



The Montessori

# OBSERVER

Imitation

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## Montessori Family Child Care in Rosemount, Minnesota

**Julie Poser** established her *Cuddly Kidz Family Child Care* business in 1990. Recognized by the Society as a Montessori school in 1995. Her program is also accredited through the *National Association for Family Child Care*.

Since 1993, Ms. Poser has been the Public Relations Coordinator for the local Dakota County Family Child Care association — a group that works to improve cooperation and quality in the area programs that serve children in the provider's home. She states that "I felt it was important for me to become involved in letting other Family Child Care Providers know about the education that is available

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*Children engaged in practical life work at Cuddly Kidz Montessori in Rosemount, Minnesota.*

## U.S. Secretary of Education Rejects IMAC Plea to Withhold Recognition of Exclusionary Accreditation

*"...the force of cohesion among adults is something that needs to be directed by an attachment to ideals;...something higher than a mere organizing mechanism."*

**Dr. Maria Montessori**  
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.238

On July 20, 1995, U.S. Secretary of Education, **Richard Riley** formally rejected the plea of IMAC (*"International Montessori Accreditation Council"*) to withhold his recognition of a non-inclusive accrediting agency (*"MACTE"*) in the field of Montessori teacher education. This decision formally endorsed the recommendation made by the Secretary's *"National Advisory Committee"* which met to hear testimony on the matter at its meeting of May 24, 1995.

**Lee Havis**, IMAC chairperson and **Dr. Jerry Duvall**, member of IMAC accrediting advisory committee presented testimony against the other agency recognition — because of its lack of proper Montessori standards, non-inclusive, discriminatory nature and potential harm to minority and innovative programs in the field of Montessori education. The May meeting focused on such issues as the agency's exclusion of certain *"correspondence"* programs because of distinctions over the number of *"residential"* classroom hours required.

Havis particularly emphasized the need for inclusive standards built on consensus throughout the entire Montessori community — standards based on the true ideals of Dr. Montessori as incorpo-

rated in her published writings. He stated that the other agency appears as a mere organizing mechanism since it lacks any clear definition of Montessori teaching and is unified only by such superficial criteria as the number of *"residential"* hours of classroom instruction. Havis noted specifically that *"Montessori is...a way of being. It is not 200 hours of residential training...if there is going to be an accreditation process, there has to be a uniformity and bonding of the essential core of what is Montessori."*

Dr. Duvall spoke for the vital need for *"inclusivity"* in Montessori accreditation. He stated *"...if diversity and quality are linked, then it is probably not good public policy to exclude options which are currently available in serving students in a Montessori environment quite well."*

Despite a broad and substantial support for the IMAC position for inclusive accreditation by many within the Montessori community, the Secretary nonetheless rejected the IMAC plea and issued the other agency its recognition for a two year term. However, a number of significant limitations were placed on this recognition. The Secretary stated that by the end of the initial two-year recognition period, there must be at least one freestanding Montessori education institution accredited by the agency that participates in a federal funding program that designates that agency as the accreditor it will use. He stated specifically that *"an educational institution does not qualify as an eligible institution of*

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## Montessori Conference Creating the New Education Columbia, South Carolina October 14-15, 1995

The Society's two-day weekend conference, *"Creating the New Education"* provides a dynamic group discussion to discover and resolve *"unknown errors"* with children. The discussion will help adults control their *"personality"* with children — to implement the approach of *"control the environment, not the child"*. The group discussion is led by **Lee Havis** — and will offer a deep psychological *"inner preparation"* for more effective Montessori teaching with children.

