



# The Montessori OBSERVER

**ACTION**

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## Montessori Regulations in Maryland and Virginia

### Free Competition vs. Censorship

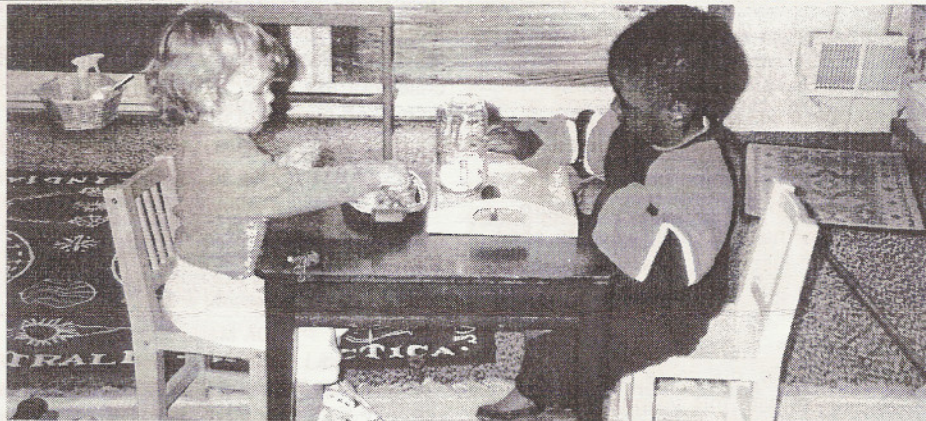
An interesting contrast of philosophy appears in the regulation of Montessori education in the two states which border the US capital city of Washington, DC. Whereas Virginia regulations are being revised to allow more flexibility and free competition, Maryland regulations aim towards the approach of censorship.

### Virginia

On February 28, 1998, the Virginia Child Day Care Council approved new regulations that would eliminate all prior reference to "Montessori" as a special category for treatment within its regulations. This change conforms with the recommendations made by the Society and others — to create a more fair, open and impartial regulation of Montessori schools in that state.

Lee Havis, Society executive director, indicated that "these changes will considerable enhance free competition among the full range of available alternatives in the field — a very constructive change for the progress and growth of Montessori education in this state".

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Children engaged in practical life work at La Casa Montessori (Annapolis, MD)

## Basement Montessori in Annapolis, Maryland

In Annapolis, MD, Alethea Hession (IMS '87) has organized a type of "basement Montessori" with a small group of other interested parents in the area. Known as *La Casa Montessori*, this unique program provides a cost-effective and valuable learning experience for all participating parents and children in the group.

The group meets together two mornings per week in a basement floor room of one of the parents. The Montessori environment is created there, which includes the provision of suitable materials and furniture. A special feature of the program is its bi-lingual nature, blending the Spanish and English languages in all aspects of its operation.

A trained Montessori parent supervises the program and one or two other parents attend as assistants. Mandatory monthly meetings provide the parents with a workshop on applying Montessori principles, as well as an occasion to organize specific field trips to places of interest in the area.

At their most recent meeting, the parents indicated an interest in scheduling a Society "Creating the New Education" conference in the Annapolis area. Attending the meeting also was Lee Havis, IMS director, who expressed his support for this event which has now been set for the weekend of September 26-27, 1998. He indicated that this first Maryland Montessori conference would parallel the format of those that had gone before elsewhere since 1986. Registration is open to all those interested in learning more about Montessori teaching — regardless of background or specific experience.

If you are interested in learning more about *La Casa Montessori*, or would be interested in starting a "basement Montessori" program of your own, contact: Alethea Hession at 410-849-3342.

## Reflections...

### Inner Preparation on Line

by Mona Shelton (Washington, NC)

Mona Shelton reflects here on her experience of an on-line computer discussion list about Montessori — as it arose in a specific interaction with Lee Havis, Society executive director. Both are active participants on the list which is sometimes very much an on-line inner preparation.

