



The Montessori OBSERVER

MATURITY

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IMAC Speaks out for Montessori in US Government Hearings

On May 12, 1999, Lee Havis testified in Washington, DC on behalf of the *International Montessori Accreditation Council* (IMAC). His testimony was given before an advisory committee of the US Department of Education dealing with government recognition of Montessori accreditation. In his comments, Havis spoke out for greater freedom and fairness in the government regulation and recognition of Montessori teacher education.

The IMAC agency offers accreditation services for Montessori teacher education conducted by the International Montessori Society and other institutions and organizations in the Montessori community. At the May hearings, Havis specifically opposed the US government recognition of another agency in the same field because of its adverse effects on IMAC representation of Montessori education to the general public. He stated that "government should not take sides for or against one form of Montessori certification, accreditation or philosophy over another in the field".

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Visiting a Montessori school in La Salle, Quebec, after the conference in Montreal, Canada. From left — classroom teacher, Jeannette Kechichian, Anne Mansour (school director) and Lee Havis.

Montessori Conference in Montreal, Canada

On April 17-18, 1999, the Society held its latest "Creating the New Education" conference in Montreal, Canada. Jeannette Kechichian, director of *Ecole Montessori International* (Montreal) provided local support and coordination for this first ever IMS Montessori conference in Canada. Participating were teachers and parents from the Canadian provinces of Quebec and Ontario, and from the United States, the states of New Hampshire, New York, Massachusetts, Maryland and North Carolina.

The conference discussion particularly emphasized the difficult problem of removing the *adult personality* as a detrimental influence in the child's environment. Havis stated that "our personality usually expresses itself around one of two extreme poles of dysfunctional activity with children, either 'negativity' or 'abandonment'. However, Montessori teaching is completely separate and apart from this dysfunctional bi-polar way of being. Montessori teaching is a third pole of adult activity which aims

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As always, Lee Havis, IMS executive director, led the group discussion at the conference through a careful analysis of common misbehavior situations with children — to show how the "normalized" child will indeed emerge from our being committed to Montessori principles. The conference provided many illustrations, examples and scenarios to visualize and illustrate the Montessori approach of "control the environment, not the child".

Participants specifically considered such issues as misuse of materials, fantasy, dependency, negativity, social disorder, inattention and violence in children. In addition, a special observation exercise was employed to help participants more directly experience the use and power of this important Montessori principle with children.

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MONTESSORI CONFERENCES

Creating the New Education
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1127.

MATURITY

by Lee Havis

This commentary revisits this subject which was first considered in the Observer in May, 1989, Vol. X, No. 3

"...humanity is still far from the stage of maturity needed for the realization of its aspirations, for the construction, that is, of a harmonious and peaceful society and the elimination of wars."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.3

Dr. Montessori recognized the great need for a higher level of maturity in humanity — to overcome the many obstacles to a true normal peace and harmony in the world. Her response to this vital need was a new education for children — to allow their true normal nature to fully emerge with such amazingly mature qualities as order, attachment to reality, spontaneous self-discipline, and complete harmony with the entire environment. However, creating such a *new education* requires us to assist an adult undergo a very delicate and demanding type of inner preparation.

To Assist an Adult

"To assist an adult we must help him untangle a skein of complex adaptations that have been made over a long period of time. To assist a child we must provide him with an environment which will enable him to develop freely."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Secret of Childhood*, p.110

Montessori teacher preparation aims primarily to assist an adult work through and resolve many complex and deep seated patterns of fear, illusion and prejudice within oneself. Such *inner preparation* must confront and correct hidden flaws and unknown errors which have been built up and fixed in our personality since childhood. Montessori teaching therefore requires a very mature and sophisticated response to children — to restrain our ordinary impulses to either judgmentally blame a misbehaving child or abandon the child to various forms of fantasy play during its most delicate period of early childhood life.

Delicate Period of Life

"the period of life during which the body attains maturity is, in fact, a delicate one"

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *From Child to Adolescence*, p.63

Before the age of about six, the young child matures through a series of delicate internal changes which will ultimately determine its essential personality for life. During these early years, the child needs a most positive, supportive environment, to assure its full and free normal growth

and development thereafter. Without such a "normalizing" environment, the young child tends to mature in an abnormal manner — to eventually become a great danger to the progress and safety of mankind.

Great Danger

"This is the great danger of mankind. The child who is not protected with a view to his normal formation will later avenge himself on society by means of the child who is formed by him."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.78

Ordinary education seriously endangers the child's normal path of development — by disregarding its inborn needs for self-directed activity in the environment according to basic laws of life. Teacher-controlled curriculum, grades, fantasy play and group instruction all work against this normal path of maturation. This type of traditional education may allow the child to mature in a physical sense, but its repressive spiritual environment will fundamentally retard the growth of more important inner qualities of spirit and character.

