



The Montessori OBSERVER

Inner Guidance

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IMS Moves Office Location

Effective December 1, 2003, the IMS offices will be relocated to 8115 Fenton St., #304 Silver Spring, MD 20910. The Society's telephone numbers, email and web site address remain unchanged.

This new location in Silver Spring is due to building renovation at the Society's prior location at 912 Thayer Ave., which has been the Society's physical location since 1979. Please direct all future regular mail correspondence to the Society's new address at 8115 Fenton St., #304, Silver Spring, MD 20910.



Participants in the Vancouver, Canada Workshop — October 18-19, 2003

Montessori Workshops in North America

The Society's "Creating the New Education" workshop is a two-day experiential learning event designed to improve Montessori teaching skills through inner preparation. Conducted by Lee Havis, IMS executive director, the various events here are the most recent in the series of over 100 such workshops that have been held throughout the world since 1986.

Montessori Workshops

*Learn Montessori Teaching Skills
Inner Preparation for Montessori teaching*

Albuquerque, NM

March 13-14, 2004

Newburgh, NY

March 27-28, 2004

Sacramento, CA

April 24-25, 2004

Vancouver, Canada

May 8-9, 2004

Boise, ID

May 22-23, 2004

Washington, DC

June 5-6, 2004

Chicago, IL

June 19-20, 2004

Boston, MA

September 4-5, 2004

Toronto, Canada

September 18-19, 2004

Kansas City, MO

October 2-3, 2004

*For full cost and registration details,
contact: IMS, 8115 Fenton St. #304, Silver
Spring, MD 20910. Tel. (301) 589-1127.*

Anaheim, CA

October 4-5, 2003

Participants in this workshop came from throughout the state of California and elsewhere to develop and improve the practice of Montessori teaching in the Pacific coast region of the United States. Havis presented a basic analytical framework for using specific practical techniques to resolve many common problem situations with children.

The workshop discussion challenged participants to question their understanding and sense of reality in relation to children — to practice techniques that may seem at first quite contrary to ordinary logic and common sense. Havis said 'we cannot always trust our instincts, feelings, beliefs, understanding or perceptions about children. So, I think it's particularly important to separate ourselves from such emotionality at times of stress — to use objective reasoning and scientific analysis to more effectively judge what particular action would be most consistent with laws of nature. I think this objective scientific approach will lead us more reliably towards the ultimate emergence of the child's true nature.'

Vancouver, BC, Canada

October 18-19, 2003

The *Montessori Day Care* in Vancouver (**Virginia Chater**, Dir.) sponsored this workshop to continue the learning and development of Montessori teaching skills achieved at the first Vancouver workshop in April 2003. Parents, teachers and other educators attended this event from throughout the northwest region of North America.

Havis presented and demonstrated various specific teaching techniques within a framework of analysis to *control the environment, not the child*. He emphasized that we must employ this framework in a flexible manner, always adapting and adjusting the timing and use of our techniques to the ultimate authority of infinite and eternal laws of nature.

Havis noted the positive value of simple observation with children. He stated however "While Montessori teaching is usually passive watching children from a stationary position at some distance from the children's activity area, we must still sometimes practice a more active type of observation to become fully aware and resolve the particular situation."

Cont'd. on Page 3, Col. 3

Inner Guidance

by Lee Haviv

"Nature offers an interior guidance, but to develop anything in any field, continuous effort and experience are required."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.221

Successful Montessori teaching requires a focused attention and considerable practical experience to always follow the elusive inner guidance of infinite and eternal laws of nature. We can make many mistakes in applying the pertinent techniques and skills to "control the environment, not the child" — particularly in moments of stress, impatience or frustration. While we may think we are following the inner guidance of nature, this may only be following instead our distorted and limited prejudices and self-deceptive logic — inner attitudes that lead us away from serving the child's true normal being of love, joy and peace with others.

