



The Montessori

# OBSERVER

Habit

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## On-site Visit Held for IMAC Accreditation

On Feb. 6, 1996, the International Montessori Accreditation Council (IMAC) conducted its on-site visit for the accreditation of the Society's Montessori teacher education program — the "Independent Study Course". The visit was conducted by a member of the IMAC review committee at a school located in Woodbridge, Virginia. The review committee will now proceed to finalize its report — and submit with recommendation for final action by the IMAC advisory committee.

A representative of the US Department of Education attended the on-site visit to observe the process as part of the Department's consideration of the IMAC petition for recognition. IMAC has received support for its recognition from members of congress and others in the field of accreditation. IMAC continue to favor, however, full abolition of these "recognition" procedures to support greater educational freedom in the United States.



Discussing "educational freedom" bills, HB 920 and 994 in office of Del. Ray Beck, co-sponsor of legislation. From left, Del. Ray Beck, Mignon Bush Davis and Lee Havis. Annapolis, MD, February, 1996

## Educational Freedom Bills in Maryland

Since fall, 1995, the Society has been actively seeking to develop and implement some specific legislative proposals for greater educational freedom in the state of Maryland. Specific legislation is needed to assure the growth and progress of Montessori education in that jurisdiction. With the support and encouragement of other concerned Maryland citizens, Lee Havis, the Society's executive director, prepared and proposed a series of possible bills for consideration by the Maryland General Assembly in its 1996 term. Each bill was designed to bring greater freedom for Montessori education — to overcome the present system of government control and censorship through such means as mandatory "certification".

In February, 1996, Havis met with legislators and others to consider specific legislative action. The result was the introduction of several bills that are presently under consideration.

HB 920 and HB 994 specifically address the need for an exemption from mandatory state certification — a system of excessive regulation in such sensitive areas as teacher qualifications and curriculum. These bills address long-standing concerns that the Society has raised in Maryland since 1981 when its own teacher education efforts for certification were denied in that state.

Del. Dana Dembrow, the primary sponsor of HB 920 and 994 is also a member of the advisory committee of the IMAC accrediting agency which oversees review of the Society's teacher education activities. Joining as co-sponsors of the bills were (HB 920) Beck, Morgan, Hixson, Jacobs, Heller, Kittleman and Muse. (HB 994) Beck, Flanagan, Hixson, Jacobs, Heller, Kittleman and Muse.

On February 22, 1996, Del. Dembrow introduced the testimony of Havis at oral hearings before the House Ways and Means Committee for HB 920, and on March 1, 1996 before the House Appropriations Committee for HB 994. Mignon Bush Davis, a Society member and citizen activist in Maryland also presented oral and written testimony at the two hearings in support of these bills. The only opposition to the bills at the hearings was presented by the affected government agencies, the State Department of Education and the State Commission on Higher Education.

In his testimony, Havis emphasized that quality education is better assured through competition in the free marketplace rather than through government censorship. He stated that without the exemption from state certification, "the

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# Habit

by Lee Havis

*"Nothing is more difficult for a teacher than to give up old habits and prejudices."*

**Dr. Maria Montessori**  
from *Discovery of the Child*, p.155

Montessori teaching requires us to give up of old habits of prejudicial thinking about the child — to discover its true "normalized" nature in complete harmony with the environment. We can learn to give up such destructive habits as "negativity" and "abandonment" with children by creating a whole new way of being committed to the three Montessori principles; i.e., (1) "Observation"; (2) "Individual Liberty"; and (3) "Preparation of the Environment". These three fundamental laws of nature can guide us to establish new habits of thought and action which are completely separate from the state of illusion that surrounds us in the negative and prejudicial opinions of others.

## State of Illusion

*"The truth is we make mistake after mistake and do not correct ourselves. We fail to realize our faults: we live in a state of illusion shut off from reality."*

**Dr. Maria Montessori**  
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.246

The illusion of external effects hides from us the reality of the "normalized" child that lives in the realm of the spirit. Since we tend to see the child only in its external form as physical body and personality, we fail to notice its infinite possibility as an "unknown entity". We have adjusted our minds to a prejudiced and limited state of reality — the legacy of basic impressions that were internalized in our being as "personality" before the age of six.

## Impressions

*"With our conscious memory we forget, but the unconscious does something far worse, for impressions made at this level...become graven on the personality itself."*

**Dr. Maria Montessori**  
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.177

Impressions in early childhood become fixed in our "personality" as a complex system of beliefs and habits — a sense of reality that defines and limits our ordinary possibility for being. As "personality", we play out a struggle for power, control and self-expression with others — the same drama of neglect, abandonment and abuse that arose from our various experiences of early childhood. Unless controlled, this inner drama

of "personality" expresses itself outwardly with children in a very detrimental manner — disturbing the child's normal growth during its most sensitive periods of early childhood.