Spiritual Environment

"A man can grow and reach maturity within a spiritual environment that is really not his own. He lives shut out from the paradise that should have been his."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Secret of Childhood*, p.46-47

Only a positive and supportive spiritual environment during the early years will lay the proper foundation for full maturity in later life. The young child in this formative period instinctively acquires such vital normal qualities as inner peace, emotional balance, order and harmony with others — through the working of its amazing "absorbent mind". Likewise, a hostile environment during this critical time will lead the child away from normal development — towards a pattern of deceit and illusion which is readily reinforced and strengthened in later adult life.

Deceit

"Deceit is an intellectual phenomenon that appears in childhood, but which becomes organized with maturity."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Secret of Childhood*, p.175

The young child will naturally react in a deceitful, defensive manner to the imposition of adult control and manipulation. Such traditional teaching, based entirely on an adult-centered curriculum, tends to divert and retard the child's normal path towards a truly mature character and per-

sonality. Here the child is compelled to learn by listening to words, rather than through a direct experience of the natural order of physical reality.

Listening to Words

"...listening to words does not make a man. Only practical work and experience lead the young to maturity."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.22

Young children cannot normally mature by just listening to words of lecture and explanation from the teacher. Such a traditional approach to education distracts the child's attention towards the imperfect, limited reality of the adult personality. Immature minds particularly need a

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Lee Havis, Executive Director

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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

TIME OUT

The teacher here uses a form of "time out" to stop children from misbehaving — requiring that they sit in a chair by themselves for a while, to reflect on proper behavior in the classroom. Although this seems to solve the short term misbehavior, the long-term harm is to create in the children a negative dependency on the adult's position of authority and control. (see *Observer*, March, 1999). Indeed, this *time out* action does draw undue attention to the child's misbehavior — the "adult personality" here being the primary detrimental influence at cause in the environment.

Since *time out* is not really consistent with the approach of "control the environment, not the child", the teacher should find another more suitable way to help the child regain its self-control and proper normal functioning in the classroom. A more effective Montessori response would be to act indirectly in the child's environment — to intervene with some friendly, positive distraction away from the scene of misbehavior and disorder.

Sometimes, a simple question or invitation to clean up a work space, throw away some trash, or return materials to the shelf, may be quite sufficient to redirect the child to more normal behavior. Regardless of its particular form, the teacher's distracting interference will certainly tend to stop the negative behavior in this *moment of peril* — and open up an opportunity for more concentrated goal-directed activity elsewhere in the environment. Such concentrated work — not sitting in a chair under a teacher-directed *time out* — is the real way to return the child to its own proper path of normal development.

Adult Control

The Montessori teacher has a classroom assistant who tends to speak in a loud, accusatory tone with misbehaving children — frequently interrupting and correcting them in the typical manner of traditional teaching. Although the assistant states that she is willing and eager to learn better Montessori teaching skills, she does not follow the direction and good example of the lead teacher to any significant extent. What to do?

Answer in *Observer*, September, 1999

Maturity

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direct sensory experience of reality if they are to grow beyond the limited mind-set, rules and opinions of ordinary adult society.

Immature Minds

"Credulity is, indeed, a characteristic of immature minds which lack the experiences and knowledge of realities."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Spontaneous Act. in Ed.*, p.259

Traditional education tends to maintain the immature minds of young children in a retarded state of development — bound to the limited perspective of the controlling adult personality. The ordinary child is thereby denied the opportunity of developing through its own direct experience of the physical laws of nature. By contrast, Montessori teaching directs the child's attention towards the more objective reality of a well-prepared arrangement of physical objects in the environment.

Environment

"...environment has a dominant part to play in the process of maturation."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Absorbent Mind*, p.95

Montessori teaching aims to create an environment which is consistent with the order of nature as represented by such fundamental principles as (1) "Observation", (2) "Individual Liberty"; and (3) "Preparation of the Environment". These three Montessori principles guide the teacher to "control the environment, not the child" — to allow the child to mature according to its own individual path of self-creative development. Adults are then acting as a force of nature — to remove the detrimental influences of the environment through the guiding influence of the three Montessori principles.

Adults

"...adults are also a part of a child's environment...They should not carry out for him those activities by means of which a child reaches maturity."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Secret of Childhood*, p.110

Montessori education seeks to remove all detrimental influences from around the individual child — including, most prominently, the negative and destructive effects of one's own personal presence. Adults must therefore carefully control their own personality expression with children — to restrain those various negative and thoughtless words and actions which so fundamentally conflict with the child's own true normal development. Such Montessori teaching can only then reveal the obvious truth of our normal being in harmony with by the absolute and eternal laws of nature.