Inner Attitudes

"...we must check those inner attitudes characteristic of adults that can hinder our understanding of a child."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Secret of Childhood*, p.153

Our basic sense of reality is ordinarily bound to conform to critical experiences of pain, fear and neglectful treatment during early childhood — experiences that become engrained within our personality as deep-seated restrictive attitudes and beliefs for life. As adults, we tend to project such detrimental inner attitudes on children through various patterns of negativity and abandonment. Montessori teachers must therefore overcome and control the expression of such illusion and prejudice with children — creating instead an environment committed to free their true normal development.

Illusion and Prejudice

"...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.233

We ordinarily project our personality on children as a drama of incomplete and unresolved feelings from our own painful past childhood experience — a struggle for power and control that is the customary form of adult-child relationship in conventional society. Unconsciously, we communicate this illusion and prejudice to children through such means as irrational rules and adult-centered teaching. Traditional teachers usually justify this repressive activity as adult responsibility that is necessary to conform the child to the needs and interests of the existing social order.

Adult Responsibility

"It is said that the mind of a child is empty — without a guide and without laws of its own. Adults, therefore are supposed to have the great and complete responsibility of following it, guiding it and commanding it."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Formation of Man*, p.465

Traditional education views the child as lacking any reliable inner guidance for its own proper mental formation — the child being seen as empty or having evil tendencies we must control through various forms of teaching and help. Ordinary teaching therefore exerts a god-like adult responsibility over the child's whole education and development, to repress and divert expression of its inherent instincts for self-creative development. By contrast, Montessori teaching trusts the child's inner teacher to guide and direct all learning and education.

Inner Teacher

"...the child...has a teacher within himself...this inner teacher also follows a program and a technique of education...we adults by acknowledging this unknown teacher may enjoy the privilege and good fortune of becoming its assistants..."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Formation of Man*, p.46

Montessori education views the child as having an unerring inner plan of creation in perfect harmony with the child's own unique place, time and social group. Adults can however, certainly assist this natural inner teacher, by providing a supportive external environment committed to such principles as (1) *Observation* (2) *Individual Liberty* and (3) *Preparation of the Environment*. These Montessori principles give direction and focus to our efforts to help the child's vital work of formation during the critical period from birth to about the age of six.

Work of Formation

"...this delicate work of formation...the little child carries on in the depth of a profound psychological mystery, under the tutelage of an inner guide..."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.16

The young child has a uniquely absorbent mind that enables it to acquire vital mental faculties through environmental experience — intimately incorporating such experience directly into its whole personality for life. Montessori teaching provides a well-prepared environment that supports this type of fundamental work of human formation. Without this prepared environment, the young child cannot properly proceed along its road to perfection in life.

Road to Perfection

"The child who cannot yet obey an interior guide is not that free being who sets out to follow the long and narrow road to perfection."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.247

From birth, the young child normally seeks to construct its mental order through sensorial interaction with objects in its environment. We must therefore offer an environment that allows the child to follow this normal road to perfection, by removing all obstacles that would otherwise interfere with the child's full and free self-directed activity. Of first importance in such Montessori teaching is to help the child return to its own inner guidance of nature — to normalize itself through profound concentration on some particular object of interest in the physical environment.

Cont'd on Page 3 Col 2

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Lee Haviv, Executive Director

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Moment of Peril

by Lee Havis

HANDLING INTERRUPTIONS

When the teacher is giving a lesson to one child, she must handle interruptions that occur from others with their disorder misbehavior or other expressions of need for her attention in the environment. (See **Observer**, September 2003). In this *moment of peril*, the teacher must weigh the relative merits of staying with the current lesson, or leaving this activity to deal with the interruption from the other problem situation.

Montessori teaching is responsible to properly prepare the total environment – to judge what actions to take in each new moment of time, based on the best interests of the entire group of children. The teacher must therefore make these judgments based on a present moment analysis of the needs of the total situation. Such judgment is best applied by establishing priorities for attention; e.g., (1) physical harm to child (2) physical harm to materials (3) fantasy (escape from reality).

