



The Montessori

Laws of Nature

# OBSERVER

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## Montessori in Politics Educational Freedom is Key

On May 11, 2002, **Lee Havis**, IMS executive director, attended a political convention in Maryland to speak about the role of public interest politics and educational freedom in the upcoming elections in that state. Sponsored by the Maryland Libertarian Party, the convention included also speakers **Doug Leard**, Pennsylvania representative of the *Alliance for the Separation of School and State* and **Tom Bryer**, independent candidate for the state legislature. Mr. Bryer spoke about building coalitions in the spirit of an "all-partisan" electoral campaign.

Havis spoke about the *Maryland Public Assembly*, a non-partisan organization in the state that seeks to endorse and support candidates for the public interest. He  
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Participants at IMS Workshop in St. Louis, MO — April 27-28, 2002

## Montessori Workshop in St. Louis, MO

The Society conducted its latest "Creating the New Education" workshop in St. Louis, MO on the weekend of April 27-28, 2002. **Kirsten Greene**, director of *Young Adventures Montessori School* in nearby St. Charles, MO, provided the primary local support and coordination for this first such event in the state. Attending were parents, teachers and other educators from the states of Missouri, Iowa, Illinois, Arkansas, West Virginia, and Florida.

**Lee Havis**, IMS executive director, guided the workshop participants in a wide-ranging discussion of practical Montessori teaching skills, including how to resolve misbehavior with such techniques as eye contact, distraction and reflective language. He helped the participants identify and gain control over the detrimental tendency to react to a misbehaving child with "negativity" or "abandonment". Havis illustrated the use of various techniques and protocols to overcome this detrimental tendency, using a lively visual form of role-play drama.

The St. Louis workshop focused particular attention on the need to identify and correct small specific issues with individual children, to eventually build up a better sense of trust, calm, order and harmony among all the children in the group. Havis stated "we correct and im-

prove the whole classroom environment as we practice effective Montessori teaching with individual children. Each moment of self-control or careful language with a single child will eventually have its positive, calming effect on others."

While in the area, Havis visited and consulted with staff and parents at the *Young Adventures School*. He helped the staff practice the various workshop techniques with children directly in the classroom. Havis indicated that "new procedures and patterns of action require some considerable practice, patience and repetition to perfect. However, they do become easier as we see and appreciate their effect in bringing about positive changes in the behavior of children.

After the workshop, several participants expressed a desire for further similar workshops in their local area. Havis indicated the Society's support for these efforts to continue the progress achieved at the St. Louis workshop.

### The Simple Truth

"The simple truth ...is that the laws the child is forced to obey are arbitrary and that he must no longer be subject to them, so that the laws of life may guide his development..."

**Dr. Maria Montessori**  
from *Education and Peace*, p. 105

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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.

# Laws of Nature

by Lee Haviv

*"A new education from birth onwards must be built up. Education must be reconstructed and based on the laws of nature and not on the preconceived notions and prejudices of adult men."*

**Dr. Maria Montessori**  
from *Formation of Man*, p. 70

Dr. Montessori's revolutionary "new education" is a way of being completely committed to laws of nature with children — a fundamentally distinct alternative to the ordinary teacher-directed approach of conventional education. However, we cannot follow eternal laws of nature like a set of rigid rules for specific behavior, because these laws extend infinitely beyond such terms as (1) *Observation* (2) *Individual Liberty* and (3) *Preparation of the Environment*. We can nonetheless follow the indications of these three fundamental Montessori principles to help control our errors with children — to eventually discover the underlying divine plan of nature that emerges only imperfectly in time to our superficial physical senses.

## Divine Plan

*"men, through their interference with ... natural laws, have hindered the divine plan for children..."*

**Dr. Maria Montessori**  
from *Secret of Childhood*, p. 34

The child's true plan of creation expresses a complete harmony of being with others — a normal development of life that follows the flawless guidance of a natural teacher in the child itself. However, we cannot easily recognize this divine plan of nature while we are struggling with a child in some moment of extreme emotional frustration, disorder or misbehavior. At such times, we must therefore carefully set aside our conventional understanding of the situation, and act instead according to a form of love that transcends our ordinary sense of reality.

## Love

*"Every work that is done according to the laws of nature...attains consciousness under a form of love."*

**Dr. Maria Montessori**  
from *Secret of Childhood*, p. 103

Love interrelates and unifies all our separate actions and purposes into a single cosmic whole, to guide us through those inevitable moments of doubt and confusion we experience with children. During early childhood, such love is particularly active to create the child's basic personality — to intimately harmonize its being with the entire surrounding environment. However, such powerful creative love cannot fully complete its work in the presence of countervailing adult desires and prejudices for children to obey

and follow the limited goals and purposes of an external curriculum of predetermined subject matter.

