



The Montessori OBSERVER

IDEAS

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Montessori in Indonesia

As a former colony of the Netherlands, Indonesia has known about Montessori education for some time. However, the current level of its practice is still quite limited in this large and diverse country.

Most recently, **Carol Engmann** and **Genia Sonnevile-Bryan** have been seeking to extend Montessori education in Indonesia through the operation of their Jakarta Montessori School (Jakarta, Indonesia). In 1999, Ms. Engmann attended the

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Participants at the "Creating the New Education" conference in Hong Kong — May 5-6, 2001

Hong Kong Holds Second Montessori Conference

On May 5-6, 2001, the Society held its second 2-day *Creating the New Education* conference in Hong Kong. Participating were parents, teachers and other educators from Hong Kong, as well as from the nearby areas of Beijing, China, Philippines and Japan.

Lee Havis, IMS executive director led the conference discussion, to examine and analyze the basic mechanics of Montessori teaching to "control the environment, not the child". He presented various exercises, classroom situations and demonstrations to focus particular attention on such Montessori teaching skills as reflective language, observation, distraction and lesson presentation with materials.

Havis said he was encouraged that the current Hong Kong conference included so many more practicing teachers than before. He stated "practicing teachers can relate their conference experience directly to children, which reinforces and builds up the learning for all involved. I believe those that successfully implement

what they learned in the conference will serve as excellent models for other local educators to observe and follow. This will help Montessori develop and expand in use throughout the whole educational community."

After the conference, Havis visited several local schools, to consult with their staff who attended the conference. He observed and worked with teachers directly in their classrooms, and made various suggestions for more effective Montessori teaching. Havis particularly pointed out the need to change the physical arrangement of a classroom, to better suit the individualized learning approach of Montessori.

Havis noted that "Montessori's approach of free-choice and independent self-directed learning certainly challenges some well-established patterns of adult control and group instruction in traditional Chinese education. However, I believe that once Montessori is successfully set in motion in Hong Kong, it could easily gain much wider acceptance and use throughout all China."

Montessori Workshops

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

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The Society's two-day weekend workshop 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.

*special rates and conditions apply

Ideas

by Lee Havis

"Around some initial idea more ideas may be assembled, in tune with or diametrically opposed to that idea."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *To Ed. The Hum. Potential*, p.14

Montessori first arose in 1907 as a simple but profound idea, to discover and serve the child's true normal being in harmony with infinite and eternal laws of nature. Since its initial introduction, however, this simple idea has become considerably complicated by years of adaptation, interpretation and compromise. Today, Dr. Montessori's legacy appears as a great chaos of ideas — a diverse community of various competing personalities, organizations and institutions.

Chaos of Ideas

"...an idea cannot enter triumphantly into the consciousness...it is necessary that the field of consciousness should be not only free but 'expectant'. He who is bewildered by a chaos of ideas cannot accept a truth which arrives unexpectedly in the unprepared field."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Spontaneous Act. In Ed. P. 179-80*

Montessori has now evolved into a vast field of wide-ranging interpretations and opinions on the subject — a chaos of ideas that can easily distract our attention away from its basic unifying message of the child emerging of itself with such normal qualities as instinctive order, spontaneous self-discipline, attachment to reality, and complete harmony with its entire environment. We must therefore carefully weigh the claims of competing authority and knowledge in the field, and search instead for the truth of Montessori within ourselves through our own personal experience and discovery. Real Montessori will ultimately only enter into the world as we actually experience and practice her noble ideas with children.

Noble Ideas

"Noble ideas, great sentiments have always found utterance, but wars have not ceased!"

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Education for a New World*, p.1

Montessori teaching applies such noble intangible ideas as love, truth and freedom to the education of children. However, we must expand these ideas beyond their ordinary sense and usage in society, where words such as "normal" imply a very different meaning from that intended by Montessori. Even the word "Montessori" itself can be a serious obstacle to its true experience and application, because it has become so widespread in use and dissemination in society.

Widespread Ideas

"...ideas lose strength in becoming widespread."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *From Childhood to Adolescence*, p. 17

Montessori spread quickly at first as a revolutionary *new education*, often gaining widespread support from many in the field of official education. However, this process soon slowed and contracted as Montessori was accommodated to conform to the limited goals, understanding and prejudices of popular culture. Montessori is therefore now largely known only by its name and distinctive materials, while society attempts to force Montessori teaching to fit into the mold of what is commonly known as a good teacher.

