



The Montessori

OBSERVER

Practical Life

Published by the International Montessori Society • 8115 Fenton St. #304 • Silver Spring, MD 20910 USA • Tel. (301) 589-1127



Participants in the Albuquerque, NM Workshop — March 13-14, 2004

Workshop in Albuquerque, New Mexico

On March 13-14, 2004 the Society conducted its latest *Creating the New Education* workshop in Albuquerque, NM. Teachers, parents and other interested educators attended this event from the states of New Mexico, Colorado, Arizona, Texas and Rhode Island. **Arthur Merson** of the *Sandia Montessori School* in Albuquerque provided key local support and coordination for this event.

The workshop discussion focused considerable attention on the mechanics of changing from conventional to Montessori teaching. **Lee Havis**, IMS executive director, led the discussion, stating the main distinction as "conventional teaching is being according to bi-polar personality expression (abandonment-negativity) and Montessori teaching is being committed to infinite and eternal laws of nature."

Havis also noted that shifting from conventional to Montessori being involves a specific type of *inner preparation* — adjusting our thinking to control the environment, not the child. He said "The IMS workshop offers the pertinent technology and knowledge for what to do, which is the first step. However, you must then choose whether to actually do it with children or not."

At the workshop, participants engaged in various practical exercises to demonstrate the use of specific techniques and protocols. Havis indicated "If you practice these techniques with children, positive changes will occur. This alone may be sufficient to motivate further efforts and experiments leading finally to the critical experience of the normalized child."

Havis also emphasized the difficult problem of following laws of nature beyond the point where the children are generally calm, well-behaved and obedient. He said "children can only concentrate and normalize when the adult influence is completely removed from the environment. Most schools never get to this fully normalized condition because the teachers are satisfied with less, and are unwilling to move into a situation where they become completely unnecessary and unimportant to the children."

After the workshop, Havis and several others from the workshop visited the Sandia Montessori School to observe and consult with staff about applying workshop techniques directly with children. The Society hopes to continue working with participants from this workshop, to extend the favorable progress achieved so far from this first New Mexico workshop.

Technology of Montessori Teaching

Since 1986, the IMS "Creating the New Education" workshops have been developing a considerable body of knowledge about the practice of Montessori teaching. **Lee Havis**, IMS executive director, is now seeking to consolidate this knowledge into a single text, to make it more widely available to the general public.

The text entitled *The Technology of Montessori Teaching*, will contain all main elements of current workshop information, including ten specific techniques to resolve various types of misbehavior scenarios to *control the environment, not the*

Cont'd. on Page 3, Col. 3

Montessori Workshops

*Learn Montessori Teaching Skills
Inner Preparation for Montessori teaching*

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

Philadelphia, PA
August 21-22, 2004

Boston, MA
September 4-5, 2004

Toronto, Canada
September 18-19, 2004

Kansas City, MO
October 2-3, 2004

Houston, TX
October 30-31, 2004

Miami, FL
November 13-14, 2004

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



Practical Life

by Lee Havis

"The carrying out of a practical life affords an abundance of exercise...it is natural exercise, since man ought to have some object in view when he moves."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Discovery of the Child*, p.81

Dr. Montessori viewed practical life as an integral aspect of her unique new education for the normal development of children. She recognized that simple everyday objects and activities could often most effectively focus and stimulate the young child's constructive work in harmony with infinite and eternal laws of nature. The Montessori environment therefore provides such exercises as pouring water, fastening buttons and other familiar practical life activities to support the young child's normal education in movement during its most formative period of development.

Education in Movement

"One of the most important practical aspects of our method has been to make the training of the muscles enter into the very life of the children so that it is connected with their daily activities. Education in movement is thus fully incorporated into the education of the child's personality."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Discovery of the Child*, p.79

Young children instinctively seek to move around and explore the environment according to their own inner instincts for self-directed development. Montessori teaching supports this spontaneous education in movement by providing a range of stimulating opportunities for their constructive physical activity. Each child can freely choose from among the materials provided whatever most responds to its own particular interest of the moment.

Interest

"Finally, the time comes in which the children to take an interest in something; usually, in the exercises of practical life..."

Dr. Maria Montessori
From *Absorbent Mind*, p.255

The young child has a uniquely absorbent mind that effortlessly incorporates experiences of practical life into its whole basic mental formation for life. We can however only see this inner plan of creation as it expresses itself outwardly through the child's interest in tangible physical activity. Such interest is most evident in what the child looks at and touches in the environment — a point of contact with reality that fixes the child's attention to work, which may then well lead to deep and prolonged concentration.

