



The Montessori OBSERVER

REASON

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Participants at the "Creating the New Education" conference in Tampa, Florida — February 17-18, 2001

Montessori Conferences in California and Florida

In February, 2001, the Society conducted its latest *Creating the New Education* conferences in the United States in Palm Springs, California and Tampa, Florida. These events are the latest in a series of over 60 such in-depth Montessori learning experiences that the Society has been conducting since 1986. The content of each conference varies depending on the time, interests and needs of those attending. However, the context is always the same process of expanding awareness of laws of nature — *inner preparation* to help improve and develop effective Montessori teaching skills with children.

Led by Lee Havis, IMS executive director, the conference has a lively open discussion format with various demonstrations, role-play drama and practical examples to graphically show the skills of effective Montessori teaching. It aims to highlight various skills and techniques in applying the basic Montessori approach of "control the environment, not the child".

Palm Springs, CA — February 3-4, 2001

A diverse group of parents, teachers and school owners met together here from throughout the state of California. Some had many years of experience in Montessori, while others were just beginning their study in the field.

One key topic of discussion was how to effectively intervene with children to help resolve their social conflicts; i.e., how to intervene without imposing the adult's own will and control over the children involved. Havis stressed that adults need to use very precise language that is neither *negative* nor *abandonment* in such situations. He stated "when we help young children resolve their conflicts on their own, they achieve greater independence, self-confidence and harmony with others for life. We can most consistently

achieve this result by developing the skills of non-judgmental eye contact, reflective language and insightful questioning."

Participants also considered how words and understanding can undermine effective Montessori teaching. Havis said, "Montessori is really a very simple way of being — a present moment experience and process committed to infinite and eternal laws of nature. It is not a set of rigid rules, curriculum content, materials or specified lesson presentation procedures. When we limit and define 'Montessori' in terms of a certificate, approval of others or some particular past learning experience, we are not really following true Montessori at all."

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Issues of Accreditation

In December, 2000, Lee Havis, IMS executive director, testified before the US Department of Education concerning the need to establish fairness in the recognition of Montessori teacher education accrediting agencies. He urged the Department to withdraw its prejudicial recognition of a non-IMAC agency in the Montessori field, stating that such recognition created an improper representation of Montessori to the general public. Havis noted particularly the non-inclusive nature and purpose of the other agency.

Havis emphasized that the IMAC agency has a structure and procedures that would most effectively assure harmony and accountability for the entire Montessori community. He stated 'the

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MONTESSORI CONFERENCES

Learn Montessori Teaching Skills
Inner Preparation for Montessori teaching

Hong Kong

May 5-6, 2001

Whippany, NJ

June 23-24, 2001

Australia

August, 2001

(Dates, locations to be announced)

Columbia, SC

October, 2001

(Date to be announced)

Washington, DC

November 3-4, 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.

For full cost and registration details, contact: IMS, 912 Thayer Ave., #207, Silver Spring, MD 20910. Tel. (301) 589-1127.



Reason

by Lee Havis

"A child starts from nothing and develops his reason, the specific characteristic of man."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Secret of Childhood*, p.61

The child develops reason as a normal aspect of its self-creative being in the world. From infancy, the child grows to reason through gradual steps that are only partially reflected by its various external activities and interaction with the environment. Before the age of six, the child's ever-inquiring intelligence is nonetheless quite active within the child, building up its basic sense of order and logic for life.

Ever-Inquiring Intelligence

"When we say, 'to give ourselves a reason'... we imply that the ever-inquiring intelligence should be left at liberty to perform its work of reconstruction and salvation."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Spontaneous Act. In Ed.* p. 167

Dr. Montessori observed that young children have an ever-inquiring intelligence that is uniquely active during the formative period of life. The young child's "absorbent mind" is constantly acquiring new knowledge from the environment and incorporating it intimately within itself. The child's reason thereby unfolds a mysterious pre-determined plan of creation that is in complete harmony with the order of fundamental laws of nature.

Pre-determined Plan

"...there is only a pre-determined plan of construction that bears all the marks of reason and intelligence."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Education for a New World*, p.16

Nature is constantly seeking to express its vital pre-determined plan of creation in each individual child. Montessori teaching supports this natural plan of development by following laws of nature, which can only be approximated by such terms as (1) "Observation"; (2) "Individual Liberty", and (3) "Preparation of the Environment". The adult follows these three Montessori principles to help the young child intelligently interact with the environment, so that its reasoning process develops in complete harmony and order with others.