**Location:** Holiday Inn (Airport) in Columbia, SC. Contact hotel for sleeping room: (803) 794-9440.

**Registration:** \$200 per person (\$160, member rate) by September 14, 1995. 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

# **Imitation**

by Lee Havis

*"No one can concentrate through imitation. Imitation in fact binds us to the external world."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Discovery of Child*, p.96

Dr. Montessori observed that imitation in children tends to reflect a restricted personality development — a lingering attachment to the state of dependence so evident in the newborn infant. She noticed particularly that profound concentration provides the young child with a freedom from such infantile dependency — to achieve a full state of independent "normalized" being in harmony with the environment. Montessori teaching aims to provide this special "normalizing" opportunity for children — the conditions of life which enable even the most distracted, inattentive and undisciplined children to eventually free themselves from their attachment to imitation and dependence on others.

## Conditions of Life

*"...faults can be made to disappear without the need of preaching, punishment or even setting a good example by the adult. Neither threats nor promises are needed, but conditions of life."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Education for a New World*, p.78

The "normalizing" conditions of Montessori education are based on the teacher's committed action to follow such fundamental natural laws as (1) "Observation"; (2) "Individual Liberty"; and (3) "Preparation of the Environment." These three Montessori principles direct us to "control the environment, not the child" — to free the child to follow its own inner plan of creation. By contrast, traditional teaching, with its view of the child as essentially a receptive being, employs imitation in a manner that restricts and limits the child's normal growth and development.

## Receptive Being

*"The commonest prejudice in ordinary education is that everything can be accomplished...by holding oneself up as a model to be imitated. The child is usually considered a receptive being instead of as an active being."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.254

Ordinary group instruction and pre-determined lesson plans set up the teacher as the object to imitate — the

central authority figure to prescribe the curriculum and measure success by such means as grades and tests. Here the child is expected only to receive information from the adult teacher — with very little interest or attention given to the child's own potential for self-directed learning. Traditional teaching therefore works against the fundamental purpose of real education to perfect humanity.

## Perfect Humanity

*"We wanted a perfect humanity. We thought that humanity had to be become perfect by imitating us; but we were imperfect, so there is a hopeless impasse."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Education for a New World*, p.56

No child can perfect itself by imitating others. Since even the most "perfect" adult teachers have their various flaws and defects, imitation only results in the projection and imposition of these defects on the child. Since all learning is ultimately from within oneself according to our own personal interests and internal activities, the traditional teacher cannot induce this learning by forcing comparisons with the example of the strong.

## Example of the Strong

*"...a deficient child...becomes more and more discouraged as the zealous teacher scolds and punishes him for his weakness and points out the radiant example of the strong."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Spontaneous Act. In Ed.*, p.317

Since the child can "normalize" only through its own concentrated work, distracting comparisons with the good behavior of others can be quite frustrating and discouraging to the weak and deficient. As always, "normalization" comes from the child's own free choice activity — not by any direct teaching or imitation of the behavior of others. In the ordinary group, imitation usually only expresses the most foolish act of others.

## The Foolish Act

*"The foolish act is multiplied in the group...In a crowd, the spirit of imitation spreads and enhances individual defects."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.267

Children ordinarily imitate others to escape from the personal responsibility of choosing their own actions. Montessori teaching challenges this "unnormlized" dependency on others by offering many

opportunities for real work in the environment. At such times, the adult must practice a very active type of "observation" — to expand awareness of the total situation well beyond such simplistic formulas as "stand and watch".

## Observation

*"...observation...has a purpose. Its object is to find out what are the laws of life."*

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

Since we each have our own unique way of doing things, "observation" cannot merely imitate the superficial behavior of others. Any good "rules of thumb" we may adopt to improve our "observation" with children are invariably limited by the need for their interpretation and implementation in actual practice. To really "observe" a child is to inquire into the most hidden mysteries of "man the unknown".

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by Lee Havis

## Group Disorder

Children together in a group can readily imitate each other's negative and destructive behavior (See *Observer*, May, 1995). As individuals, the children may be quite receptive to the teacher's direction and focus to reality. But, the "group" seems to present a perplexing problem for the teacher to "control the environment, not the child". In the present scenario, the teacher has essentially "abandoned" the children under the guise of "individual liberty".

Since the children in this disorderly group situation are unprepared for real freedom, the teacher's "personality" must provide an active and persistent contact with reality — drawing attention in a positive way towards real opportunity to work and cooperate in harmony with each other.