Concentration

"The power to concentrate on something...occurs with the exercise of practical life."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.255

Simple practical life materials readily draw a young child's attention, because they are so well-known from ordinary use at home. In the Montessori environment, young children naturally gravitate to these activities, which can then engender a profound concentration in the child to signal the beginning of a whole new state of normal development and learning in life. This is the event that Dr. Montessori described as normalization.

Normalization

"The transition from one state to the other always follows a piece of work done by the hands with real things, work accompanied by mental concentration. This psychological event...we have called by the technical term 'normalization'."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.186

Children usually enter the Montessori environment in a state of inattention, disorder and fantasy — the ordinary behavior that reflects the corresponding dysfunctional conditioning of conventional society. In the Montessori environment, this dysfunctional behavior disappears however through the event of normalization — a moment of profound concentration when the child's true normalized nature emerges with such qualities as spontaneous self-discipline, attachment to reality and eager interest in self-directed learning. Montessori teaching supports this normalizing work in children by providing an ample variety of stimulating practical life materials.

Work

"The simplest exercise of practical life will lead the little wandering spirits back to the solid earth of real work, and this reclaims them."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.245

Young children follow the perfect inner guidance of nature to explore and interact with their environment in a constant state of spontaneous activity. This is the work of basic formation that occurs most powerfully in the early years of life. Before the age of about six, the child works with physical objects primarily for the purpose of developing and perfecting its basic inner being for life.

Purpose

"The objects that are used for practical life have no scientific purpose."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Discover of the Child*, p.81

Whereas adults work to gain some outward change in the environment from their effort, the young child works primarily for an inner purpose to build up basic mental faculties of order, precision and clear rational thought. The simple exercises of practical life most effectively serve this internal purpose, by offering the young child effective means to focus attention on constructive goal-directed activity with physical objects. The Montessori environment must therefore provide a well-organized arrangement of these common, everyday materials, assuring that each one offers a stimulating motive for the child's focus of sensorial activity.

Cont'd. on Page 3, Col. 2

Look for the
May Observer
featuring
SCIENCE

ISSN 0889-5643

The Montessori Observer
published by

INTERNATIONAL MONTESSORI SOCIETY

8115 Fenton St. #304

Silver Spring, Maryland 20910

Tel. (301) 589-1127 • e-mail: havis@erols.com

Worldwide Web:

<http://www.wdn.com/trust/ims>

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.

IMS ADVISORY BOARD

Elizabeth Hainstock, Educator, Author
Dr. R. Orin Cornett, Professor Emeritus
John Bradshaw, Author, Public Speaker
Donald E. Seymour, Author, businessman

SUBSCRIPTION

Subscription to this *Observer* publication may be obtained by requesting Society membership, which is open to all individuals for a \$20 annual fee. Society members also receive a subscription to the *Montessori News* and other membership benefits.

ADVERTISING

Advertising space is available for services and products relating to Montessori education. Market-place ads are \$7/line. Position and placement ads are \$20 each and will be set and edited by the Society to conform to space requirements. Write for the Society's advertising outline for details about design advertising rates.

© IMS, 2004

Moment of Peril

by Lee Havis

Making Noises

Four-year-old Walter makes loud, wild noises in the classroom — imitating animal screams and mechanical devices, in a repetitive, mocking tone. This then provokes similar disruptive behavior in others. The teacher has cautioned Walter to use an "inside voice", and has modeled quiet speaking; however, she still sees no significant improvement. What to do?

Walter is certainly the hub child in this scenario, which involves the detrimental influence of *other children* as they imitate Walter's negative behavior. The *adult personality* is also detrimental, due to the teacher's reactive, negative attention to Walter's misbehavior. In general, it is best to remove the obstacles in other children first, through such means as distraction, eye contact and clear direction focused on reality in the present moment.

For the adult personality, the essential drama comes down to a sort of power-struggle in the adult-child relationship. The loud, negative language is Walter's reactive feelings of fear or hostility towards the environment, perhaps a carry-over from loud, judgmental language of parents at home.

In the classroom, the teacher must certainly avoid any reference to the child's noisy, wild language. Even a frown or suggestion to use a quiet "inside voice" will likely draw negative attention to the behavior. In speaking to Walter, the teacher must therefore use only *safe words* in implementing such techniques as clear direction, questioning and reflective language.

