



The Montessori OBSERVER ^{obedience}

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Participants at IMS Workshop in Los Angeles, CA — February 23-24, 2002

Montessori Workshop held in Los Angeles

On February 23-24, 2002, IMS conducted its latest "Creating the New Education" workshop in Los Angeles, CA. Participating were parents, teachers and other educators from California, Ohio, Washington and Georgia.

As always, **Lee Havis**, IMS executive director, directed the workshop discussion in a lively interactive manner, to communicate the essential experience of Montessori teaching. Participants brought up many practical problems with children for discussion and analysis according to the essential Montessori approach of 'control the environment, not the child'.

The Los Angeles workshop focused considerably on obstacles and communication issues between parents and teachers. Havis stated, "the fundamental adult-child relationship is shared by parents and teachers alike. Differences between parents and teachers are therefore only matters of degree — the extent to which emotional dependency may be much more heavily experienced in the drama of parent-child relations."

While in Los Angeles, Havis visited several area schools, to consult with staff who attended the workshop. He reported considerable progress and interest in the classroom application of various workshop techniques and procedures. Based on interest of workshop participants, IMS is

planning to offer a further workshop in Los Angeles in August 2002 — to continue the favorable progress of inner preparation achieved at the February event.

IMS Seeks Change to Government Regulations

The Society has been working for many years to change government regulations that oppose the progress and growth of Montessori education in many jurisdictions throughout the world. *See Observer, November 2001.* **Lee Havis**, IMS executive director, said "The problem arises most seriously in the area of staff training qualifications. Montessori schools need to hire teachers who are oriented towards inner preparation, patience, humility and effective observation skills. However, government regulations often limit hiring of staff to only those least likely to serve as effective Montessori teachers. This happens when regulations restrict schools to hire only those persons with academic degrees and credentials from institutions that are contrary or inconsistent with basic Montessori philosophy."

IMS recently reviewed the new proposed childcare regulations for Queensland, Australia, and offered specific suggestions to better enable the effective

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New IMS Discipline Policy

IMS is now distributing a new model discipline policy, to help schools more effectively enforce their duty of respectful treatment of children in their care. **Lee Havis**, IMS executive director, states that the new policy statement uses plain, simple language to communicate to all staff and parents what exactly is expected in this important aspect of the adult-child relationship.

The policy statement establishes the school's commitment to the child's own self-discipline as the basis of any adult-child interaction. It states that adults must engage in only positive treatment of children, through such means as example, clear directions, reasoning, distraction, reflective language and questioning.

The document is written to apply to all adults in their interaction with children on school premises, including parents and their agents in dealing with their own children as well. It requires that anyone violating the policy agree to accept correction, direction or guidance to remedy the situation in a suitable manner. A signature the

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Montessori Workshops

Learn Montessori Teaching Skills
Inner Preparation for Montessori teaching

St. Louis, MO

April 27-28, 2002

Los Angeles, CA

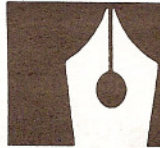
August 10-11, 2002

Baltimore, MD

November 9-10, 2002

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.



Obedience

by Lee Havis

"The word 'obedience' now has a higher meaning than the one usually given to it. It may well imply a sublimation of the individual's own will."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Spontaneous Act. In Ed.*, p. 160

Parents and teachers seek obedience as an important aspect of their relationship with children — to be able to tell them what to do, and have them respond by carrying out their orders. Dr. Montessori however viewed a higher level of obedience in the process of normal growth, to arrive at an ultimate state of yielding one's own will to that of another — a profound unity of purpose between the adult and child. She observed this ultimate true obedience developing normally in the young child, building itself first upon a strong and firm foundation of self-directed will.

Will

"Will and obedience then go hand in hand, inasmuch as the will is a prior foundation in the order of development, and obedience is a later stage resting on this foundation.."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Absorbent Mind*, p. 234

The young child normally develops its will by acting on the environment according to inner instincts for self-directed learning. Montessori teaching supports and sustains this delicate process of normal development, by following such fundamental principles as "individual liberty" — to allow the child to choose its own activity from among a diverse range of stimulating learning materials. By contrast, ordinary education aims primarily to transmit information according to the will of the teacher — even to the point of suppression of the child's inherent instincts for normal self-directed growth and development.

