



# The Montessori OBSERVER

Correcting Error

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Observation exercise conducted at the Society's "Creating the New Education" conference  
Hong Kong — August 19-20, 2000

## Montessori Conferences in North America and Asia

### Mesa, Arizona July 15-16, 2000

The Society's conference in Mesa, Arizona was attended by parents, teachers, school owners and other educators from the states of Arizona, New Mexico and California. Several Montessori charter schools were prominently represented at this first IMS Montessori conference in the state. The conference discussion therefore focused particular attention to applying Montessori principles with the elementary aged child.

Lee Havis discussed how to conduct the first day with a new class of children — particularly with children in the 6-12 age range. He emphasized the importance of keeping the children in a group in the beginning, while helping them get acquainted and comfortable with each other and the basic social order and limitations of the physical circumstances.

Havis stated that "in the beginning with a new group of elementary children, the teacher's personality must be very prominent in a positive way — particularly when there are a significant number of children who have not become normalized through prior experience in a Montessori environment. The teacher must establish a bond and relationship of trust and friendship with each child. Only then can the teacher gradually allow the chil-

dren to freely engage with their own activities in the environment." He also noted the value and importance of occasional testing, to determine progress and ability level of each child in such areas as reading, writing and math, suggesting the "Evaluation of Basic Skills" (Trust Tutoring, 1995) as a very effective tool for this purpose.

The conference discussion brought out the importance of scheduling and reporting work in a written form for elementary children each day. Havis said "at the elementary level, I suggest a daily log for each child to schedule, plan and record their activities in an orderly manner. Also, I recommend at least one full group meeting for elementary children each day, to help them establish and develop important social skills and order for their ongoing interactions in the group."

After the conference, several participants initiated plans for a further follow up conference in Sedona, Arizona, which is now scheduled for October 28-29, 2000.

### Santa Barbara, California July 22-23, 2000

The conference in Santa Barbara, California was the first such conference on the west coast of the United States for many years. It emphasized the resolution

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## New Members Appointed to IMS Review Committee

The Society has recently appointed two new members to its review committee that operates in conjunction with the IMAC accrediting agency. This agency offers accreditation services — the IMS review committee being specifically directed to procedures and criteria for IMS Montessori teacher education.

The two new members are Sara Pileggi (IMS '00) and Janice Edelen (IMS '95). Ms. Edelen is a school owner  
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## MONTESSORI CONFERENCES

Learn Montessori Teaching Skills  
Inner Preparation for Montessori teaching

### Columbia, SC

September 16-17, 2000

### Montreal, Quebec

October 14-15, 2000

### Sedona, Arizona

October 28-29, 2000

### Washington, DC

November 4-5, 2000

### Edinburg, TX

November 28-29, 2000

### Palm Spring, CA

February 3-4, 2000

### Tampa, FL

February 17-18, 2001

### Brisbane, Australia

March 31-April 1, 2001

### Melbourne, Australia

April 7-8, 2001

Register 8 weeks before event date for maximum discount. Conference rate (8 weeks in advance) is:

\$130/member \$170/regular

The Society's two-day weekend conference employs group discussion and dynamic experiential learning procedures, led by Lee Havis, IMS executive director.

# Correcting Error

by Lee Havis

*"the correction of errors is often humiliating and discouraging...and, since education rests on this basis, there follows a lowering in the general quality of social life."*

**Dr. Maria Montessori**  
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.240

Correcting errors in children is the ordinary way of teaching children in traditional education — a repressive approach to the child that is built on negative criticism, manipulation and control. Whatever academic learning there may occur through this negative form of teaching will nonetheless also bring with it serious harm to the development of the child's whole personality, spirit and character. By contrast, Montessori education gives children freedom to learn by making their own mistakes, within the right supportive conditions of life.