Safe words include phrases such as 'where does this go?', 'What are you doing?', 'What do you think about that?', and 'Come over here, I have something to show you'. The teacher must also avoid any comments about Walter's tone of voice or wild noises, focusing instead on the factual substance of what he says, particularly to any words of feelings he expresses in the process of the conversation.

If the child answers with a noise, rather than words, give it no attention, but instead repeat or change the clear direction or question in a quiet, calm tone of voice. Eventually, this repetition of basic Montessori teaching techniques will help Walter become more calm, and return to a normal tone of voice and behavior with others — particularly as he finds some interesting work with materials.

Cont'd. on Page 4, Col. 3

Practical Life

Cont'd. from Page 2, Col. 3

Motive

"...practical activities are simply an external incentive to the educational process, they provide a motive and urge the child on to organize his movements."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Discovery of the Child*, p.92

The young child normally perfects itself by completing cycles of physical activity with those materials that most conform to its inner needs and interests of the moment. Even the simplest practical life activity for pouring, scooping or fastening buttons on a frame can serve as a powerful motive for a young child to deeply concentrate its attention and interest to work. Young children often first find this motive for work in activities for care of the person.

Care of the Person

"In the care of the person the first step is that of dressing and undressing."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Dr. Montessori's Own Hand*, p.53

From infancy, the ordinary young child has direct experience with many types of activities for care of the person, e.g., dressing, washing hands, hair grooming, bathing and toileting. We can duplicate some of these same activities for use in the Montessori environment through such means as dressing frames for fastening with buttons, snaps, hooks, bows, etc. Young children also naturally seek out activities for care of the environment, which we can duplicate and provide as well in a useful, systematic manner.

Care of the Environment

"...practical life...includes such things as setting the table with great care, serving the meals, eating properly, washing the cups and plates, and putting away pots and pans."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Discovery of the Child*, p.82

Young children have seen their parents clean, prepare food and arrange objects on a regular basis at home. We can set up these practical life activities for care of the environment in such specific exercises as pouring liquids, grasping objects, using transfer devices, folding cloth, and following steps in simple food preparation and table washing routines. When these exercises are displayed on trays that children can choose from open shelves, the children gain the added advantage of precise and exacting use of the hand.

The Hand

"The education of the hand is particularly important since the hand is the organ of the mind, the means which the human intelligence uses to express itself."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Discovery of the Child*, p.284

Practical life activities generally involve

Cont'd. on Page 4, Col. 1

Technology of Montessori Teaching

Cont'd. from Page 1, Col. 3

child. Havis states "such techniques as eye contact, distraction and clear direction are vital for effective Montessori teaching. However, they have been little noted, poorly understood or totally unknown outside the context of the IMS workshop."

Havis believes that much understanding of Montessori teaching has deviated from its original simple function to allow the emergence of the child's true nature in the world. He says "from the beginning of this scientific new education in the early 1900's, Dr. Montessori gave surprisingly little attention to the precise mechanics and technology that teachers must practice to employ her approach. The current text will therefore fill a long-standing gap by providing substantial practical knowledge."

The new publication will present Montessori teaching as a scientific way of being committed to laws of nature, allowing the child to freely express its own perfect inner guidance for self-directed normal development. The content will include such specific topics as the three Montessori principles, ten basic teaching techniques, analyzing misbehavior scenarios, starting procedures, protocols of good lesson presentation, and safe words. It will also provide many practical examples and applications to demonstrate the use of various techniques to resolve a variety of common problems that arise in Montessori teaching with children.

Havis emphasizes the focus of this technology on normalization, to help primary (2-6) level teachers in dealing with

Cont'd. on Page 4, Col. 3

Magical Moment

Loud Talking in the Car

By Esther Rupert (Martinsville, IN)

I was driving two brothers home the other day — with two of my own children. The two oldest boys were sitting in the back of the car and their noise level was incredible...I suppressed the urge to say 'Keep it down, boys', and started doing as Lee had advised someone in a workshop 2 years ago — talk about what you see around you and keep talking until you engage their attention.