## Adult Desires

*"The end of education was to subject the child to an adult, who substituted himself for nature and replaced the laws of life with his own desires and intents."*

**Dr. Maria Montessori**  
from *Secret of Childhood*, p. 212

Adults ordinarily aim for an intellectual understanding, emotional comfort and convenience with children. However, such superficial adult desires may lead to many detrimental actions that work against the child's normal development, resulting in various forms of resistance and dysfunctional behavior in the child. While such traditional teaching may succeed in transmitting certain subject matter information to the child, it also conveys many common prejudices of adult society as well.

## Common Prejudices

*"...one of the most imminent perils is that of going against nature's laws in the education of the child, to suffocate and reform him under the error of common prejudices."*

**Dr. Maria Montessori**  
from *Formation of Man*, p. 66

The ordinary teacher unconsciously imposes many types of common prejudices on the child through "negativity" or "abandonment" — to either repress the child through manipulative teaching or to wastefully abandon it to idle make-believe play. The young child must then warp its being to conform to the various fears, limiting perspectives and values of the supervising adult — acquiring all those corresponding habits and tendencies of weakness, fantasy and dependency we associate with the ordinary child. We customarily perceive these qualities as normal, because they are so widespread in society and conform so closely with the popular expectations and superficial human logic of conventional society.

## Human Logic

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

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

We ordinarily perceive reality from the perspective of our own personality formation of the past — a distorted but convincing vision of possibility that is widely reinforced and strengthened by its general agreement with others in society. By contrast, Montessori teaching rejects this ordinary human logic, seeing instead a child with its own inherent inner guidance for perfect order, harmony and unity with others. However, we can only find this

truly normal child by a process of expanding such principles as "individual liberty", to allow the young child a type of freedom that extends infinitely beyond the restrictive bounds of our various prejudicial and limited thoughts and ideas of reality.

## Freedom

*"Nature makes freedom a law of life — the choice only to be free or to die."*

**Dr. Maria Montessori**  
from *Ed. for a New World*, p 28

Montessori teaching respects the child's freedom to extend the ordinary bounds of conventional reality and possibility in life. We must therefore apply the principle of "individual liberty" to accept and support the child's own free choice of work and activity from among a wide range of interesting options in the environment. We must likewise commit ourselves to a principle of "observation" that views the child

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Lee Haviv, Executive Director

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## Moment of Peril

by Lee Havis

### CLEAN UP

The Montessori teacher here is struggling with children who are not inclined or oriented to clean up after themselves. (See *Observer*, March 2002). This condition relates to a general disorder that the teacher must resolve and correct in her approach to "control the environment, not the child".

The teacher's mistake relates to how she approaches the children on the issue of "clean up". In brief, she appears to be violating certain protocols; e.g., (1) talking without first obtaining eye contact (2) interrupting the children with her direction when they are busy working elsewhere and (3) using negative language associated with the teacher's own feelings, values and judgments.

Ideally, the teacher maintains a steady visual scanning and active observation of the children throughout the day — so she is alert to the status of materials that are left out, and the specific children who will most readily respond to a suitable ordering activity. At a suitable time, the teacher will therefore obtain eye contact with a particular child, and then direct it to the scene of disorder with a phrase such as "come over here, I have something to show you". The teacher may then point to some specific object and ask, "Where does this go?" If the direction is clear and simple, the child will usually comply and proceed accordingly.

When the individual work time comes to an end, the teacher has another opportunity to direct attention to order the environment as the children gather for a brief group time together. She can then direct the children who come to the group first to "look around the room", and see what is left out and needs to be put away. At this time, the children are normally eager to order the environment, and will help each other as a friendly social experience of value and interest to all.

As the teacher follows these basic protocols of effective adult-child interaction, she will find that the children will more independently clean up the environment on their own. Then, the teacher can be less involved and more a passive observer to the children's own normalized orderly behavior with the materials and each other.

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## Laws of Nature

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as an unknown entity to discover, as we humbly and patiently restrain our detrimental personality expression in the environment.

### Observation

*"Observation...has a purpose. Its object is to find out what are the laws of life"*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Absorbent Mind*, p12

Montessori teaching follows a principle of "observation" that either recognizes the reality of the child's true nature, or seeks to find and remove what is opposing this reality in the child's environment. We therefore usually best observe children by remaining stationary and silent in their presence; however, actively observing at times as well, using such techniques as questioning, eye contact and reflective language. Such an expansive "observation" helps guide our actions in applying the principle "preparation of the environment" — to offer the child active experiences with a well ordered set of self-educational materials.