Suppression

"If a child carries out the will of the teacher because he is afraid, or because his affection is exploited, he has no will, and obedience that is secured by suppression of the will is truly oppressive."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Discovery of the Child*, p. 85

The first priority of traditional education is to deliver a pre-determined curriculum of specified subject matter — an approach that necessarily breaks the child's will to pursue anything else. Teachers justify this suppression as vital to achieve the overriding needs of their instruction, judging the child as essentially weak, evil or unguided from within itself. This is the basis of education that fundamentally denies the child's inner self-creative plan of development, and restricts its opportunity

to develop a normal character of strength and independence in life.

Basis of Education

"To dominate the child, to bring him into subjugation, to make him obedient — this is the basis of education. If this can be done by any means whatever, even by violence, all the rest will follow."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Spontaneous Act. In Ed.*, p. 29-30

Adults ordinarily compel obedience in children through various forms of threat, manipulation and control — the basis of education being to mold the child according to the needs and purposes of adult society. Such traditional education supplants the child's own inner guidance with the overriding authority of the supervising adult. The young child instinctively rebels against such adult tyranny, expressing itself through many forms of misbehavior, disorder and disobedience.

Disobedience

"Often, disobedience is due to the fact (the child) does not know how to do a certain thing, that he is not sure of an action.."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Voice of Dr. Montessori*, 8 Jan. 1942 A

Adults tend to judge a child's disobedience as evidence of its inherent evil nature — rather than as a normal reaction caused by either the child not knowing exactly what to do or as a defensive reaction against some disrespectful demand of the directing adult authority. We can however easily resolve the type of disobedience that comes from a child not knowing what to do — by simply giving clearer, more specific directions, and perhaps repeating our directions to assure a more accurate and complete understanding. When disobedience is caused by a profound defense against some disrespectful words or action of the adult, we have again a rather straightforward course of action to remedy the situation.

Profound Defense

"The child...is all obedience, because obedience is his life. We ought therefore, to think how an apparent bit of misbehavior might be a vital act or a profound defense..."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Child in the Family*, p 15

A young child must first obey its own vital urges and inner instincts for normal growth, thereby necessarily opposing or avoiding any adult direction to the contrary. Such a profound defense is most evident in the typical power struggle or tantrum — a child's vital reaction to the adult's harsh or threatening tone and manner of direction. Montessori teachers resolve such disobedience by acting with renewed patience, courtesy and respect — directing the child with words and

action that are kind and gentle, and in full harmony and collaboration with nature.

Collaboration with Nature

"We have to adjust our minds to doing a work of collaboration with nature, to being obedient to...the law which decrees that development comes from environmental experience."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Absorbent Mind*, p 81

Montessori teaching follows natural laws with children, applying such fundamental principles as (1) *Observation*, (2) *Individual Liberty* and (3) *Preparation of the environment*. These three Montessori principles guide us to relate to children in deep and intimate collaboration with nature — a way of being that ultimately allows the child's true nature to fully emerge

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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

Disturbing Group Activity

The Montessori teacher cannot continue to allow Michael to disturb others while she is attempting to direct some organized group activity (see *Observer*, November, 2001). However, when the teacher deals with this one misbehaving child, she may well lose the attention of the other children to the planned group activity.

Applying Montessori principles here, the teacher must recognize first her primary concern for the total group. In this *moment of peril*, it is evident that "other children" most need control around the hub child Michael.

Controlling "other children" is generally a matter of obtaining eye contact with these children, to draw their attention away from the misbehaving hub child. So, the teacher may have to momentarily stop her planned activity, and look up for this vital eye contact relationship with such children. At that time, she may also direct certain children to sit a bit further away from Michael, to avoid undue physical contact. If necessary, the teacher may also leave her own position briefly, to touch a child to get attention towards her, and away from the disturbing influence of Michael.