## Periods of Childhood

*"...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

Sensitive periods before the age of six give rise to the child's whole sense of order, language and self-image. After the age of six, these basic faculties of our being fix habits in our behavior which are almost impossible to overcome. Montessori teaching must therefore respect the young child's "absorbent mind" during these sensitive periods — to allow the child to create its own way of being through such means as free exercise with various practical life activities.

## Practical Life

*"...the carrying out of practical life affords an abundance of exercise...By a habit of work a child learns how 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

Young children develop their habit of constant work by a profound concentration on such practical life exercises as cleaning, ordering and handling of simple objects in the environment. In this way, the "normalized" child develops a love of order, spontaneous self-discipline and social harmony in all areas of its life. Persistence, personal responsibility and loyalty to inner conviction all make up the essential character of the "normalized" child.

## Character

*"The man of character is the persistent man, the man who is faithful to his word, his own convictions."*

**Dr. Maria Montessori**  
from *Spontaneous Act. in Ed.*, p.178

The "normalized" child has its character firmly grounded in a commitment to inner guidance based on its own inner plan of creation. By contrast, the ordinary child reflects a much weaker, more dependent nature — distorted and diverted by undue obedience to the demands and opinions of others. While we all must learn to obey certain necessary aspects of organized society, the

"normalized" child has mastered the control of this obedience.

## Control of Obedience

*"There is no lack of obedience in the world; quite the contrary...What unhappily is absent is the control of obedience."*

**Dr. Maria Montessori**  
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.257

Normal obedience reflects a habit of intrinsic motivation and inner guidance that expresses itself in outer form as an independent and self-confident nature with others. Montessori teachers serve this "normalized" nature by the practice and habit of obedience to the authority of fundamental laws of nature. The principle of "observation" directs us particularly to look beyond the body and personality of the child, to see its true "normalized" nature within ourselves.

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Look for the  
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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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## Moment of Peril

by Lee Havis

### No Interest

Even a child who appears to have "no interest" amid a sea of wonderful and well-ordered Montessori materials has the inborn need and interest to pursue goal-directed activity. The "bored" attitude of 9 year old Marie (see *Observer November, 1995*) is therefore a reflection of some detrimental influence in the environment which must be controlled and resolved by the responsible adult.

Since the "physical objects" or "other children" are not directly detrimental here, we must examine the detrimental influence of the "adult personality". The teacher must draw a clear distinction between the "environment" and the "child".

As always, we consider Marie as the "hub" child — the unknown entity that must be allowed to perfect itself. The "environment" to particularly control in this situation includes the "adult personality" as a key obstacle.

The "bored" child is a reflection of the teacher's attitude and disposition of "personality" — and the solution is a sort of psychological dialogue with the child on the matter of interest in reality. Essentially, the teacher is acting out the "abandonment" in her own life as a child. Viewed from Marie's position, she is dramatizing her alienation from the environment — and the teacher must use her own "personality" in a positive way to engage and wake up the child to reality.

Conscious of such principles as "preparation of the environment", the teacher here must use her "personality" to bring energy and attention to the circumstances of the present moment — perhaps to point out some challenging opportunity for work or to comment on the weather or some activity conducted by another child. It does not matter that Marie may well choose some other idea altogether from that suggested or pointed out by the teacher. What is important in this "no interest" situation is that the child does "wake up" to her circumstances — and finds something interesting to pursue with concentrated attention.

### The Distracted Child

4 year old Brian seems to become too easily distracted for the slightest reason. A door opens, a pencil drops, or some words are spoken, and he must immediately rush off to "explore" the distracting

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## Habit

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### Observation

"The possession of the senses and of knowledge is not sufficient to enable a person to observe; it is a habit that must be developed by practice."

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Spontaneous Act. in Ed.*, p.130

True "Observation" requires us to see beyond our current expectations and knowledge of children and education — to focus our attention with faith on the central reality of the "normalized" child. Only by a most probing type of "inner preparation" can we discover "Montessori" beyond the external symbols of "certification" and "materials" — to see its true reality as a commitment to fundamental principles of nature. If real progress is to be achieved in this committed way of being, our "inner preparation" must become a constant habit and practice in our actions with children.

### Progress

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

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

Progress in Montessori education is achieved by expanding Montessori principles in our being with children — to separate ourselves from the surrounding pretense of external effects in our environment. We must develop the habit of approaching the child as an "unknown entity" — to then apply the three Montessori principles as an approach to "control the environment, not the child". Whatever impotence and futility we may feel in our imperfect efforts with children, we can always return to the three Montessori principles to control our inner errors — to keep us moving on with greater precision and skill than before.