The teacher here should interrupt the disruptive behavior in any friendly way — pointing out anything of possible interest to any receptive single child. When that child responds with interest, the "group disorder" will begin to dissipate its negative energy.

If the "group disorder" is particularly pervasive and established, it is best to gather the children to some alternative group activity — perhaps sitting down in a circle to show some particular object or exercise relating to "practical life".

In conducting such a focused "collective lesson", the teacher must practice a very "positive" communication with the children, dealing with what misbehavior there may be by complimentary appreciation and attention given to the positive behavior of those that show signs of order and cooperation. This control of the "other children" is an indirect lesson to the most destructive "negative" personalities in the group who will then seek the same type of approval and recognition of the teacher.

In time, these positive collective meetings for "practical life" exercises, can be eliminated entirely, as the children more and more find their own individual interests in a positive "normalized" way in the environment.

## Communicating with Parents

The teacher has noticed that certain children in her new classroom are being harmed by detrimental actions of their parents; e.g., impatient, negative remarks

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## Man the Unknown

*"The basis of the reform of education and society which is necessary for our times must be the scientific study of man the unknown."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
*from Formation of Man, p.12*

Committed to fundamental laws of nature, Montessori teaching approaches the child as an "unknown entity" — to then discover its true nature as revealed by its own spontaneous activity. We cannot enter into this expansive process of "discovery" by the slavish imitation of rigid rules or personalities. To control our own "personality", we must intimately examine our own way of being — to uncover and correct our own many unknown inner errors of thought and attitude.

## Unknown Errors

*"The adult must find within himself the still unknown error that prevents him from seeing the child as he is. If such a preparation is not made...he can go no further."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
*from Secret of Childhood, p.15*

Montessori teaching depends primarily on how we control our own "personality" with children — a process of "inner preparation" which extends far beyond our physical senses and current level of conscious knowledge. By observing our "personality" reflected in others, we can discover some important aspects of our own inner defects — and work to control our behavior with children in many positive ways. However, we cannot overcome our most significant inner obstacles by imitating the solution of others — because we are always alone in the most decisive moment of peril.

## Moment of Peril

*"It is primarily necessary to depend on oneself, because in the moment of peril we are alone."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
*from Spontaneous Act. In Ed., p.183*

Our most critical actions with children will tend to arise from personal choices we make in moments of solitary reflection. However much knowledge we may gain from observing others, we all must finally decide on our own specific action according to internal processes of instinct and interest. Imitation of others and following rigid rules is no substitute for the practice and habit of constant expanding self-knowledge.

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*Montessori Observer, September, 1995*

## ACE Convenes Conference on Educational Choice

On Saturday, October 7, 1995, the Americans for Choice in Education (ACE) will hold a conference/banquet on educational choice. The all-day "Hands On - How To" conference is planned to include such ideas as "vouchers" — government funding of education directly to parents to choose the government or non-government school of their choice for their children. Audience participation and discussion will allow for expression of a wide diversity of views and ideas. A banquet will follow the all-day conference — with featured speakers involved in educational choice.

The conference/banquet will be held at the Sheraton National Hotel (Arlington, VA). Conference only — \$65; banquet only — \$85; Conference and Banquet — \$100. Send check to Americans for Choice in Education, 927 S. Walter Reed Dr., #1, Arlington, VA 22204.

*The Society is a member of the ACE coalition — and supports its basic concept of eliminating the unfair and prejudicial interference of government in the field of education. Contact the Society for more details or to coordinate participation with other Society members.*

## IMAC Plea

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higher education under the HEA if it is accredited solely by the (MACTE) Commission in its capacity as a programmatic accrediting agency."

The Secretary also required an interim report by May 1, 1996 demonstrating "strengthened compliance" with certain of the recognition criteria, including the review of any complaints it receives that is related to the agency's standards, criteria or procedures.