Many teachers fail to obtain effective group support, because they begin the activity without having full attention from all children. Such teachers must therefore particularly practice patience and determination in preparing the children to sit and focus in a suitable manner.

If the teacher sees that many children lose interest in some passive activity, such as a 'story' or 'show and tell', she can change the activity to some type of body movement and physical exercise. An active exercise involving songs and motion may be more consistent with the interests and needs of young children during some period of time together in a group.

Of course, the teacher must never seek to resolve disorder in a group by drawing negative attention to the misbehavior or by forcing some child to leave for a "time out" isolation away from the group. If the teacher applies basic techniques to "control the environment, not the child", she can return the group to a calm, orderly and peaceful activity, that will be consistent with the harmony of the entire group.

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Obedience

Cont'd. from Page 2, Col. 3

in reality. We aim to "control the environment, not the child", to help children attain an amazing normalization that is won as they pass through three distinct levels of obedience.

Three Levels of Obedience

"...obedience...occurs in three...levels. At the first, the child obeys sometimes, but not always...."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Absorbent Mind*, p.235

The ordinary young child initially enters the Montessori environment with a superficial personality that tends to react and rebel against any form of adult authority or direction — a condition of being associated with the psychological effects of past detrimental influences suffered during infancy. In this first level of obedience, the child will only occasionally obey the adult's direction. However, in time, the Montessori environment helps the child to develop a sure and steady self-will and inner control of its actions, to thereby bring the child to a second level of obedience.

Second Level of Obedience

"The second level is when the child can always obey...The child can absorb another person's wishes and express them in his own behavior.."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Absorbent Mind*, p. 237

When the young child appears to consistently obey adult direction, it has achieved an inner control and order that Dr. Montessori described as the second level of obedience. Many parents and teachers believe that this second level of obedience is the highest level possible in children, and so remain thoughtless and inattentive to any further development and progress. In fact, Dr. Montessori reported the existence of a third, higher level of obedience — the child's true normal obedience, with the child showing such qualities as spontaneous self-discipline, order, harmony and complete adaptation to its surrounding environment.

Third Level of Obedience

"...the third level of obedience...the child becomes anxious and impatient to obey...."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Absorbent Mind*, p.238

When the young child enters into a deep state of concentration on some particular piece of work of its own choice, we have the normalization event so central to all Montessori education — the beginning of a whole new way of normalized development for the child. The normalized child gradually enters into a third level of obedience that shows itself as a remarkable oneness of purpose with the supervising adult. However, such an extraordinary type of obedience will only arise as

the adult enters into ever-deeper levels of inner preparation of the spirit.

Inner Preparation

"Nothing is gained by mere imitation or forced obedience; there must be inner preparation by which obedience becomes possible...."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Ed. for a New World*, p. 56

We will only see the child's true normal obedience, as we open our minds to consider a new and expansive possibility for being — a new reality that is beyond our superficial perceptions and ordinary physical senses. We enter into this new plane of reality only by practicing a form of constant inner preparation, to deeply examine ourselves, to see and remove those deeply hidden errors and prejudices about the child, that blind us to its ultimate true nature. Then we can truly discover the normalized child that will evolve the cosmos towards greater love, harmony, order and unity throughout all mankind.

Evolve the Cosmos

"...the purpose of life is to obey the occult command which harmonizes all and creates an ever better world. The world was not created for us to enjoy, but we were created in order to evolve the cosmos"

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Ed. for a New World*, p. 26-27

Montessori teaching follows laws of nature to evolve the cosmos in harmony with the emergence of the child's true normalized nature. This is the work of Dr. Montessori's *new education* — to free the child to create a whole new and better humanity. We serve this purpose in our daily lives with children, by our obedience to those infinite and eternal cosmic laws that define and guide our essential practice of Montessori teaching.

GOVERNMENT REGULATIONS

Cont'd. from Page 1, Col. 2

operation of Montessori schools there. IMS cited particularly the need to reduce the proposed mandatory staff training qualifications that include 2 and 3-year courses of "early childhood studies".

IMS noted Dr. Montessori's warning against attempting to employ or re-train traditional teachers for work in Montessori schools. She said such teachers were "...full of ideas which opposed the child's freedom..." and that "their prejudices are so deeply rooted that they are incurable." (MM, *Education for a New World*, p.52-53).