Based on logical priorities and analysis of the total environment in the present moment, a teacher would therefore readily leave an academic lesson with a child, to deal with a misbehavior situation elsewhere involving a child hitting or grabbing another child (physical harm to child – highest priority). At such times, the teacher may interrupt the present lesson with a brief word, such as “excuse me. I’ll be right back”, to deal with the more pressing priority elsewhere in the environment.

When the potential interruption is a child quietly pretending to be a spaceman or pet dog (fantasy), the teacher may choose to complete her lesson with the current child first, before dealing with this low-priority situation elsewhere. If the teacher will make sure to look up and around the classroom on a frequent basis, she will usually find that she can give many useful “eye contact” lessons with other children – without allowing undue interruption to her present lesson with a particular child.

As the teacher creates an overall calm and orderly observation of the entire environment, she will find that the children gradually learn to solve their own problems by helping each other and making their own independent efforts – rather than by verbal dialogue and direct interaction with the teacher herself.

Inner Guidance

Cont'd. from Page 2, Col. 3

First Importance

“To care for, and keep awake, the guide within every child is therefore a matter of first importance.”

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.92

The primary aim of ordinary education is to impose a curriculum of pre-determined subject matter on children – to obey the teacher's instruction as applied through whatever force and control there may be. In Montessori education however, the matter of first importance is not curriculum, but rather the child – to awaken its own natural inner guidance by offering a wide range of well-ordered physical objects that will stimulate interest and spontaneous activity in the environment. Such materials can provide a most reliable guidance for many forms of constructive sensory exploration and experimentation.

Reliable Guidance

“Reliable guidance, and the possibility of checking as we go, are the indispensable conditions for getting anywhere.”

Dr. Maria Montessori
From *Absorbent Mind*, p.227

Montessori materials provide young children with an opportunity to directly experience the order and harmony of physical reality. Such materials provide a reliable guidance to the child's process of self-teaching, which is carried out directly with the materials themselves. Children normally follow an internal sense that guides them in this process to use just those particular objects that conform to their individual needs and interests of the present moment.

Internal Sense

“...normal persons, although entirely ignorant of the laws never transgress them, owing to an internal sense which guides them.”

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Spontaneous Act. In Ed.*, p.326

Children naturally seek out materials that afford them the opportunity for learning through the guidance of nature. A mysterious internal sense directs this process in the child, without the ordinary need for conventional rules and other forms of external adult control. In Montessori education, adult and child collaborate together to follow those laws of nature that support the perfect cosmic plan of all creation.

Laws of Nature

“...the children find their guide in the laws of nature.”

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Formation of Man*, p.345

The young child is particularly sensitive to the complete order of nature that unifies all being into a single interrelated plan of creation. With children, we cooperate with

Cont'd. on Page 4, Col. 1

Montessori Workshops

Cont'd. from Page 1, Col. 2

Stroudsburg, PA

November 1-2, 2003

This workshop was held in the Pocono Mountain region of eastern Pennsylvania, and was attended by educators from the states of Pennsylvania, Virginia, New Jersey and New York. **Barbara Gumpfer**, director of the nearby *Growing Concern School* (Tannersville, PA), provided local support and leadership for this event.

Workshop discussion directed considerable attention to the nature of the child's inner guidance – focusing on how this guidance shows itself in specific external behavior. Havis emphasized that the child's true self-directed guidance will naturally lead the child to a quality of perfect order, harmony and wisdom that is far beyond our ordinary sense of reality or what is possible in human expression. He noted “our proper role in support of this true natural teacher is to serve only as its assistants, to create a suitable environment by removing detrimental influences and obstacles in our personality that would otherwise result in many forms of negativity and abandonment with children.”

Providence, RI

November 8-9, 2003

This event was the second held in the New England region of the United States, and included the participation of persons from the states of Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New York, Virginia, New Hampshire, Vermont and Connecticut. **Mary McElroy**, director of the *Children's House School* (Providence, RI) initiated this event, and provided important local support and coordination for its successful operation.