Reasoning Process

"The reasoning process...grows gradually...images are ordered to serve the reason, and a child absorbs his first images to assist the reason."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Secret of Childhood*, p.61

The young child develops reason through various stages — at first to absorb some visual image or experience in

the environment, and then to relate that image to some particular corresponding action, thought or word. Adults however ordinarily disturb this delicate natural reasoning process with their distracting interference and imposition of various limiting beliefs, ideas and prejudices. Montessori teachers must therefore work to overcome these past detrimental influences in the environment, by creating a new *normalizing* condition for the young child to freely work in a state of deep concentration.

Concentration

"The ability to move about under the guidance of reason and not simply in response to sensible stimuli leads to concentration..."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Secret of Childhood*, p. 95

Normalization is the central event of Montessori education, and occurs when the child deeply concentrates its attention on some object of particular interest. In such a profound moment of concentration, the child changes from its ordinary condition of disorder and inattention, to a normalized state of being with such qualities as spontaneous self-discipline, order and harmony with its entire environment. After the early childhood period, nature continues this normal process of mental development by placing an unusual demand on the child for more advanced, complex forms of abstract reasoning.

Unusual Demand

"Between the ages of 6 and 12... there is an unusual demand on the part of the child to know the reason of things."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *To Ed. The Hum. Potential*, p.3

The older child is in a sensitive period for abstract reasoning, moral development and the right use of imagination. While the young child develops its mental faculties primarily through the physical senses and by imitating others, the older child has an unusual demand for a more conscious form of mental activity — to work out the many practical issues of moral decision-making and abstract reasoning that can only take place in the plane of social relationship and conscious thought with others. The Montessori teacher must protect and nurture this self-directed learning by not imposing any adult reasoning in the process of helping children resolve their various social conflicts and disputes.

Adult Reasoning

"...adults... oppose their own reasoning processes to the child's developing reason..."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Secret of Childhood*, p. 97

Traditional education ordinarily imposes a system of pre-determined curriculum, group instruction, age-segregation and teacher-controlled rules on children. Within such a repressive structure, even the teacher's most thoughtful and objective efforts at instruction will tend to substitute adult reasoning for the child's own free thinking and independent solution to the problems at hand. Conventional teaching also typically includes a set of irrational rules that direct attention to the authority of the teacher, and thereby disturb the child's own natural formation of personal thoughts and values in the social setting.

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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.

INTERNATIONAL MONTESSORI SOCIETY

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

Grabbing and Holding Things

A very young child will instinctively grab and hold physical objects. However, when this instinct results in constant dropping and picking up new objects, without returning them to the shelf, the teacher has a serious problem to resolve (see *Observer*, November 2000).

2½ year old Oscar is grabbing and holding objects in a most disruptive manner in the classroom. His eyes are focused on some new object while he is holding another one in this hand. He then drops one object to take another, without any apparent awareness or interest to return any object to its proper place in the environment. The main problem in this *moment of peril* is how to "control" the physical objects — without controlling the child.

The teacher here has been more controlling of the child in the past, because she has held Oscar's hands at these times, rather than the object itself. So, a good place to begin to *control the environment, not the child*, would be to carefully limit any teacher touching in these situations, to the objects alone; i.e., not the child's hands.

Of course, the teacher can and should place a firm hand on the object being abused, to then gently guide the child towards careful handling of another, more suitable object. However, in doing this, the teacher must only hold the object long enough to get the child's attention through eye contact. Then, the teacher can safely release the object, and guide the child to more suitable activity elsewhere in the environment.

The teacher then might well re-direct the child to some object the child has handled before; perhaps an object that the child has just before dropped and abandoned. Then, the teacher can show the child where to return the object to its proper place on the shelf, and help the child complete that particular cycle of activity.

If the teacher speaks in a positive, friendly tone with Oscar during these scenes of disorder, he will gradually pay more attention to what he is doing with his hands, and eventually concentrate on some piece of work. Such concentration will lead the child to normalized behavior of order and harmony with his entire environment.

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Reason

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Irrational Rules

"... teachers of the older school hold firmly to irrational rules and have little to guide them but illusion and prejudice."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.256

Although teachers usually think of classroom rules as a form of group fairness, social necessity or help for children, they actually impose a form of repressive adult control. Since the teacher must necessarily enforce and interpret these rules on children, they reflect a detrimental influence of the "adult personality". We must therefore control such negative influences, and not allow our impatience with misbehavior to lead towards any violation of Montessori principles.

Impatience

"He who is impatient cannot appraise things properly..."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Spontaneous Act. In Ed*, p. 132

Feelings of impatience are natural when we face children who disobey or act violently towards others. Such feelings can easily drawn into a power struggle with children, to violate such principles as "individual liberty". Montessori teachers must therefore use such means as positive eye contact, reflective language and insightful questioning in moments of disorder with children, rather than the usual recourse to the ordinary standards of human logic.

