



# The Montessori OBSERVER

*Persistence*

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9 year old Kelly Beltran and Kevin Pastran writing to e-mail internet "penpal" on computer in the offices of the Society (Silver Spring, MD)

## Society gets on-line with the Internet

The Society now has an e-mail address on the INTERNET — "havis@erols.com". Interested persons may e-mail the Society at this address from all over the world, for no more than the cost of a local telephone call.

Lee Havis, IMS executive director, also announced plans for a Society home page on the World-wide Web — to bring news and information of its services and support for Montessori education to the growing number of computer users all over the world. He indicated that this page would link up with other related organizations on the web, like *Trust Tutoring*, recently located on the web at "<http://www.wdn.com/trust>".

Havis is using his experience in designing and publishing the *Trust Tutoring* home page to create a similar home page for the Society. He stated that "our *Trust Tutoring* web page features the 'Evaluation of Basic Skills', a standardized test of reading, math and English for ages 3-18. I hope that this web page will considerably increase the use of the test in the Montessori school community and elsewhere. The *Trust Tutoring* site also includes some basic information about Montessori principles and the work of the International Montessori Society."

The INTERNET now also includes a "newlist" entitled "Montessori Education Discussion List<Montessori-L@Listserv.AOL.com>". This list was recently started by Sonja Buhlman to provide a forum for open discussion of Montessori education. Subscription is free and open to all. For further details, e-mail your request directly to Sonja at "buhlman@earthlink.net".

### A Look of Surprise

By Sunila Madiman

I am trying to put into practice 'control the environment' especially the idea to gently divert the children around the 'hub' child and then direct this child to an activity or affectionate interest/talk. When I used this with a 4 year old he looked at me with a look of surprise and then opted to work on a science assignment — **surprise for me!**

Sunila is a student in the IMS Montessori teacher education course, and is reflecting here on her own personal experiences of Montessori teaching with children. She relates the surprise of discovering the "normalized" child in a particular "moment of peril".

## Good Nutrition aids Normal Development

As a physician, Dr. Montessori was keenly aware of the role of nutrition in the normal growth of children. As an educator she also learned that "...a stimulating psychic experience can increase the rate of metabolism and thus contribute to one's physical well-being." (from *Secret of Childhood*, p.135).

This relationship of nutrition and mental development is now becoming a matter of greater interest as Montessori teachers so often see their efforts for normalization in children being opposed by poor nutrition within a culture of drugs, toxic chemicals and stressful life styles for parents, teachers and children alike. In 1976, one Montessori teacher and scientist, Daryl Kollman noticed a declining ability of his children to concentrate and

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## Virginia considers revision of "Montessori" regulations

In Spring, 1996, the Society noted its objection to certain prejudicial "Montessori" regulations which had recently been established in the state of Virginia. These regulations set up certain private "Montessori" organizations in a favorable capacity to avoid various requirements for teacher education qualifications, group size and staff-child ratios. The name of the Society and its affiliated IMAC accrediting agency were excluded from the list of approved organizations.

The issue of improper regulation in Virginia apparently arose within a context of a politicized agenda in child day care in the state. Dr. Charles O'Malley in his newsletter *Private Education Issues* reprinted a notice from the Virginia Council on Child Day Care in June, 1996, that their independent reviewer had found a "radicalized political curriculum" in child day care in the state, where certain private and public interests were closely linked in the funding and referral of services to businesses and parents.

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# Persistence

by Lee Havis

*"The little child who persists in his exercises, concentrated and absorbed, is obviously elaborating that unique fundamental manifestation: persistence in work."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Spontaneous Act. in Ed.*, p.179-80

Dr. Montessori observed that children normally act with great persistence to complete their various cycles of goal-directed activity. Such persistence is a foremost aspect of the child's true "normalized" nature — a way of being in complete harmony with the fundamental laws of nature. Montessori teaching follows these natural laws to allow the young child to "normalize" through the spontaneous functioning of its uniquely absorbent mind.