I have noticed as I've moved through my years that sometimes the people who "raise my hackles" at first are those from whom I will learn the most. Usually this isn't apparent in the beginning ~ after a few contacts with such a person, I usually cut off contact and never have the chance to move forward. Occasionally the situation will continue to put me in the company of these people and more often than by chance the reasons for my initial discomfort becomes apparent. I think that's what happened with you. Your ideas are usually plainly and strongly presented.

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## MONTESSORI CONFERENCE

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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

Annapolis, Maryland  
September 26-27, 1998

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# ACTION

by Lee Havis

*"...it is not the truth itself that has value, but the man who is capable of appreciating it and bringing it into relation with action."*

**Dr. Maria Montessori**  
from *Spontaneous Act. in Ed.*, p.223

Montessori teaching puts into action a commitment to the child's true nature — the new "normalized" child with its spontaneous self-discipline, precocious intelligence, order and complete harmony with the entire environment. Unless we act in some tangible outward manner for this *normalized* child, our mere words, beliefs or agreement with this visionary truth will have no effect at all in reality. The type of committed action needed for this new educational approach is, however, very different from the ordinary behavior of traditional teaching.

## Different Type of Action

*"It verily seems as if one has to have a seal of virtues, but it is not so; it is but a different type of action that is required."*

**Dr. Maria Montessori**  
from *Voice*\*, 21 Jan. 1942, p.9

Montessori teaching follows the path of commitment to such fundamental principles of nature as (1) "Observation"; (2) "Individual Liberty" and (3) "Preparation of the Environment" — a very different type of action from the ordinary way of reacting, controlling and manipulating children in conventional education. Montessori teachers must act at times in a very contrary manner to the comfortable habits, feelings and thoughts which have been fixed in our personality since childhood. The activity of the teacher must reflect instead a way of being committed to the three Montessori principles — constantly adapting to the changing needs and interests of each child's own evolving plan of creation.

## Activity of the Teacher

*"...the more the environment corresponds to the needs of the child, the more limited becomes the activity of the teacher."*

**Dr. Maria Montessori**  
from *The Child*, p.9

The principle "Preparation of the Environment" teaches us to control the environment, not the child — to remove those various obstacles which interfere with the child's true normal development. The activity of the teacher must therefore change from an initial outgoing and directive presence, to one of a more passive

way of being — to observe the children as they freely pursue their own independent learning in the environment. Montessori teaching always looks to the individual child, not the adult, as the primary active being and source of the child's education.

## Active Being

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

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

Ordinary teaching treats the child essentially as a receptive, passive object — repressing its normal spontaneous expression through such means as group instruction, grades and teacher-controlled curriculum. By contrast, Montessori education views the child as having its own inner guidance — a "teacher within" who provides the true authority and direction for its proper course of action. The adult's role in this new educational approach to the child is therefore rather indirect and supportive — to allow the child's own nature to fully emerge of itself.

## Child's Own Nature

*"...there was no method to be seen, what was seen was a child...acting according to its own nature."*

**Dr. Maria Montessori**  
from *Secret of Childhood*, p.136

"Observation" as a Montessori principle teaches us to view the child as an unknown entity which will reveal its own nature through various forms of outward physical activity. Montessori teachers particularly look for a profound moment of concentration with some object of interest — the pivotal "normalization" event which signals the beginning of a whole new path of stable, orderly development thereafter. This new *normalized* way of being emerges spontaneously from mysterious internal activities within the child itself.

## Internal Activities

*"...internal activities act as cause; they do not react and exist as the effect of external factors. Our attention is not arrested on all things indifferently, but by those which are congenial to our tastes."*

**Dr. Maria Montessori**  
from *Spontaneous Act. in Ed.*, p.160

Internal activity in the child, associated with fundamental tendencies, instincts and interests given by nature, emerge in many forms of exploration and

experimentation in the environment. Montessori teachers must support these delicate inner formations, by offering lessons in the use and handling of different objects of interest to the child. Such lessons must particularly respect the child's first vital instinct towards independent activity.