### Impotence

"The real enemy is man's impotence against his own products...To vanquish this enemy, man has only to react and behave in a different manner towards the environment."

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Formation of Man*, p.18

Montessori teachers with practice can overcome the impotence of being as "personality" with children — to create the habit of following Montessori principles instead. Then we can powerfully act to control our "personality" as an objective element in the child's environment. The distinction between "environment" and "child" is one powerful thought that can initiate our successful action with children

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## Book Review

### The Almanac of Education Choices

Jerry Mintz, Editor in Chief

Pub. 1995 Macmillan

The *Almanac* brings together many years of research and study of alternative education — to provide an extensive compilation of names, addresses and other information about over 6000 non-traditional educational alternatives in the United States and elsewhere. Jerry Mintz has collaborated with Macmillan publishers to provide this useful information in a single publication which includes Montessori schools, Waldorf schools and new charter schools, in the USA and CANADA. Included are over 2500 Montessori schools, 700 homeschool support groups and 500 independent alternative community schools.

This publication provides a means to network with others seeking out viable options to the traditional public school classroom. Readers will be able to find out about alternative boarding schools, and higher education alternatives. Also, there are 12 how-to and historical essays about starting schools, homeschooling, Montessori education, charter schools and research findings.

Montessori schools and interested parents will find this resource particularly useful for referrals and inquiries about related programs and opportunities. Many schools that do not carry the "Montessori" label still offer a similar type of commitment to experimental study of children, intrinsic education and individualized learning.

For many years, Jerry Mintz has devoted himself to non-traditional education throughout the world with his newsletter, *Alternative Education Resource Organization* (AERO). This AERO-GRAMME newsletter has been an invaluable resource and encouragement to many parents, teachers and schools frustrated with the ordinary traditional approach to education.

Dr. Robert Muller, former Assistant Secretary General of the United Nations and author of the *World Core Curriculum* stated that "The publication of this *Almanac* is a real breakthrough and very fundamental to educational change. There has never been a complete list of educational alternatives like this before. We have been waiting for years."

To order, send \$23 prepaid to: Jerry Mintz, AERO, 417 Roslyn Rd., Roslyn Hts., NY 11577, tel. (516) 621-2195.

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## Habit

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which gradually become a well-established habit by its constant repetition.

### Repetition

*"The exercise which develops life, consists in the repetition, not in the mere grasp of the idea."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Montessori Method*, p.358

Repetition of a word, thought or action can provide a most effective trigger to break some fundamental pattern of negative behavior in our "personality". A single word; e.g., "positive", might serve very well to trigger our awareness of a pattern of negative language — so that we can then proceed to control and restrain its expression through conscious action. By repeating even small actions for the "normalized" child we will bring about a most favorable evolution in our being with children.

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event. When the teacher tries to interest Brian in work, his initial interest seems to disappear quickly as something new grabs his attention for a short while. Since this pattern has been repeated over and over again, the teacher is discouraged and wonders whether it would not be best to leave Brian entirely alone for him to find some activity of interest on his own. What to do?

Answer in *Observer*, May, 1996

### Evolution

*"Man has to adapt himself to all kinds of conditions and circumstances in the environment and never fixes himself in his habits because he evolves continuously along the course of history of civilization."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Formation of Man*, p.89

Even though our "personality" may lead us to repress and abandon the "normalized" child, we can still set in motion an evolution of our being towards harmony with the three Montessori principles. Small steps in applying the three Montessori principles become meaningful habits as we proceed to try out specific action to "control the environment, not the child". We can stabilize and strengthen even further this committed way of being by speaking out for the reality of the "normalized" child to others — creating the "new education" in the world as a regular and consistent habit each day.



Lee Havis (left) and Del. Dana Dembrow (right), discuss HB 920 and 994 in Annapolis, MD.

## Maryland Bills

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most innovative, creative and non-traditional types of teacher education institutions would be held back in their work because of the intrusive government control and censorship which is built into the current system."

During later discussion with Del. Raymond Beck, it was suggested that many aspects of "educational choice" in Maryland be studied to continue these legislative initiatives during the next Assembly term. The Havis proposals for educational reform include elimination of "compulsory" schooling, a more uniform distribution of government education funds, tuition tax credits for parents of children attending non-government schools, and greater local control of public education, including the use of vouchers for parents to choose non-government education if they wish.

Contact the Society for information and details about the progress of HB 920, 994 and other proposals on "educational choice".

## Marketplace

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