Workshop discussion brought out the critical need for group support, cooperation and accountability from others in achieving successful Montessori teaching with children. Havis noted “too often we block out communication and association with others, because of fear of negative judgment or out of an undue regard for manners and politeness. However, we can only make progress in Montessori teaching by honest mutual discussion, observation and awareness of our own hidden inner errors. We must therefore seek out and encourage this type of critical dialogue with others, to correct our errors, and expand beyond our existing level of knowledge and skill in the field.”

Cont'd. on Page 4, Col. 2

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The Montessori



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Cont'd. on Page 3, Col. 2

this vast cosmic plan by following those laws of nature that allow the child to return to its true normal state of being. Then we can observe how a truly free child will follow its own inner guidance to bring about a whole new and better human personality in the world.

A Free Child

"When we speak of a free child, we mean one following the guidance of that nature that is powerful within hum."

Dr. Maria Montessori

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

Montessori teaching applies a principle of 'individual liberty' with children that allows them to pursue their own spontaneous interests and needs of the moment. A free child will accordingly show such qualities that are consistent with its true nature, including spontaneous self-discipline, order, love of intellectual work, attachment to reality, and complete harmony with its entire environment. This new *normalized* child will act with true independence and an amazing serenity and joy — without regard to the presence of any supervising adult authority.

Serenity and Joy

"The children in our schools have proven to us that their real wish is to be always at work...Following an inner guide, the children busied themselves with something which gave them serenity and joy."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Absorbent Mind*, p.184

Dr. Montessori's approach is to scientifically observe the child, to discover and free this being for true normal development. We can recognize this normalized child by its serenity, joy, order and harmony with others. However, such a visional new child only emerges as we ourselves practice the pertinent skills and techniques of Montessori's new educational approach — that distinctive way of being that follows the perfect inner guidance of universal laws of nature with children.



Participants practice 'distraction' technique at IMS workshop; observer (left), teacher (center), child (right)
— Ft. Lauderdale, FL, November 15-16, 2003

Montessori Workshops

Cont'd. from Page 3, Col. 3

Ft. Lauderdale, FL

November 1-2, 2003

This workshop was held in the South Florida region, and included participation from teachers and other educators from throughout the state. The last such IMS event in this region was in February 2001 in Tampa.

Participants in Ft. Lauderdale explored in some depth the benefit and value of reducing the ordinary active-dependent functioning of the adult with children. Havis emphasized how teachers could use 'eye contact' from a stationary position to reduce or eliminate the occurrence of much misbehavior and disorder among the children.

Havis also noted "Dr. Montessori warns us that an over-active presence or reactive correction to a child's mistake may severely limit the opportunity for a successful independent solution. Quite often, we make matters worse through our active intervention. Using neutral 'eye contact' alone we will always improve the situation, and may even totally resolve the misbehavior without any further involvement."

Messages to IMS

October 23, 2003
Boise, ID

Dear Lee,

Heather and I enjoyed the workshop and have started implementing some of the techniques that we had not used previous to the workshop. There is always something new we can learn as educators. I love the word "watch". It is so powerful. Thanks again Lee.....

Lynn Butler

Participant in Vancouver, BC, Canada workshop
(October 18-19, 2003)

October 22, 2003
Anaheim, CA

Dear Mr. Havis

I thank you from bottom of my heart for choosing to visit our Montessori in Anaheim, after the weekend seminar at Ramada Inn in Anaheim California.

It was amazing how generously you want to share your wealth of knowledge with other Montessorians. I truly appreciate all the pointers you personally gave me throughout the morning when you visited our Montessori. You showed me how & when to handle each situation with the kids...

Thank you & wishing you success always,
I remain yours, sincerely

Shiromi Samaranyake

Participant in Anaheim, CA workshop
(October 4-5, 2003)