Human Logic

"the pedagogic world is guided by human logic, but nature has other laws."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Education for a New World.*, p.53

Montessori teaching approaches the child less as a being to understand, and more as an "unknown entity" to discover. Human logic may give us understanding and reasons for a child's behavior, but it is only the higher logic of nature that leads to the emergence of the normalized child. Natural laws guide us to a "preparation of the environment", that requires us to control our "personality", to restrain those various sentiments and prejudices that lead us to attempt to control the child.

Sentiments and Prejudice

"Adults find themselves with sentiments and prejudices... which perhaps their reason may reject; but they can never quite get rid of them."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Education for a New World*, p.22-23

The Montessori approach calls us to control such tendencies as "negativity" and "abandonment" in our personality — to follow instead the higher order of reason found in infinite and eternal laws of

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Amanda Greene (left) and Ursula Thurst (right) engage in observation experience at IMS Palm Springs, California conference, February 3-4, 2001

Montessori Conferences

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After the conference, Havis visited several area schools to observe and consult with staff and teachers. He underlined the importance of continuing the work of Montessori teacher education beyond the bounds of a single two-day event or other formal course of study in the field. He said "we must help each other on a regular continual basis to better observe, analyze and reflect on the various problem situations that we encounter with children each day. Otherwise, we will fall back into old destructive patterns of thought and action, which are deeply entrenched in our dysfunctional personality, and reflected outwardly by the many well-established prejudices of popular adult society."

Tampa, Florida

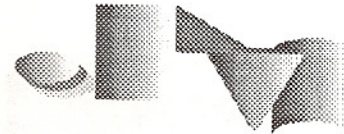
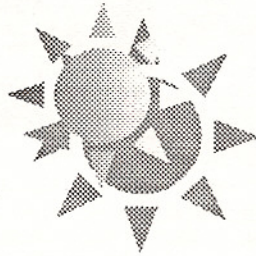
Feb. 17-18, 2001

Participating in the Tampa, FL conference were teachers, parents and school owners from the states of Florida, Georgia, Arkansas and New Jersey. In addition, representatives were present from Warsaw, Poland and Wiesbaden, Germany.

The conference discussion here gave considerable attention to developing better observation skills through visual scanning, and maintaining a less active physical presence in the classroom. Havis noted that "Observation as a law of nature, cannot be reduced to a concept we can understand or explain. However, we can still practice, experience and know it in our being with children."

After the conference, Havis met with conference attendees, Malgocia Tar-nowska (Poland) and Karl and Gisela Obermayr (Germany) about scheduling an IMS conference in Europe. He noted

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nature. We must practice a persistent type of *inner preparation* — to discover those various sentiments and prejudices that interfere with our effective being with children. When our own sense of the child conflicts with the normalized ideal, we can only overcome this issue with considerable faith and imagination — to look beyond our immediate perception of evidence in the physical plane of reality.

Perception of Evidence

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

Dr. Maria Montessori

From Spontaneous Act. In Ed., p.237

Dr. Montessori's "new education" emerges only slowly and with great difficulty in the world, because so much of our perception of evidence is built on expectations and prejudice of the past — a complex mental state of awareness that is widely reinforced and accepted as reality in our social experiences with others. Time and patience alone, much less argument and explanation is enough to change our deepest convictions about the child and education. We must therefore act beyond present knowing, to envision a new possibility for the human personality, which is built on the ultimate reason of infinite and eternal laws of nature.

Montessori Conferences

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the strong historical roots of Montessori in Europe, and expressed his hope that the Society could more actively contribute to its rejuvenation and authentic expression there in the near future.



From left, Dr. Karl Obermayr, Gisela Obermayr and Malgocia Tarnowska at the Tampa conference — Feb. 17-18, 2001

Moment of Peril

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CLASSROOM ROUTINES

The teacher notices that her 3-6 year old class never seems to achieve complete independence from her presence. They lack the complete concentration and focus on work she envisioned as the ideal state of normalized being. She senses that her routines of early morning circle time, mid-morning group snack and outdoor recreation before lunch may be part of the problem; i.e., not providing the children with a sufficiently long period of time for individual work of their own choice. However, she doesn't know how to allow this long work period and still include the full range of other ordinary routines that she sees as necessary for the total group. What to do?

Answer in Observer, May 2001

Issues of Accreditation

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IMAC agency is an umbrella agency, which can bring growth and improvement to all Montessori teacher education. When the US Department of Education recognizes another agency in the field, without providing a similar recognition for IMAC, it works against an inclusive accreditation process that would be in the best interests of the entire Montessori community."

Havis noted that IMAC favors abolishing all government recognition of private accrediting agencies in the United States. He said that "such recognition seems particularly unwise and harmful in the field of Montessori teacher education.

Contact IMS, for more detailed information about this dispute over Montessori accreditation in the United States.