Havis indicated that IMAC will continue to oppose this exclusionary Montessori agency recognition, as it pursues its own government recognition which is presently pending with the Secretary. Havis stated that "we also support repeal of laws with respect to any government 'recognition' of private accrediting agencies because of its inherently discriminatory nature and unnecessary government interference in educational choice. True unity and quality in Montessori education cannot be achieved by majority rule within a mere organizing mechanism for power — but must come about by inclusive standards for the entire Montessori community. I believe the IMAC agency best meets this need because of its clear definition of proper Montessori standards coupled with a full inclusion of diversity

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## IMAC Plea

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and consensus decision-making in all phases of its operation."

The Society is inviting petition signatures for congressional legislation to abolish the federal practice of discriminatory "recognition" of private accrediting agencies. For more details, or to obtain a copy of this petition for review and distribution, contact the International Montessori Society, 912 Thayer Ave., #207, Silver Spring, Maryland USA, 20910, Tel. (301) 589-1127.

## Imitation

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### Self-knowledge

*"...adults...are confronted with the problem of self-knowledge, that is of knowledge of the hidden laws that direct the psychic development of man."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Secret of Childhood*, p.208

Montessori teaching must constantly distinguish between one's "personality" and being as a "commitment to Montessori principles" — a process of expanding self-knowledge at the most fundamental level of reality and truth. With patience and persistence in this "inner preparation", we can gradually develop patterns of positive thought and action — even in the midst of great confusion, discouragement and negativity. Such an application of Montessori principles will then gradually lead us to discover the "normalized" child with its complete freedom from the ordinary attachment to imitation and dependency on others.

## Trust Tutoring Meetings for Tutors and Directors

Since June, 1995, the International Montessori Trust (Lee Havis, Trustee) has been conducting a series of important orientation meetings for tutors and regional directors involved in its TRUST TUTORING program for individualized in-home instruction. Topics include, "Introduction to Regional Directors", June 27, 1995, "Communicating with Tutors", August 1, 1995 and "Communicating with Clients", August 29, 1995. Havis stated that these meetings are intended to supplement and reinforce the directions given in its "Handbook" — the complete formal guidelines for regional directors.

Each meeting was taped for later use in a wider training procedure for new regional directors. Havis indicated that these tapes will be organized into a more systematic and widespread preparation of individuals who can serve in the critical role of "regional director" — to initially evaluate students with the new Trust Tutoring "Evaluation of Basic Skills" test, contract with clients and supervise the tutors who implement each assignment.

Havis noted that "since 1992, we have gradually developed a structure of support for in-home 'study skill' learning that has wide application for all ages and subject areas. Our handbook, tapes and testing materials will enable us to expand more easily beyond our current operation in the mid-Atlantic area of the United States."

Further meetings for TRUST TUTORING regional directors will include such other critical topics as "evaluating students", and "selecting tutors".

## Family Child Care

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to them. I am currently working with the Resource and Referral agency on setting up the Child Development Associate (CDA) program in our county."

Ms. Poser first became interested in Montessori when her oldest son was labeled with "Mild to moderate Mental Impairment". She indicates her hope that some day her son will be able to read and write as any normal child should. She states that "It is a goal of mine to help other Family Child Care Provides to become professionals, and offer high quality programs in their homes."

Ms. Poser is presently enrolled as a student in the Society's Montessori teacher education. For further information, contact: Julie Poser, *Cuddly Kidz Family Child Care*, 14307 Cimarron Ave., Rosemount, MN 55068. Tel. (612) 423-6092.

## Moment of Peril

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and actions when they arrive and leave each day. The children express various negative manners and attitudes from home, and the teacher has been seeking to communicate with the parents about this situation. However, the parents have thus far only expressed argument, defensiveness, lack of interest and thoughtless indifference. Since the parents most needing this communication tend to view their child's misbehavior as the school's problem and not theirs, the teacher is frustrated and confused in her efforts to expand Montessori principles with the parents. *What to do?*

Answer in *Observer*, November, 1995