### Absorbent Mind

*"A child less than six years of age has a mental form different from that which develops after he has reached the age of 6 or 7...things absorbed during that unconscious period...are those that persist in such a stable manner that they are identified with the person."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Discovery of the Child*, p.324

Prior to the age of about six, the child absorbs every detail of its environment — so that "normalizing" experiences during this formative period can become a permanent aspect of its entire personality for life. The only environment suitable for this "normalization" in children is one which is committed to such fundamental principles as (1) "Observation", (2) "Individual Liberty" and (3) "Preparation of the Environment". The child that emerges from an environment committed to these Montessori principles shows a natural tendency towards real perseverance in all areas of its activity and expression.

### Perseverance

*"After concentration will come perseverance...nature's will...builds the power which enables people to carry out the projects they have undertaken...the ability to carry through what he has begun."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.217-18

Children naturally persevere in their work when they are given true "individual liberty" in a "prepared environment". Once the child comes to deeply concentrate on some object of particular interest, it begins to show its "normalized" qualities

of spontaneous self-discipline and independent action. So too the child develops a strong will that becomes integrated into its whole personality formation.

### Will

*"When the child...persists for a long time and with earnest interest in the same exercise...he performs so many acts of the 'will'."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Spontaneous Act. in Ed.*, p.170

In the Montessori environment, children regularly exert their will in choosing from among a wide variety of goal-directed activities and materials. The children freely pursue those tasks of their own choosing, according to a self-directed will that is unencumbered by the distraction and interference of ordinary adult teaching. Such "individual liberty" allows children to develop the power of decision as a routine aspect of their regular activity throughout the day.

### Decision

*"If persistence be the true foundation of the will, we nevertheless recognized decision as the act of the will par excellence."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Spontaneous Act. in Ed.*, p.180

Adults possess the quality of decision because of their experiences of freedom of choice as little children. Those that lack such "normalizing" experiences during the critical formative years tend to develop an indecisive and self-doubting personality. By contrast, the "normalized" child shows a self-confidence and superior intellectual capacity and interest which is outwardly evident in the practice of persistent work.

### Persistent Work

*"When work has become a habit...children then work with order, perseverance, and discipline, persistently and naturally."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Spontaneous Act. in Ed.*, p.108

Children are normally drawn to the habit of persistent work — preferring the challenge of serious mental activity to the casual occupation of idle play. Even in a large group of children, the "normalized" child will seek out and find its own individual interests — independent of the ordinary need for persistent praise and encouragement from others. Such character qualities as self-discipline, independence, inner conviction and integrity are found in the persistent man — the one

who can successfully overcome so many difficulties where others so often cannot.

### The Persistent Man

*"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 persistent man has a natural drive and determination to succeed — to pursue his chosen tasks with a full commitment to their satisfactory resolution and completion. The widespread lack of such persistence in so many is the primary source of ignorance, poverty and misery in the world. No individual effort or achievement can fully succeed within such a pervasive social condition of persistent ignorance.

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## Moment of Peril

by Lee Haviv

### The Anti-Social Child

8 year-old Nathan (*Observer*, May, 1996) has resisted the teacher in her efforts to help him achieve a normal social harmony with the group. Although she knows the theory of elementary children having a natural social harmony with others, Nathan seems to defy this normality by resisting her every invitation and effort for this normal adaptation with others.

The teacher knows the detrimental effects of abandoning Nathan in his anti-social mental wandering — but neither does she wish to "force" him to participate in the occasional necessary group activities. However, she cannot seem to find a suitable balance to this dilemma in her efforts to "control the environment, not the child".

Since the "adult personality" is always most difficult to control in the environment, the teacher here should seek out the "other children" to control their "detrimental influence" with Nathan. She should help them relate in a more positive and harmonious way with Nathan.