### 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.281

Montessori teaching creates for the child an environment committed to such natural laws as (1) "Observation"; (2) "Individual Liberty" and (3) "Preparation of the Environment" — fundamental Montessori principles that allow the child to express its normal qualities of spontaneous self-discipline, love of order and complete harmony with its entire environment. Such *normalizing* conditions of life allow the child to learn through its own self-directed efforts based on individual needs and interests of the moment. The task of education then becomes one of freeing the child's spirit to fully express itself in the world.

### Task of Education

*"...the task of education should not be to remedy...should not be to correct...defects. Education should make us avoid their arising."*

**Dr. Maria Montessori**  
from *Voice*, 13 Nov. 1941, p.E

True education collaborates with nature — a process that helps the child avoid the many mistakes that would otherwise occur through various forms of adult repression or abandonment. Following infinite and eternal laws of nature, the teacher aims to "control the environment, not the child". The child can then pursue a path of independent, self-directed learning through the unerring guidance of its own mysterious inner teacher.

### Inner Teacher

*"...in the small child...the inner teacher is still at work guiding him unerringly..."*

**Dr. Maria Montessori**  
from *Education for a New World*, p.52

Montessori teaching assists a basic creative force of nature within the young child — an inner teacher that guides its actions in harmony with infinite and eternal laws of nature. The adult assists this teacher within the child by *preparing the environment* with an orderly arrangement of useful materials and exercises that allow the child to choose from among many types of constructive goal-directed activities. Such a prepared environment is constantly giving space for the child to act and will according to its own particular needs and interests of the moment.

### Giving Space

*"The usual conception of direct correction and suppression of defects is wrong...Correction is possible only by expansion, by 'giving space', by opening up the means for the expansions of the personality."*

**Dr. Maria Montessori**  
from *Formation of Man*, p. 49

Montessori teaching is a way of giving space for the child to learn through its self-directed experience — correcting its various errors as they arise in the ordinary process of interacting with the environment. Physical objects particularly draw the young child to concentrate on the inherent order and harmony of nature, and incorporate these same qualities into its entire mental formation. Errors in the beginning of this delicate formative process are easily corrected with the support of an environment committed to Montessori principles.

### Errors in the Beginning

*"...slight errors at the beginning can cause the greatest deviations in later life."*

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

Since the child under six will intimately absorb all aspects of the environment into its whole basic personality, the adult must carefully remove all distracting and detrimental influences. Otherwise, even slight errors in the beginning of the child's self-creative process will become fixed and permanent for life. The Montessori teacher must see the cause of error in children as really in the environment, not the child — and then proceed to remove the particular detrimental influence at cause.

### Cause of Error

*"...the adult...finds himself embroiled in a labyrinth of problems...he does not know the cause of his wanderings, these errors, lie within himself."*

**Dr. Maria Montessori**  
from *Secret of Childhood*, p. 14

A young child's persistent error has its ultimate cause as some detrimental influence in the environment. When this detrimental influence comes directly from the adult personality, it can only be removed by a most careful form of inner self-examination. We must then work with considerable patience and persistence to break through a state of illusion that blinds us from the ultimate truth of the matter.

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Lee Havis, Executive Director

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## MOMENT OF PERIL

by Lee Havis

### Adult-Child Dependency

When children frequently ask the teacher for help, there is an evident undue adult-child dependency that must be resolved (see *Observer*, May 2000). In this situation, the "adult personality" is the primary detrimental influence that must be removed from the child's environment.

In applying the approach of "control the environment, not the child", the teacher here must work to disengage her pattern of offering excessive and unnecessary help to the children — to return the problems back to the children themselves so they can find their own more independent, self-directed solution. The teacher must change her language from the habit of answering questions, to a process of reflective language; i.e., to reflect the question back to the child itself.

A teacher's reflective language is basically to repeat the child's exact words back to the child, to help the child listen more carefully to the problem at hand; e.g., a child asks "how do you do this?", the teacher responds with "how do you do this?". This simple reflective language is quite often sufficient help to the child, to allow it to think through the problem, and then proceed by itself with a suitable independent solution.