## Child's First Instinct

*"The child's first instinct is to carry out his actions by himself, without anyone helping him..."*

**Dr. Maria Montessori**  
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.90-91

Dr. Montessori observed that independent action is a fundamental drive in the young child — to manage its own problems of everyday life entirely by itself.

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Look for the  
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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.

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## Moment of Peril

by Lee Havis

### BORED

When 4 year old Brian claims to be 'bored' in a Montessori environment (see *Observer*, March, 1998), he is reflecting unnormalized behavior which calls for some form of teacher action to "control the environment, not the child". The essential cause of the boredom here lies in the detrimental influence of the teacher's "personality".

Although the teacher has offered suggestions for work, the child has failed to show interest. So, the teacher must re-structure her verbal communication with the child — to shift the focus of attention from the teacher's ideas and suggestions for work, to a thinking involvement of the child himself.

The teacher should therefore ask questions designed to stimulate some thinking in the child; e.g., "what work would you like to do?". If the child persists with "I don't know" type responses, offer some more specific hints and clues; e.g., "what things do you like to do at home?"; "Can you think about something you enjoyed doing before?" A friendly conversation about where and when the child is 'not bored', might help to bring a resolution to the situation.

The teacher might also have the child think about his interests in a more structured manner; e.g., to sit quietly, close his eyes and imagine something to do that would be interesting. Once the child has identified some interest or idea, the teacher should then respond by providing the needed materials or information for the child's return to normal work in the environment.

### Discouraged and Frustrated

5 year old Jeremy has recently entered the class — showing a pattern of extreme discouragement and frustration in all his actions. The teacher has tried to encourage Jeremy with positive words and invitations to work. But, he remains inattentive and distracted by the slightest noise — somber and sullen in his attitude of discouragement and frustration about everything around him. The teacher recognizes that Jeremy's mother has an extremely negative and judgmental manner at home. However, the mother has not changed her behavior, despite the teacher's frequent efforts to clarify the situation. What to do?

Answer in September, 1998 *Observer*

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Montessori teachers must therefore patiently show the child how to handle materials for such activities as carrying, ordering, dressing, pouring and cleaning — basic skills of practical life which are responsive to the child's particular needs and interests of the moment. The teacher must then follow up these practical life lessons to assure that the actions of the child's muscles are effectively guided by a primary goal-directed purpose.

### Actions of the Muscles

*"Mental work should be accompanied...by movements which bring ideas into play and leave their traces on the external world...The actions of the muscles should always be at the service of the mind."*

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Discovery of the Child*, p.78

The principle "Individual Liberty" directs us to provide the young child with many opportunities for free action and movement in the environment — to exert its muscles for some useful mental purpose. Such goal-directed work helps to integrate physical movement and sensorial experiences — to build up the child's inner mental order and form its entire essential personality. Dr. Montessori referred to this normal spontaneous activity of the child as "work", and its underlying cause as the "Horme".

### The Horme

*"Another vital factor of the mind is the urge to carry out an action to completion...called by psychologists the Horme..."*

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *To Ed. the Hum. Potential*, p.21

The "Horme" motivates the child towards completing various cycles of external activity — work which is most essential for normal mental development during the formative period of early childhood. Montessori teaching supports this vital developmental function by allowing the child to freely work with various objects and exercises of interest. However, the teacher must not confuse the child's real work with the foolish action of the unnormalized child.

### Foolish Action

*"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

The foolish action of a child may disturb the work of others or direct itself to some fantasy make-believe use of materials — a distraction and deviation from the proper purpose of physical movement in the child. Whatever its form, the

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## Book Review

### Practical Life Catalogs

Ed. Note: The Society often receives inquiries about materials for children in the Montessori environment. One well-known practical life catalog is featured here.

