



The Montessori

# OBSERVER

Faults and Errors

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Participants at the IMS Montessori workshop in Los Angeles, CA — August 10-11, 2002

## IMS Workshops in California and Arkansas

**Los Angeles, CA**

**August 10-11 2002**

Parents and teachers from California, Arizona, Canada and Philippines attended this most recent IMS workshop in southern California. It included the participation of many from the same schools that attended a prior workshop in the area in February 2002.

Lee Havis, IMS executive director, led the group discussion to work through and resolve many practical misbehavior problems using the Montessori approach of "control the environment, not the child". He particularly emphasized the importance of dealing with specific present-moment details of action with individual children, as a way towards a more nurturing attitude and positive relationship with all the children in the group.

After the workshop, Havis visited and consulted with a school in Burbank, CA that had staff at the workshop. He encouraged all participating schools to continue their productive support for further such *inner preparation* workshops, to continue the progress achieved at the August event.

**Fayetteville, AR**

**September 14-15, 2002**

This workshop was set in motion and locally coordinated by Vickie Butler, school owner in Fayetteville, AR, who attended a prior IMS workshop in St. Louis, MO. Parents, teachers and other educators attended this first Arkansas IMS workshop from throughout the local region.

Participants focused significant attention on the practical problems of overcoming false impressions and limiting concepts about Montessori in society — particularly those related to lesson presentation with materials and academic curriculum. Havis emphasized that Montessori teaching follows the child, not curriculum. He said, "our lessons with materials must follow the present-moment indications of the child's true interests to work — not the demands of academic curriculum schedules or rigid rules about prior teacher presentations. We must base our lesson presentations on direct observation of what the child watches with its eyes, and

## Public Interest Politics Supports Educational Choice

On August 31, 2002, the Maryland Public Assembly (MPA) confirmed the endorsement of public interest candidates in Maryland for various state-wide and local offices in the state. This non-partisan citizen group in Maryland is seeking to provide guidance to voters, to help elect those candidates who most reflect the broad public interest of all. MPA emphasizes such issues as individual liberty, integrity in government and commitment to fair and free market competition for all.

At its August meeting, the MPA central committee elected Lee Havis, IMS executive director, as state chairperson. Havis noted his particular concern for bringing

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## Montessori Workshops

*Learn Montessori Teaching Skills  
Inner Preparation for Montessori teaching*

### Indianapolis, IN

October 19-20, 2002

### Baltimore, MD

November 9-10, 2002

### Singapore

March 15-16, 2003

### Vancouver, Canada

April 26-27, 2003

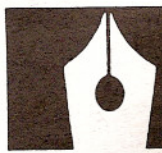
### New Paltz, NY

May 17-18, 2003

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.

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# Faults and Errors

by Lee Havis

"...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. 61

Dr. Montessori discovered that faults and errors in children, such as inattention, violence, fantasy, disobedience and disorder would naturally disappear within her exacting educational environment. Montessori teachers today seek to create these same conditions of life to return the child to its true normal state of being, with such qualities as spontaneous self-discipline, order and complete harmony with its entire environment. Conventional education however does not provide these normalizing conditions for the child, but imposes instead a general form of discouragement, to correct the child's mistakes by means of negative adult control, repression and manipulation.

## Discouragement

"The greatest source of discouragement is the conviction that one is unable to do something...An adult, by constantly humiliating a child and making him aware of his weaknesses, dampens the child's desire to act."

**Dr. Maria Montessori**

from *Secret of Childhood* p. 169

Traditional teaching attempts to discourage faults and errors in children by such means as rewards and punishments. However, this repressive approach tends to restrain not only the intended misbehavior, but also all other forms of spontaneous activity in the child as well. By contrast, Montessori teaching allows children to correct their own little mistakes through the natural process of interaction with others in the social group.

## Little Mistakes

"...it is the environment itself which helps to make the children continuously better...the teacher...can remain a quiet spectator of all the little mistakes that occur around her."

**Dr. Maria Montessori**

from *The Child*, p. 12-13

Montessori teaching respects each child's *Individual Liberty* to make those little mistakes that the child can readily correct without interference of the supervising adult. We must however support this self-correcting process in the child by following the principle *Preparation of the Environment*, to remove any obstacles there may be around the particular 'hub' child in question. When misbehavior occurs, the idea is to "control the environment, not the child", to identify and remove whatever teacher error there may be at cause in the matter.

## Teacher Error

"...when her class becomes undisciplined, the teacher sees in the disorder merely an indication of some error that she has made; she seeks this out and corrects it..."

**Dr. Maria Montessori**

from *Absorbent Mind*, p. 260

Montessori teachers carefully observe and analyze a misbehavior situation, to find and correct their own error in effectively controlling the physical objects, other children and adult personality around the misbehaving child. We then correct this teacher error through such positive techniques as eye contact, distraction, clear direction, showing materials, reflective language and non-judgmental questioning. The most difficult aspect of this Montessori approach is to remove the detrimental influences of the adult personality that come from some deeply hidden 'unknown error' within the teacher herself.