The teacher therefore might raise the issue of Nathan as a "problem" for the whole group to solve through the process of discussion and positive cooperation. The teacher might ask the children "why" Nathan seems to not wish to join in some necessary group meeting — to help them understand the important role that each one serves to the well-being of the whole group. Perhaps some child would speak with Nathan directly at that time — or at other times seek out his company throughout the day. More likely, Nathan himself will hear the conversation about himself, and enter into a more active and normal role to express his own purpose and value to the group.

### The Over-eager Achiever

5 year old Marcy believes she can do just about anything — and very often seeks to act out her unrealistic impressions in various harmful and self-destructive ways. She therefore leaves much disorder and incompleteness as a result of her efforts to imitate the more thoughtful, serious work of others. Although the teacher has attempted to calm down her over-eager instincts and guide her to more realistic activity, March persists in trying to achieve goals beyond her ability. *What to do?*

Answer in *Observer*, November, 1996

## Persistence

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### Persistent Ignorance

*"There is a vacuum in our present scientific knowledge, an unexplored territory, an unknown factor — and this void concerns the process of the formation of the personality. The persistence of such ignorance at the level of civilization to which we have attained, must needs have mysterious causes."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Formation of Man*, p.9-10

Age-old prejudices and limiting beliefs weave a persistent pattern of ignorance that affects the whole of society. Our own unknown and unseen errors within are reinforced and magnified outside ourselves through the repressive influence of such institutions as government and traditional education. Ordinary schooling propagates this ignorance by such means as the constant correction of the teacher.

### Correction of the Teacher

*"...there comes the idea that there is a perfection to be striven for but which the child cannot achieve without the aid of the teacher, therefore we have the persistence of the action of correction by the teacher."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Voice*, p.320-21

In traditional education, the teacher ordinarily corrects the child as part of an elaborate system of tests, grades, praise, blame, rewards and punishments. A group-oriented curriculum invariably represses and undervalues the interests and needs of the individual child. Traditional teaching then becomes a persistent interruption and obstacle to the child's own normal development.

### Interruption

*"...restlessness persists...if they are interrupted in their cycle."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Spontaneous Act. in Ed.*, p.99

Adult interruption can easily break a child's concentration and discourage its will to act with its own self-directed efforts. Even children as young as three can develop a most resistant and hostile attitude towards any type of adult interaction. Montessori teachers must therefore act at times with great energy to break the flow of these unnormalized behavior patterns in children.

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\**Voice* is the "Voice of Maria Montessori" (J. Hardinge, ed.)

## Positions and Placements

**Position wanted:** AMI certified Montessori teacher is looking for a teaching position, in any state in the USA. Please contact Rumini Peramune, 9815-4, Pineapple Tree Dr., Apt. 106, Boynton Beach, Florida 33436. Tel. (561) 733-9397.

## Book Review

### Maria Montessori

— *Teacher of Teachers*

Publ. Learner Publications Co.

by Marie Tennent Shephard

Marie Tennent Shephard uses an easy writing style to tell a very personal, human story of Maria Montessori. Whatever liberties she may have taken with the actual facts and details of her life and thoughts, we still have a most realistic impression of this great personality who brought forward her great vision of a revolutionary "new education".

Many interesting, rare photos of Dr. Montessori, her "new" children and the surrounding life of her times help the reader better realize the reality of her practical circumstances. Shephard's Montessori is inspired and inspiring, yet frustrated and frustrating in her efforts to cooperate with others.

We learn that Dr. Montessori was often frustrated in her communication and relationship with others. Montessori is quoted at age 50 as having said in an interview that "I don't know what to do...nobody will ever collaborate. Either they accept what I say...or else waste precious time in criticizing."

Although such central Montessori ideas as "normalization" and laws of nature are left out of this biography, we still see how her life has come to evolve the Montessori education we know today. Dr. Montessori's own personal conflict in communication remains with us now as the same mysterious "personality" issue we experience in our own lives today.

Shephard tells us of the contribution and support rendered by those in the United States in the early 1900's — only to leave us wondering at how such a hopeful beginning could become so lost and abandoned after Dr. Montessori returned to Europe before World War I. Perhaps many would be surprised to learn that it was the American Montessori community in 1912 that organized the first International Montessori training course in Rome. Maybe the unwritten chapter on Dr. Montessori's teacher education efforts in the United States during the early 1900's will never be written.