### The Joyful Child

Michael Olaf's Essential Montessori for Birth to Three

Publ. by: The Michael Olaf Company

Copyright 1997, price \$5.00 ea.

This catalog is directed primarily to the practical life needs of the infant and young child. Edited by Jim Stephenson, it has been revised in various forms over the years, to reflect the growing need for a materials guide and source of products for use with the very young.

The *Joyful Child* includes 52 pages of pictures and descriptions of materials which are divided into various interest areas; e.g., Prenatal, The First Year, The Second Year — Working with My Family, the Third Year — Culture and Language, The Third Year — Science and Math. Each section includes a summary commentary on various philosophical aspects of the particular subject matter and specific materials.

For further information, contact: The Michael Olaf Company, P.O. Box 1162, Arcata, CA 95518 USA, tel. (707) 826-1557. Toll Free FAX: (800) 429-8877. Email: Michaelola@aol.com

### Montessori Regulations

Cont'd. from Page 1, Col. 1

### Maryland

On February 24, 1998, Lee Havis represented the Society before the Maryland State Board of Education — to speak out against their adoption of more restrictive regulations which would require government interpretation of written curriculum, qualifications of teachers, instructional methods, materials and other intimate aspects of a Montessori school.

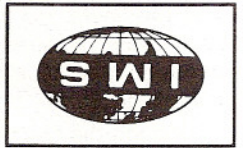
Havis stated that "Montessori education cannot effectively survive and expand where government officials decide what is or is not authentic 'Montessori' — and then prohibit or allow the operation of schools based on their judgment. Private organization, such as IMS and the IMAC accrediting agency are available to give the general public proper guidance and recognition in the field. I believe that free competition and choice, not government censorship, is a better philosophy to follow to assure real quality in Montessori education."

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teacher must interrupt such unnormalized behavior — to help return the child to a normal state of work and harmony with the environment. Such interruption aims to resolve the disturbing activity of children with positive action consistent with Montessori principles.

### Disturbing Activity

*"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. The interruption may take the form of any kind of explanation, or in showing a special and affectionate interest in the troublesome child."*

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Absorbent Mind*, p.278-79

Montessori teaching has a clear role and responsibility to apply the principle "Preparation of the Environment" — to remove the detrimental influences in the child's environment that are causing the particular disturbing activity. Sometimes, the most effective action is to distract "other children" away from the troublesome child, or to simply engage the misbehaving child in some friendly conversation about something elsewhere in the environment. In these critical moments of peril, our positive action counts most — to return the child to normal goal-directed activity

### Action Counts

*"To think and wish is not enough...It is action which counts."*

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Spontaneous Act. in Ed.*, p.171

Some form of action is always necessary in Montessori teaching, since we cannot simply remain passive and inert in the face of the many obstacles that ordinarily disturb the normal growth of children. Whatever mistakes or errors we

may make in our actions with children, study and learning more about the three Montessori principles will help us control our detrimental tendencies and correct our erroneous actions — to direct us again to the path of true Montessori teaching. This is how our committed action for the *normalized* child works to bring the reality of the *new education* into the world




\*Voice refers to *Voice of Dr. Maria Montessori*, Lectures Madras, India, 1941-42. Publ. by Joy Hardinge

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## Reflections

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You have touched nerves ~ nerves that have not been touched by any other. At first this raises defenses, but in this wonderful medium (on-line discussion list), the ability to fade into the background and then LISTEN, has afforded me an opportunity to look into what you are saying and most importantly, look into MYSELF and my relationship with my work and my classroom. I've been delving deeply (again) into Maria's writings to try to find just where you are "coming from." Almost every time I DO find that you are stating a purely Montessori idea... unfettered by modern politics.

Thank you for your input ~ I've learned that your well is deep and you have done a wonderful job in the past week or so maintaining kindness in the face of much dissension.

*There is no cost to joining the on-line Montessori discussion — just a computer with internet access. The discussion list is managed by Sonja Buelman.*

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