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GOVERNMENT REGULATIONS

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IMS suggested that one possible solution to this problem might be to allow schools to seek an "exception" from any provision of the regulations that is contrary to a school's unique educational philosophy. It also suggested that the government uniformly reduce all academic staff training qualifications to a more basic level of academic literacy; e.g., "high school diploma or equivalent".

In the United States, Havis noted "some states have been applying very unequal, excessive and prejudicial regulations over Montessori schools for years. However, these regulations are hard to change, because certain private organizations have established political power and economic interests to maintain exclusive approval of their own particular training certification or credential. Public interest does not generally touch these issues, because most people are more concerned with the taxpayer-funded system of government schools. This system likewise reflects strong economic interests to maintain a repressive condition over non-government alternatives."

Havis indicated the need to forge a coalition of persons interested in educational freedom, and to develop consensus around certain specific changes. He said "once we agree on what changes we most need, we will have to present these changes to government officials in a manner that is most likely to engender their attention and positive response".

Contact IMS if interested in further details to join in the IMS effort for regulatory reform, and to help resolve these issues in your own particular jurisdiction.

Moment of Peril

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Clean up

During the course of the day, the teacher sees that many children are not putting their materials away. Although she has reminded children to "clean up" when finished, she finds that some children deny responsibility, blame others or get involved with other activities before putting prior materials away. *What to do?*

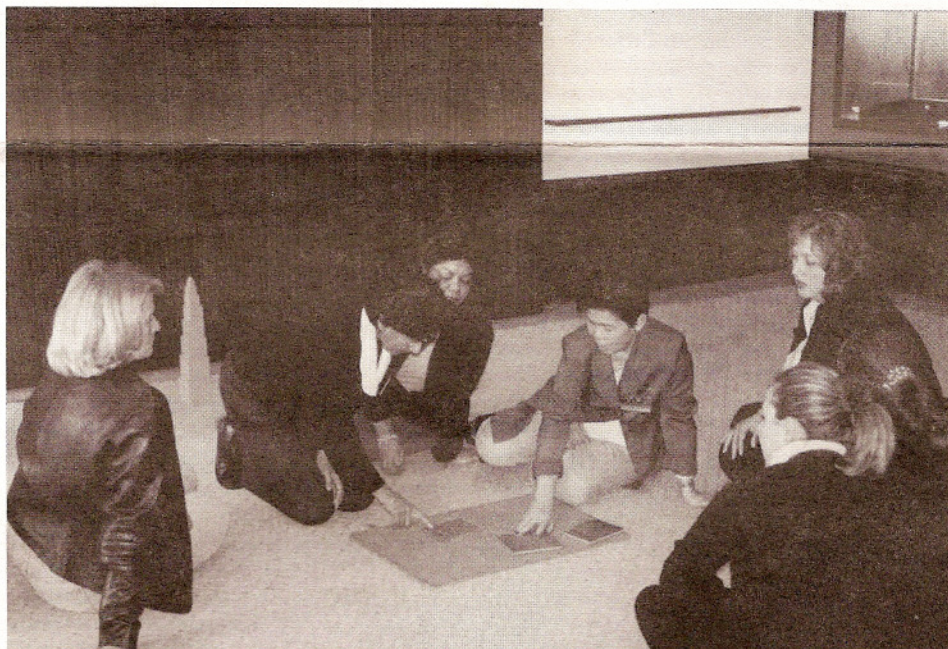
Answer in Observer, May 2002

IMS Discipline Policy

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at the bottom affirms each person's commitment to comply with the policy.

Havis indicated that the Society will distribute this statement to all IMS recognized Montessori schools, and encourage its adoption and strict enforcement by other schools as well. He stated, "I believe that this policy statement adds substance and clarity to the nature of the adult-child relationship in a Montessori school. It will help assure greater compliance with IMS recognition criteria, which we plan to more effectively enforce in other ways as well."



Practicing lesson presentation protocols at the IMS Los Angeles workshop (February 23-24, 2002)