Shephard also reminds us that Dr. Montessori was foremost a "teacher of teachers" — so that her personal approval and control over teacher certification was a central means to convey her work in the world. Before her death in 1952, she apparently approved teacher education through correspondence and certification issued by others. But then

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### Break the Flow

"...If...there is some child who persistently annoys the others, the most practical thing to do is to interrupt him...to break the flow of disturbing activity."

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.278-79

Montessori teaching applies the approach of "control the environment, not the child" — to guide the teacher to control her own "personality" with various forms of positive, friendly interaction. The teacher must intervene at times with considerable persistence to break the flow of those most deeply-entrenched patterns of negative behavior in children. Only when the child begins to concentrate on some object of interest will its true normal being finally begin to emerge — to open up a whole new path for the future of humanity.

### Future of Humanity

"Through long experimentation we have arrived at much elimination of error...On our courage and perseverance in its use depends the future of humanity."

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *To Ed. the Hum. Pot.*, p.118

Montessori teaching serves the future of humanity by creating the special circumstances needed for the child's true normal development in harmony with the laws of creation. Only with the greatest persistence in our "inner preparation" to discover these laws of nature can we hope to work through and resolve those most unknown hidden errors which block our vision of the "normalized" child. Likewise, we must work with a similar energy and persistence with others — to create Dr. Montessori's "new education" as a true reality for all humanity.

## Good Nutrition

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and learn — and began to look into nutrition as a possible contributing factor. His research led him to discover lake algae as a possible solution to this basic malnutrition he perceived in modern society.

Other medical researchers have found that chemicals such as Ritalin and Dextroamphetamine may have very negative side-effects in their efforts to treat the lack of concentration which comes with attention deficit disorder (ADD). "Pycnogenol" has been named as one natural substance to meet this condition without the negative side effects of conventional drugs. Pycnogenol is an extract from the bark of the French Maritime Pine tree.

Although no formal medical studies have conclusively proven the beneficial results of either lake algae and tree bark to improve learning and concentration in children, proponents have accumulated a considerable anecdotal record. Meanwhile, there is considerable evidence of the negative toxic effects to the human body of the many pesticides, drugs and chemicals that have increased in use so much in modern society. Proponents of Pycnogenol and blue-green algae claim that such natural substances effectively reduce stress, improve concentration and increase energy and physical well-being.

Readers may judge for themselves the value of these natural nutritional products. For more information, contact the following: *Pycnogenol* — George W. Bodkin III, 8550 Fales Lane, Severn, MD 21144, tel. 410-551-7705; *Blue Green Algae* — Pamela Tcharikovski, Leader, Cell Tech, 101 Atkinson St., #3, Bellows Falls, Vermont 05101, tel. (802) 463-4545

## Book Review

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she withdrew her approval from one such organization in Great Britain for reasons that are not explained. We can only speculate on what other course certification she may have approved during her life — and what plans if any she had to continue Montessori teacher education when she was no longer able to give her personal approval.

So much of Dr. Montessori's life and work therefore remains a mystery today — and we must therefore each draw our own conclusions from a very incomplete historical record. Nevertheless, Shephard has offered us a most thoughtful picture of Dr. Montessori as a person. Perhaps we can all relate to the struggles of this single human personality in our own lives — to better understand and appreciate how we ourselves can serve such a vast, expansive vision as a "new education" in the world.

Hardbound, 112 pages, \$22.95  
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## Virginia Regulations

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As the Council considers various proposals to revise the "Montessori" regulations, a further public comment period will be announced. The Council has invited all interested persons to stay involved — and a favorable proposal to resolve this matter is presently pending. For further information, contact: Sharon L. Jones, Chair, Child Day-care Council, 730 East Broad St., Richmond, VA 23219. Tel. (804) 692-1787.