## 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 teaching requires a constant deep level of *inner preparation*, to remove detrimental influences of the adult personality associated with patterns of negativity or abandonment with children. Unknown inner errors of prejudice and misconception towards the child lead to many forms of destructive behavior habits with children that are hard to break. We must therefore carefully discipline ourselves to overcome the tendency towards hiding such defects behind a mask of polite conformity with the prejudicial expectations and opinions of the surrounding dysfunctional adult society.

## Hiding Defects

"We hide our defects under the guise of noble and impelling duties...when we are criticized for our faults, we find it easy to excuse them..."

**Dr. Maria Montessori**

from *Secret of Childhood*, p. 151

Whatever good feelings, opinions, beliefs and intentions we may have towards the child, we may still be hiding defects that work against our sincere efforts at effective Montessori teaching. From childhood, we have ordinarily incorporated such common defects as impatience, fear and prejudicial expectations deeply into our whole personality — and act these out in many forms of dramatic struggle with children. We can only overcome these deeply hidden inner obstacles through cooperative reflection and accountability with

others — to point out those defects in each other that otherwise remain hidden behind a complex web of camouflage and pretenses in conventional adult society.

## Point out the Defects

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

**Dr. Maria Montessori**

from *Ed. for a New World*, p. 28

Montessori teaching requires us to point out very personal flaws and defects in those around us with children, to assure an effective control of the "adult personality". We must engage in constant *inner preparation* with others, to correct those errors that others can see much better than us. We can also certainly use objective rules and standards of conduct to help guide us in this process, to develop

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Look for the  
**November Observer**  
featuring  
**Repression**

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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

### Physical Contact

The teacher here is unsure of what to do with Carl because he screams in rage whenever she touches him in the *moment of peril*. (See *Observer*, May 2002). She therefore needs to first recognize that Montessori teaching, to "control the environment, not the child" does not mean that we may never touch a child in some *moment of peril*. Rather, it implies that our physical contact must always respect such fundamental Montessori principles as "individual liberty".

With such a fearful, sensitive child as Carl, the teacher usually finds that such non-physical techniques as eye contact or positive language alone will not effectively achieve the child's full attention. She must then therefore look to employ some form of direct physical contact, to gain the child's attention and lead him gently back to reality in the present moment. Such physical contact will then not necessarily violate Carl's "individual liberty", even if he screams loudly in protest at the time.

Using physical contact here however, the teacher must not control the child's free movement; i.e., no grabbing, hitting, picking up or forceful holding. Our aim is just essentially to get Carl's attention.

While the teacher is gently, but persistently touching Carl, she can then use such other techniques as reflective language, questioning, clear directions or distraction to help him experience the friendly comfort and support of the teacher's positive presence. In the future, Carl will become less fearful of the teacher's physical contact — and respond more readily to less assertive forms of interaction, such as eye contact, positive language or mere physical proximity.

### Tantrums

The teacher finds that two-year-old Jessica flies into a tantrum at times without any apparent cause in the environment. For example, Jessica has gone into a tantrum when the teacher directed her to do such things as put her shoes on after nap; take her seat for lunch; and return some piece of work back to the shelf after use. The teacher is concerned that she may be somehow causing these episodes of emotional distress, and wonders what she can do to keep them from occurring in the future. What to do?

Answer in *Observer*, November 2002

## Faults and Errors

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the most constructive practices, techniques and procedures possible to improve our daily efforts with children.

### Standards of Conduct

*"External conformity to accepted standards of conduct is important since it makes us reflect and become aware of our faults."*

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

IMS provides various types of specific rules and standards to support and identify effective Montessori teaching skills. Such standards of conduct can greatly help teachers apply common sense, reason and scientific analysis to their daily efforts with children. A good teacher employs all such means to overcome the many defective patterns of personality expression that can so easily distract us from effective Montessori teaching.

### A Good Teacher

*"A good teacher does not have to be entirely free of faults and weaknesses."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Secret of Childhood*, p. 149

We must train our minds to recognize and learn from errors that are inevitable in any case with children. A good teacher is therefore constantly correcting and controlling errors — adjusting outward behavior in accordance with fundamental laws of nature. We can maintain a more positive feeling towards error as we see the ultimate results emerging in children who gradually become more independent and self-directed in their daily activities.

### Feeling Towards Error

*"...cultivate a friendly feeling towards error, to treat it as a companion inseparable from our lives..."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Absorbent Mind*, p. 225

Montessori teaching is a way of controlling our outer behavior through a constant process of inner preparation. With a more positive feeling towards error, we can better adjust and adapt our actions to conform to the ultimate authority of infinite and eternal laws of nature. Such self-correction is an important means of union with others who are likewise engaged in this revolutionary work of creating Dr. Montessori's "new education" in society.