At first I felt foolish, because the boys in back were obviously not listening, but I did keep up a running commentary on what I could see. Eventually the noise subsided and the boys also became engaged in observing their environment. I also played a bit dumb on directions to the brothers' house and, as expected, the one in the back took great pleasure in telling me where to turn. By the time we had arrived, everyone was much more calm and orderly than when we started, and I didn't have to utter a negative word. Yea! Thanks, Lee.

Return Service Requested

8115 Fenton St. #304 • Silver Spring, MD 20910 USA

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 3875
Silver Spring, MD

OBSERVER

The Montessori



Practical Life — Cont'd. from Page 3, Col. 2

great precision and considerable hand-eye coordination. The hand is therefore central to how the young child learns through its senses during early childhood. A young child may repeat many times some simple handling activity to refine and perfect the pertinent skill or action — a repetition that occurs most significantly with deep concentration in the event of normalization.

Repetition

"Exercises in practical living alert a child to the many actions he carries out during the day."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Discovery of the Child*, p.92

The young child tends to repeat those movements that are most familiar in everyday practical life. Such repetition perfects the child's skill in some detail of coordinated movement, developing as well a basic inner order and harmony of being. Montessori teaching helps children construct themselves in this manner through the materials, at times by showing the use of such materials in the form of a brief lesson presentation.

Lesson Presentation

"...the presentation of these materials...introduces the child to them but nothing more. The important activities begin only later."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Discovery of the Child*, p.96

Children normally wish to see how to use even the simplest items of practical life, before attempting to do the task on their own. The child will then directly ask for a lesson presentation in words, or show specific interest for such instruction by touching the material while looking at the teacher. The teacher's role in this process is only to introduce the basic movement or action involved in the work, and then move away to allow the child to freely continue on its own thereafter.

Teacher's Role

"A teacher, after she has shown the sensorial stimuli to the children and taught them their use, should seek to withdraw herself from the environment."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Discovery of the Child*, p.97-98

Montessori teaching must avoid unnecessary or excessive proximity, teaching or help to the child while giving instruction on the use of some particular piece of work — following always the basic guidance of such fundamental principles as (1) Observation (2) Individual Liberty and (3) Preparation of the Environment. The teacher's role in this process is primarily indirect, to approach to give a lesson only when the child is showing a clear basis of interest in this type of direct instruction. Our presence therefore aims mostly to observe from a stationary position outside the activity area of the children, to allow plenty of room for them to concentrate and normalize through their own work with such activities as practical life.

Messages to IMS

December 15, 2003

Key West, FL

Dear Lee:

We are planning on a one a month discussion and practice and lots of feedback. Some immediate feedback was about using the simple technique of reflective language: one Mom used it with her young teenaged daughters and stuck to it through one situation and was amazed at the results...I think it is going to take some time to sink in but I keep asking the parents and keep on leading them back to the #1 rule of engagement! (no negative language...)...Lee, your workshop has brought me back on the path: we have something good and I'm going to stick with it, develop and refine the skills that will help the normalized child to emerge, shedding cumbersome layers of personality and ego in the process! I am very excited!

Sylvie Turner

Participant Ft. Lauderdale, FL workshop
(November 15-16, 2003)

Moment of Peril

Cont'd. from Page 3, Col. 1

The teacher will also help to control the adult personality around Walter, by encouraging Walter's parents to apply effective Montessori teaching techniques at home. Show the parents how to model a quiet, positive and respectful tone of voice when speaking with Walter. Ask them to agree to avoid expression of any negative attention or judgment to Walter about his making noises or other types of misbehavior.

Running and Pushing

The teacher notices that 5 year-old Jerry is often the center of negative energy in a group — running and pushing others at every opportunity. Getting in a line, Jerry pushes to the front or runs ahead if possible. Other children tend to imitate this behavior, which brings the whole group quite regularly into a frenzy of loud, dangerous misbehavior and disorder. The teacher has reminded Jerry to walk, and keep his hands to himself, but the negative behavior still continues. What to do?

Answer in *Observer*, March 2004

Technology of Montessori Teaching

Cont'd. from Page 3, Col. 3

children during this critical formative period of development. However, he indicated the publication would still provide ample commentary on special adaptations in such areas as elementary level (6-12), home schooling, infants and tutoring.

The new text aims to provide authoritative practical guidance for Montessori teaching, to help overcome the obstacles and detrimental influences of conflicting ideas and practices of conventional education. Havis believes this technology will serve as a reliable reference and effective study guide for regular practitioners, as well as students, parents and other educators at all levels of experience and background in Montessori education.