field trips and outside activities for the summer.

Lili holds an associated degree in Child Development and various certifications in Early Childhood. In 1994, she enrolled into the Society's teacher education program through correspondence.

In 1995, Lili sent out a letter to Society members in Texas inquiring about interest in scheduling a "creating the new education" conference in Texas. She indicates that some of her parents are interested in attending, and has received some favorable responses from others in the state.

For further information about "My Sweet Garden" or to help organize plans for a Texas Montessori conference, contact: Lili Morales, 8405 Wilcrest 3000, Houston, TX 77072, Tel. (713) 575-8758.

Marketplace

Montessori School — for sale in the Clearwater, Florida area. Fully equipped and operating. Owner plans to retire after 16 successful years. Available with or without real estate. Contact Angelo Trega of Best Business Brokers at 1-813-321-1414.