### Active Experiences

*"The human being is a united whole, but this unity has to be built up and formed by active experiences in the real world, to which it is led by the laws of nature."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Absorbent Mind*, p184

Montessori teaching prepares the environment around each child by such means as providing a range of stimulating learning materials for the child's free and independent use. The child may then engage in those active experiences that vitally integrate itself into a unitary whole, leading towards the pivotal psychological event that Dr. Montessori termed *normalization*. After the child has *normalized* through some profound concentration on a particular piece of work, we can see the outer evidence of this event in an order, peace and calm that clearly reflects the conditions of life created by the adult's commitment to laws of nature.

### 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 *Ed. for a New World*, p.78

Montessori teaching creates a psychic condition of peace, calm and order in the child's environment — a commitment to laws of nature that allows the child to settle into deep concentration and work for its purpose of self-creative normal development. These conditions of life set in motion a whole new realm of normalized development that is capable of fundamentally transforming the future of mankind.

We can however only indirectly cooperate with these powerfully creative laws of life, such as by preparing an environment that offers substantial opportunities to satisfy each child's unique interest for work in the present moment.

### Interest

*"...interest corresponds with natural laws and opens up a whole cycle of new activities..."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Absorbent Mind*, p. 279

The young child's inner teacher guides it unerringly to select various activities and materials that are uniquely suited to its own individual self-directed needs and interests. We must therefore closely observe each child to see the outer signs of such interest, to notice the child's eye contact with teacher while touching some piece of work, or just asking with words for some particular lesson. Whatever rules, procedures and protocols we may devise to help guide us in these delicate skills of Montessori teaching, we must nonetheless adjust their specific use and timing to the ultimate authority of transcendent cosmic laws of the universe.

### Cosmic Laws

*"...the problems of education must be solved on the basis of the laws of cosmic order...Respect for these cosmic laws is fundamental. Only when we hold to these as a basis can we judge and modify the multitude of human laws which deal with the passing moments of external social construction."*

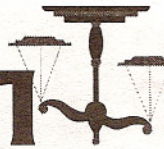
Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Formation of Man*, p. 11

While we can and must seek to understand and effectively apply specific techniques and procedures to "control the environment, not the child", these must

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Participants practicing lesson presentation protocols with language materials at the St. Louis, MO workshop — April 27-28, 2002



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## Letters to IMS

May 3, 2002  
Columbia, MO

To: Lee Havis

...I attended your (St. Louis, MO) workshop with five staff members last weekend. We really had a wonderful time. We came back with full excitement and we talked to other staff members... this week we all tried the simple directions that you gave us in our class. It worked so well, I cannot explain... Thank you very much for such a wonderful guidance. We would like you to come to Columbia, MO some time in the near future.

One important thing I want to share with you; (describing an event with her son)...we were sitting and he was eating something. After he finished he left the bowl on my study table. ...Next morning I saw that and I went to him and held his hand and told him 'come here I have something to show you'. He walked and saw his bowl and put it away without making a fuss about it. Thanks. Because otherwise I would have been asking him to put it away which he never liked.

Thanks,

Reeta Prasad

## LAWS OF NATURE

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nonetheless be applied only according to the higher authority of infinite and eternal cosmic laws. We must therefore constantly expand our understanding and awareness of such terms as "observation" to discover their essential substance in the emergence of the normalized child. Only then will we experience the ultimate truth and reality of those laws of nature that Dr. Montessori directs us to follow in her work and vision of a "new education".



Participants in discussion at the IMS Montessori workshop (St. Louis, MO — April 27-28, 2002)

## Montessori in Politics

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said, "the Assembly is based on Montessori principles, and has already demonstrated its positive influence to improve the political climate in a prior state-wide election. We plan to expand our efforts in this electoral cycle."

Speaking also at the convention was **Spear Lancaster**, Libertarian candidate for Maryland governor. Mr. Lancaster emphasized the vital importance of protecting individual liberty in the operation of government, especially to assure greater educational freedom for all. He indicated that freedom is a campaign issue that will resonate in a positive way with many Maryland voters.

After the convention, Havis expressed his appreciation to Mr. Lancaster and others for their support and interest in greater educational freedom in the state. He said "Debate and support on this issue will be a very good step forward for the success and progress of Montessori education."

## Moment of Peril!

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## Physical Contact

The teacher finds that Carl is deeply distracted into misbehavior and fantasy with objects and other children. He usually does not look up for eye contact with the teacher at such times, and does not respond to various forms of non-physical distraction. When the teacher touches Carl, he screams and pushes away, to continue the same disruptive behavior as before. The teacher wishes to avoid harsh physical contact with Carl to stop the destructive behavior. However, she fears that any physical contact with Carl in these *moments of peril* will violate Montessori principles.

What to do?

Answer in *Observer*, September 2002