If this simple reflective approach is not sufficient for the child, the teacher may re-phrase the question, or give a slight hint that will help the child see the problem more clearly. When the child persists with an "I don't know" response, the teacher can follow up with a phrase like "what do you think?"; "how could you find out on your own?"; "look at this part of the problem"; or "who could help you with that?"

If the materials and learning exercises are set up for independent, self-corrective use, the teacher's careful use of reflective, questioning language will gradually reduce the adult-child dependency, and encourage the children towards their more normal self-directed approach to learning and problem-solving in the environment.

### Starting a New Class

The teacher has just been hired to start a new class of children, and is uncertain how to organize the day and introduce the children to the environment. Although she has had prior experience as

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## CORRECTING ERROR

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### State of Illusion

*"The truth is that 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

Mistakes and self-deception are built into the fabric of our whole personality — a state of illusion that has been built up in our life from early childhood. We therefore tend to observe the child through this limited point of view — a dramatic replay of our own hidden fears, struggle and unresolved pain from childhood. The various defects that arise in teachers reflect this drama, and are quite well hidden by an elaborate network of camouflage and conventions with others in society.

### Defects in Teachers

*"... we must point out the defects in our future teachers that would hinder their work."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Secret of Childhood*, p.150

The most problematic defects in teachers are those that lie hidden within, and are reflected outward in society by the widespread notion of children as weak, fanciful and unguided from within themselves. This is the external drama of our own personality that is so widely repeated and reinforced in our daily relations with others. We are therefore correcting ourselves as we engage in correcting others to develop better Montessori teaching skills with children.

### Correcting Others

*"If we readily enough admit the need of correcting errors which we recognize in ourselves, we do not so easily accept the humiliation of being corrected by others. We would rather make a mistake than admit it... Instead of attempting to perfect ourselves interiorly, we continue to fight."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Secret of Childhood*, p.150

Correcting others is often a frustrating and difficult task because the cause of the

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### New Review Committee Members

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in Woodbridge, Virginia, and Ms. Pileggi conducts a program for children in her home in Columbia, Maryland.

These two members will join current member Edythe Hepner (IMS '94), residing in Jamaica, NY to evaluate self-study reports, conduct on-site visit and make recommendations for IMAC accreditation. The committee is responsible for continuing oversight of all IMS teacher education, which is conducted in affiliation with the Society.

Montessori Observer, September, 2000

## Montessori Conferences

Cont'd. from Page 1, Col. 2

of various social conflicts among the children by using reflective language and questioning — to help the children reach their own independent solution in the matter. He stated, "the adult's use of reflective, non-judgmental language is a powerful tool to help children return to their own independent, self-directed activity in the environment."

The Santa Barbara conference also directed attention to the best means of presenting materials to children. Havis used the pink tower, sandpaper numbers and alphabet letters, to demonstrate the most favorable protocols in presenting a wide range of materials to children. He stated "a few basic rules can guide us in presenting effective lessons with all materials."

Havis also helped the conference delegates see how to discern the child's specific interest for a lesson presentation by the teacher, through observing the child's eye focus, hand and body movement and verbal expression. He stressed the importance of finding this interest in the child as the basis for initiating any effective lesson presentation with materials.

A follow up conference for California is planned for February 2001 in Palm Springs. Contact the Society for specific location to make arrangements to attend.

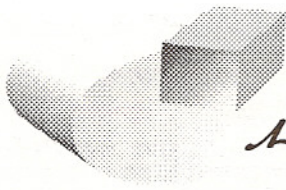
## Hong Kong

August 19-20, 2000

This conference was the second such IMS "Creating the New Education" event in Asia — the first one being in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in 1999. As before, Lee Havis led the conference discussion in English, using various exercises, discussion and experiential learning procedures to show the key elements of effective Montessori teaching. Participating were parents, teachers and other educators from Hong Kong, as well as from Japan, Singapore, Philippines and Taiwan.