### Means of Union

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

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Absorbent Mind*, p. 229

We cannot effectively control and correct our errors through solitary reflection and meditation exercises alone. Personal growth and self-discovery is a practical social experience, and a necessary

means of union to support the larger work and purpose of Montessori education in society. With others, we can extend beyond the bounds of our isolated and separated circumstances with children, to begin to realize our true worth and value to help bring forth a new breath of life and hope 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

Montessori education offers real hope that the new *normalized* child will truly emerge to create a whole new and better humanity for the future. To realize this new breath of life, we need only to continue our efforts at applying Montessori principles every day with young children — to provide the *normalizing* conditions that are so vital for this new possibility in human evolution. However, such Montessori teaching requires us to constantly control and correct those faults and errors in our own being that block the way to this hopeful new destiny of peace, love, order and harmony in the world.



IMS Workshop participants practice basic lesson presentation protocols in showing materials to children.

— Fayetteville, AR (September 14-15, 2002)

### IMS Montessori Workshops

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touches with its hands in the present moment — and act according to this as our basis of presenting lessons."

After the workshop, Havis visited with teachers who attended the workshop, to provide consultation directly in their classrooms with children. He stressed the critical need to continue these types of workshops, to maintain successful progress for the *new education* in the local region.

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*J.P. Tai (director, Torrance Montessori School, Torrance, CA) speaks out in discussion at the IMS Montessori workshop — Los Angeles, CA (August 10-11, 2002)*

### **Public Interest Politics Supports Educational Choice**

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greater public attention to such issues as the need for more freedom and fairness in the regulation of non-government education in the state.

On August 28, 2002, the MPA statewide endorsement session was held in Baltimore, MD. Several candidates for Governor appeared, and engage in a lively discussion of such issues as campaign reform, juvenile justice and education policy. Following this discussion, the MPA members voted to endorse **Spear Lancaster** for Governor, and **Lorenzo Gaztañaga** for Lt. Governor. Both Lancaster and Gaztañaga will appear on the November general election ballot as candidates of the Libertarian Party.

Lancaster and Gaztañaga are both MPA members who have been outspoken and active in their support of greater educational freedom in Maryland. In August 2002, Lancaster attended with Havis the opening of the first charter school in the state, in Frederick County.

In summer, 2002, the MPA held a series of local endorsing sessions throughout the

state to interview candidates on a range of public interest issues. Havis indicated that these discussions were an important part of the organization's value and purpose, since such issues as freedom and fairness for non-government education are less likely to arise in conventional political debates, where discussion is generally dominated by special interests concerned mostly with government funding.

Havis stated that the MPA would continue to support its endorsed candidates for election through such means as news releases and literature distribution. He stated "Maryland is just one of many jurisdictions where government imposes detrimental and excessive control over non-government education. I believe that organizations like MPA are therefore vital to expand the political debate on these issues that so critically impinge on the fundamental progress and success of Montessori education".

*For more information about MPA, see its web site: <http://www.wdn.com/trust/mpa>; or email to: [havis@erols.com](mailto:havis@erols.com).*

### **The Problem with "NO"**

*By Lee Havis*

The problem with "no" in our language with children is its over-use; and its rather definitive, conclusory nature. Negativity is built into our culture, and there are many limitations we place on children and ourselves that don't necessarily exist except in our limiting perceptions, expectations, assumptions and prejudices about reality.

The ordinary human personality is built up with "negativity" as an underlying pattern of thought. We live in a society of limitations built on fear — prisons, police, guns, locks/keys, etc. Fear is the coin of the realm, and we live with it as if that were the inevitable context for all being and experience.

By contrast, children and infants instinctively enter the experience of life in a very different manner from us. They are "yes" oriented to life and experience. Fear is the other guy's problem. They learn fears only from the negative communication of adults. If we don't think carefully about what we are projecting, that "negativity" just comes out — usually at times when the child is reaching out in a loving, natural way according to its true interests and needs to purposefully interact with the environment.

A young child doesn't have the concept of "time", so to say "no" is like "never" to a child — and this is very discouraging; it creates fear of the environment. Indeed, the word "no" is quite definitive. It doesn't open up communication, such as perhaps a word like "maybe" or "later"; or some explanation that includes an acceptance of the idea — without giving into the exact physical act itself.

We need to work on language that "accepts" more of what children want, and helps them find suitable ways of achieving that within the bounds of the real limitations of laws of nature. "I want this" can be answered with "I know what you mean" "that looks real good"; "that would be great to have the next time we come in"; "let's put it on the list"; "let's plan to include that the next time we come"; Then, offer the explanation "right now we are looking for...."