An Obvious Truth

"A kind of internal maturity must come about...When an obvious truth cannot be seen we must retire and leave the individual to mature. A struggle 'to bring about perception of evidence' would be bitter and exhausting."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Spontaneous Act. in Ed.*, p.237

The obvious truth of the *normalized* child is ordinarily hidden by the many camouflages and conventions of ordinary society — a retarded state of awareness which is deeply enmeshed in the human personality. Such a limited perception is associated with unknown inner errors which persist at the unconscious level to deter our clear vision of any new creative alternative to the habits and prejudices of the past. We must therefore carefully prepare our spirit and intelligence to notice and overcome these elusive inner obstacles — to prepare ourselves within to discover the reality of the child's true nature.

Spirit and Intelligence

"...men do not produce with their feet and their bodies, but with their spirit and intelligence, and when these shall have reached the level of development that is proper to them, then all our 'insoluble problems' will have become solved."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Absorbent Mind*, p.285

Time, experience and age alone cannot completely mature our Montessori teaching skills with children. Rather, we must engage in the precise and challenging work of *inner preparation* — to constantly expand our spirit and direct our intelligence to discover and correct those unknown inner errors which can so easily blind us to the reality of the *normalized* child. Only then can we begin to see how to translate Dr. Montessori's great vision of a *new education* into actual practice — to free the child to create the new higher level of maturity which is truly proper to the human personality.

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IMAC SPEAKS OUT *Cont'd. from Page 1, Col. 1*

Havis testified that the other agency failed to substantially comply with the applicable government criteria for recognition. He stated that "Department criteria require that a recognized agency have a purpose of obtaining federal funds. However, only a single institution has ever obtained any such funds through this other agency. Even then, the amount was extremely small, after a period of several years with no funds drawn out at all. Recognition of this other agency should therefore be withdrawn as having no proper purpose."

He also pointed out that the other agency was failing to meet Department criteria because of a serious conflict of interest in the composition and operation of its major decision-making body. Also noted were misleading representations to the general public, lack of consultation with IMAC, and absence of reliable and appropriate Montessori standards.

Following a staff presentation and discussion of these issues, the Advisory panel recommended to continue recognition of the other agency for a period of four more years — but only to the extent of two of its five review committees. It also recommended to require the agency to submit an interim report by May 13, 2000, demonstrating that it has fully addressed all the issues cited by the Department staff analysis.

After the hearing, Havis pledged to keep monitoring the other agency, and working to correct the problems of inappropriate recognition and regulation of Montessori education. He also reaffirmed that IMAC will continue to work in all ways possible to improve the accreditation and

quality of teacher education throughout the entire Montessori community.

For more information on the matter of Montessori accreditation, contact: IMAC, 912 Thayer Ave., #207, Silver Spring, MD 20910 USA. Tel. (301) 589-1127.

Montessori Conference in Montreal, Canada

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to indirectly attract the unnormalized child towards some constructive activity in the present moment — a way of being that is a very positive and connected approach to the child."

Before the conference, Havis and Jeannette Kechichian met with **Noushig Eloyan**, a leading member of the Montreal City Council — to discuss the Society's concerns and interests in expanding the availability and quality of Montessori education in the region. The need for more substantial Montessori teacher education was given particular attention.

After the conference, Havis visited several nearby Montessori schools — to become better acquainted with the needs and interests of the local Montessori community. He stated that "the Society is committed to support and cooperate with the growing interests and development of Montessori education in Canada. I hope we can follow up this first successful conference with others in the future. Perhaps we can even establish a more permanent presence of Montessori teacher education in the region."

Trust Tutoring

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In Spring, 1999, TRUST TUTORING extended its program operation to the state of California. **Debbie Amoroso** (Rialto, CA) has now been certified by TRUST TUTORING to administer the special "Evaluation of Basic Skills" testing — and to serve as the first regional director for TRUST TUTORING in the state. **Lee Havis**, overall program director, will use computer telecommunications technology from his office near Washington, DC to provide the necessary long-distance support for program operation in California and elsewhere outside the mid-Atlantic area.

Havis noted that "our program helps children overcome many problems encountered in the traditional school classroom — by providing a structured plan of study that supports regular daily study and learning in the subject areas at issue. It brings Montessori principles to bear in a diversity of situations which touch the lives of many teachers, school officials and parents involved with the students in our program. In California, we will demonstrate our ability to successfully operate at a considerable distance from our main offices — without sacrificing quality or our commitment to Montessori principles."

TRUST TUTORING is sponsored by the *International Montessori Trust* and employs a study skill approach and special evaluation testing in every situation. The testing materials may be purchased separately from TRUST TUTORING. For more information, contact: TRUST TUTORING, 912 Thayer Ave. #205, Silver Spring, Maryland 20910, USA. Tel. (301) 589-0733.