The conference focused particular attention on the relationship between the Chinese culture and Montessori education. Havis observed that Montessori teaching appears both consistent and inconsistent with some of the most well known aspects of ancient Chinese traditions. Havis stated that "the Chinese appear most consistent with Montessori education in their instincts for hard work, politeness, interest in intellectual activity and well-developed skills of observation.

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**CORRECTING ERROR** *Cont'd. from Page 3, Col. 2*

problem is within ourselves, and very well hidden and disguised by various forms of self-deception, prejudice and agreement with others. We can nonetheless help each other to make the necessary corrections as we view the situation from the impersonal, objective basis of commitment to Montessori principles. Only then are we likely to discover and resolve the particular unknown error at cause in the matter.

**Unknown Error**

*"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 teachers must engage in a process of *inner preparation* with others to overcome the most damaging effects of unknown error. Such inner preparation must be a constant aspect of Montessori teaching, since the drama of our personality is so well established in our lives. Correcting these errors is a means of union and necessary support for the vital long-term progress of Dr. Montessori's new education in society.

**Means of Union**

*"Errors divide men, but their correction is a means of union."*

**Dr. Maria Montessori**  
*from Absorbent Mind, p.250*

Although we can certainly correct some problems through such solitary means as reading books and experimenting with children on our own, the most problematic issues will only be resolved by our working closely with others. By using Montessori principles as our basic means of union and central focus of attention, we can see more clearly our own

mistakes — and then make the necessary changes for long-term correction of the problem situation. Montessori teaching requires this type of teamwork for effective inner preparation, to ultimately allow the normalized child to emerge as a new breath of life for all mankind.

**New Breath of Life**

*"...children... could correct the errors of past generations and give a new breath of life to the world."*

**Dr. Maria Montessori**  
*from Secret of Childhood., p.2*

The normalized child has a natural capacity to correct the most problematic errors of human civilization — to create the conditions for a new and better humanity in the world. However, this new breath of life will only come about as we take on the necessary Montessori teaching with young children today. We must therefore constantly work at correcting those unknown errors of thought and action that block us from realizing that ideal of constant, self-perfecting being with children.

**Moment of Peril**

*Cont'd. from Page 3, Col. 1*

an assistant with another group of children, she is not sure she wants to duplicate all the prior established procedures and scheduling. The teacher has been given considerable latitude to set up and conduct the class as she thinks best; however, she is unsure how best to start the class on the first day, and set up the procedures and routines for an effective Montessori classroom on a regular, daily basis thereafter. What to do?

*Answer in Observer, November, 2000*

**Montessori Conferences**

*Cont'd. from Page 3, Col. 3*

However, their traditional tendency towards lack of self-expression and individual initiative, and an over-emphasis on conformance with others would be considered as more inconsistent with Montessori principles".

Issues of Chinese culture arose in the conference discussion relating to such matters as teacher-directed curriculum, rigid age-level grouping and dependency in the adult-child relationship. The participants dealt with these issues by acting out various scenarios dealing with the teacher's lack of visual scanning of the total group, and the importance of achieving eye contact with a child before engaging in any verbal interaction.

Havis stated "when the teacher is over-involved with group instruction or lengthy academic instruction to an individual child, she is less able to notice the other children who will nonetheless be looking up for momentary eye contact support from the adult. These important eye contact lessons help children remain connected to reality and continue ahead with their own self-directed activity".

At the conference, Havis distributed Chinese language translations of key IMS study documents about Montessori education — to help extend further learning and study of Montessori education in the Chinese educational community. After the conference, he visited several nearby Hong Kong schools, and observed some hopeful beginning efforts at Montessori teaching there. Havis noted his strong desire to return in the near future, to expand this important work of creating the "new education" in Asia.