Good Teacher

"In America...a good teacher meant one who had studied all the things that do not help the child, and was full of ideas which were opposed to the child's freedom."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Ed. for a New World*, p 52

Montessori education must now contend with many government regulations, such as rigid staff training requirements, which generally promote a very traditional model for good teaching. However, the conventional good teacher is unsuited to Montessori, having too well learned to view make-believe fantasy as an expression of "freedom" or "creative imagination", and to impose a rigid structure of teacher-directed curriculum and group instruction. Dr. Montessori's approach to the child is completely distinct from this traditional teaching role, where the popular fixation of the spirit is on the child as inherently weak and unguided from within.

Fixation of the Spirit

"Where there is fixation of the spirit to an idea, it is difficult to change..."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *To Ed. The Hum. Potential*, p.50

The ordinary idea of the child is as a weak, unguided and dependent being, requiring various forms of adult control and direction to assure its proper development. By contrast, Montessori teaching requires a fixation of the spirit on the child as having an unerring inner teacher to guide it along a path of natural self-development. Montessori teaching is therefore an *inner preparation* of the spirit, which cannot be achieved by just learning certain academic ideas on the subject.

Learning of Ideas

"The real preparation for education is a study of oneself. The training of the teacher...is something far more than a learning of ideas. It includes the training of character; it is a preparation of the spirit."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Absorbent Mind*, p. 120

Montessori teaching requires our complete commitment to such fundamental principles as (1) "Observation"; (2) "Individual Liberty" and (3) "Preparation of the Environment". These three Montessori principles guide us to observe the child as an unknown entity, to discern and serve its inherent interests and needs for self-directed learning in the present moment. It is a way of being that can give us clear ideas to effectively apply the basic Montessori approach of "control the environment, not the child".

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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

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Moment of Peril

by Lee Havis

Classroom Routines

The problem here relates primarily to the teacher's current schedule of classroom routines, which restrict and interrupt the time available for the children to engage in individual work (see *Observer, March 2001*). The teacher realizes the vital importance of a long uninterrupted period of individual work, to help the children deeply concentrate and normalize. However, she cannot see how to provide this without harming the other necessary elements of her program.

The teacher can best solve this problem by adjusting her routines to assure a longer period of individual work. She could certainly eliminate the initial morning group meeting, since the children should by now be well oriented to the environment. The children could then just enter the room and proceed to their own self-directed individual work.

The mid-morning group snack is another unnecessary interruption, and could be replaced by an individualized snack table that children can use on their own. The snack could vary each day to include an assortment of fruit, vegetables, crackers and juice, that the children prepare and serve themselves. Such individualized snack activity will not interrupt the children in their concentrated work activity elsewhere in the environment.

The best time for any group lessons with children is probably at the end of the individual work period. The teacher could initiate this closure to the work session through simple eye contact, and then proceed to conduct some basic movement or music exercises. She would then dismiss them for outdoor recreation and lunch.

After lunch, a naptime is usually most suitable in a full-day program for young children. After the younger children have gone to sleep, the older ones can get up and quietly work individually with materials on their own. When the sleeping children finish their nap, they too can enter into the afternoon individual work period. The children may then continue individual work until time for outdoor recreation and dismissal for the day.

The children would soon adjust to the routines indicated here, which can be easily adapted to suit many programs and situations. More importantly, they would assure a generous amount of time for uninterrupted time for individual work by the children throughout the day.

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Ideas

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Clear Ideas

"Clear ideas, ...can straighten out a child's soul."

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

Montessori teaching applies the principle of "preparation of the environment" to help us discover and remove various detrimental influences from around the child. We can obtain clear ideas for this indirect teaching as we observe the child with a calm and humble spirit, looking for ways to help children concentrate with independence on some object of particular interest. Since we cannot directly observe the child itself, we must nurture an intimate attachment to such expansive ideals as vision, faith and imagination.

Attachment to Ideals

"...the force of cohesion among adults is something that needs to be directed by an attachment to ideals, ...something higher than a mere organizing mechanism."

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

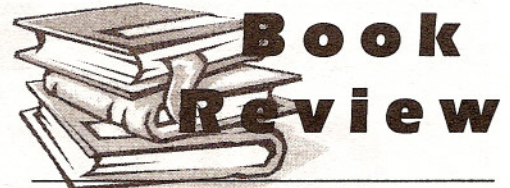
Montessori teaching applies the principle of "individual liberty", as a process of correcting inner errors with children; e.g., removing those various personality flaws that will tend to express themselves outwardly in various forms of abandonment and negativity. Our attachment to such high ideals as "liberty" can help us to correct these inner defects through a constant process of *inner preparation* with children. Only our most determined efforts in following this self-correcting way of being will lead us to fully realize those grand and lofty ideas that Dr. Montessori experienced and described throughout some forty years of her life.

Grand and Lofty ideas

"...we must offer grand and lofty ideas to the human mind, which we find ever ready to receive them, demanding more and more."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *To Ed. the Hum. Potential.*, p.11

Montessori education can help us make a reality of such grand and lofty ideas as peace, freedom, harmony, unity and love in the world. However, this new world will only come about as we faithfully commit ourselves to applying absolute and eternal laws of nature with children today. Montessori therefore challenges us to act on a simple idea of the child's true nature, to allow the reality of this normalized being to bring about a whole new and better humanity in the world.



Why Montessori?

Choosing the Right Preschool

by Aisha Z. Abdullah, 2001

Foreword by Lee Havis

Review by Lee Havis

This new publication by Aisha Abdullah aims to help parents choose Montessori as the best possible preschool for their child. It uses a very effective question-answer format of dialogue with the reader that stimulates inquiry and study into this most vital choice that many parents must make for their child.

Abdullah notes that many parents, such as those in her native country of Malaysia, often choose a preschool for their child without proper regard to its life-long impact. She argues that parents should think more about the long-term consequences of their decision, rather than simply choosing a preschool that conforms to the traditional teacher-directed system of later school education.

Why Montessori? also seeks to briefly explain such visionary ideas as the absorbent mind, the child's true nature and sensitive periods in early childhood development. However, Abdullah candidly admits that her aim is primarily more modest, to help "busy parents trying to give their children the best".

In my foreword to this book, I particularly caution the reader to look beyond the words and symbols of Montessori — to discover its truth through personal experience, reflection and inner preparation. The author too warns against choosing a Montessori preschool that only uses her name and materials, without adopting her approach. She suggests that we can best make the right choice of preschool if we "learn the approach ourselves and monitor the practice through regular visits to the school." (p. 45). Abdullah also thoughtfully provides the reader with a very useful bibliography of Montessori publications and other resources, to invite a more comprehensive study into the subject.

Although this first edition is quite clear and readable, I think a further revision could constructively clarify certain points, particularly as related to the role and activity of the Montessori teacher during a "typical day". While Abdullah wisely states that "three hours of uninterrupted and unregimented work a day is ideal" (p. 53), she also suggests that a "typical day" includes many forms of teacher-directed

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Montessori in Indonesia

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IMS conference in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and in May, 2000, she joined Genia Sonnevile-Bryan to attend the one held at that time in Brisbane, Australia.

Engmann is now sponsoring a "creating the new education" workshop for Jakarta, Indonesia for the weekend of September 1-2, 2001. **Lee Havis** will direct the workshop in a similar manner as conducted elsewhere. It will provide experiential learning to help improve Montessori teaching through inner preparation.

To register to attend or obtain further information, contact: Carol Engmann, Jakarta Montessori School, Jalan Kemang, Raya 39, Jakarta Selatan 12730, Indonesia, tel. (62) 21 747 00010, email to: engmann@cbn.net.id.



Participants at the IMS conference in Melbourne, Australia — April 7-8, 2001

Why Montessori

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activity. Specifically, she mentions circle time, music and movement exercises, art topics and themes, and mid-morning outdoor activity. (p.65)

I nonetheless believe that *Why Montessori?* will effectively introduce Montessori to parents, and give them a very useful guide to making a proper choice of a preschool education for their child. This concise paperback volume definitely helps the reader begin to understand why Montessori is indeed the ideal preschool for all children, regardless of culture or social situation.

Published by Times Media — on the web at <http://www.timesone.com.sg/te>

Moment of Peril

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Reflective Language

When five-year-old Carrie approaches the teacher with a complaint such as "Tell Mary to stop bothering me", the teacher uses reflective language to help her work out the problem on her own; e.g., "you want me to tell Mary to stop bothering you?" However, Carrie insists on an answer, until she finally says "you're not nice because you won't answer me". She then storms away to engage in quiet fantasy. The teacher is concerned that her continuing reflective language is abandoning Carrie; however, she does not want to give an answer that would create undue dependency on her presence. What to do?

Answer in *Observer*, September 2001.



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