



The Montessori

OBSERVER

Human Nature

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Messages to IMS

October 15, 2004
Sullivan, MO

Hi Lee

I just wanted you to know how much our classroom has improved over the past few days. We have been using the tools and techniques that you taught us. The children are gaining our trust again and it is a relief to know that it does work. When I get to school, it is exciting to see the children engaged in their work. Thank you again for a great workshop in Kansas City....

Cheryl Burns

Participant in Kansas City workshop (October, 2004)

October 1, 2004
Toronto, Canada

Dear Leel,

The workshop went absolutely at a high note. I had a great chance to meet you and some dedicated educators...The idea of reflective language was taken enthusiastically by some of my colleagues. They told me several interesting moments when the reflective language worked in their classroom. That was amazing...Best wishes,

Elena Efimova

Participant in Toronto, Canada workshop (Sept., 2004)

September 24, 2004
Key Largo, FL

To IMS list:

Lee's workshop and techniques ... help me and the people around me be true to what I fell in love with: Montessori...I truly think Lee's techniques are the most helpful tools I have ever been given in my life as a teacher and a learner. The children are starting to trust me in a world where they are very distrustful of adults...I am looking forward to our next workshop...

Sylvie Turner

Participant on IMS on-line discussion list



Participants in the Kansas City, MO workshop — Creating the New Education (October 2-3, 2004)

IMS Workshops in Fall, 2004

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.

Kansas City, MO

October 2-3, 2004

The Kansas City workshop included teachers and other educators from Missouri, Nebraska, Kansas and Oklahoma. It focused considerably on how to control the detrimental influences of the adult personality in the child's environment.

Havis noted "we effectively control the environment only as we see this as clearly distinct from the child. Struggling with a misbehaving child, it is surprisingly easy to blur this vital distinction. In our mind, the child then becomes a projection of our own self-deluded mental perception of ourselves as children in the past."

Havis stated that in Montessori teaching the child is spiritual in nature – an unknown entity with its own inner guidance for perfect self-directed development. He said, "Any misbehavior we associate with the child is therefore only a reflection of our own personality. We can however effectively control and remove these personality projections by exercising a conscious control of what we say and do. We do this by applying such Montessori protocols as 'least amount of adult involvement' and 'no negative attention to misbehavior.' "

Kamloops, BC, Canada

October 16-17, 2004

Educators and parents attended this workshop from throughout western Canada. **Anna Cecchini** of Kamloops, initiated this event and provided key coordination of local participation.

Workshop discussion raised many challenging issues, including fantasy, the young child's inner guidance, resolving social disharmony among children and controlling the adult personality through such techniques as reflective language and questioning. Havis emphasized the importance of persistence in practicing the workshop technology, to achieve the ultimate aim of the normalized child.

Havis noted also the experimental nature of Montessori teaching, which requires constant attention to controlling and correcting errors. He said "applying workshop technology is precise and exacting, but still only an imperfect approximation to following laws of nature. We will invariably make mistakes as we conduct our various experiments. At times, we may feel frustrated, angry and fearful in the face of misbehaving children. Then, we must practice steady discipline to objective observation

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Montessori Workshops

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Human Nature

by Lee Havis

"...from the depths of the child's soul we can draw...some light that would clarify the obscure causes of human behavior...some said... 'How can you be so optimistic of human nature?'"

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Formation of Man*, p.29

Dr. Montessori found that man's true nature is really very different from the way it seems to appear in ordinary adult society. In 1907, she discovered this true nature by scientifically observing young children who showed such amazing normal qualities as spontaneous self-discipline, love of order, attachment to reality and eager enthusiasm for hard intellectual activity. Despite some 40 years of validating this fundamental truth of our basic human nature, it still remains in sharp conflict with the prevailing belief that people are inherently lazy and prone to evil and indolence.

People are Lazy

"Mentally as physically people are lazy, wanting only to enjoy life. The more than is admiration due to those who are different."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Ed. of the Human Pot.*, p 52

Throughout history, man's behavior has often been violent, immoral and unpredictable — a reality that has resulted in various forms of external social restraint through such means as police, courts, jails and the force of arms. The dominant concept here is that people are generally lazy and self-centered — a presumed aspect of our fundamental human nature. Based on this assumption, society has therefore established a conventional educational approach to children that aims to anticipate and control such inclinations towards decadence and inertia.

Decadence and Inertia

"It is believed that the child is naturally inclined towards a number of defects, towards decadence and inertia...that adults therefore, must stimulate and encourage him, correct and guide him all the time."

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

Adults ordinarily view children as having the same evil tendencies and weaknesses as they themselves — a natural tendency towards evil that justifies many types of control and manipulation through such means as rewards and punishments. Conventional education therefore establishes a complex web of rules and curriculum designed to counteract these apparently natural instincts towards decadence and inertia. Unfortunately, this approach sets up precisely the wrong conditions for

normal development to materialize as described by Dr. Montessori, and actually brings about the very destructive human nature that it purports to remedy.

Wrong Conditions

"...defects...come to human nature...caused by the wrong conditions which we human beings, we teachers, we modern society, have forced upon the children..."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Voice of Dr. Montessori*, p.150

Parents ordinarily deter normal human development in children by imposing a bipolar personality expression that either negatively represses their spirit through adult-controlled teaching or abandons them to escape into a world of fantasy. By contrast, Montessori teaching creates an alternative to these wrong conditions for children, providing instead a psychic space that frees the child's true nature to fully express itself in the environment. We can however only create these new normalizing conditions by restraining any of our actions that dramatize century-old prejudices about the apparently evil or unguided nature of children.

Century-Old Prejudices

"The results we have touched upon are not easy to obtain because enormous obstacles are encountered in century-old prejudices...so universal that it is difficult to have them recognized as such."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Formation of Man*, p.60-61

Montessori teaching approaches children indirectly, to control the environment, not the child. We must particularly control the adult personality in the child's environment, by avoiding those actions that reflect century-old prejudices about the weak, evil and dependent nature of children. Such prejudices direct us to act against the reality of the child's true nature under the guise of teaching or help — to run after the illusion of obtaining superficial effects in children such as good manners and academic achievement by any means whatever.

Run After Illusion

"To be contented with the imaginary, and to live as if what we imagine actually exists; to run after illusion, and 'not to recognize' reality, is a thing so common that scarcely is it apprehended."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Spontaneous Act. In Ed.*, p.265

A fundamental misconception of our human nature leads many parents and teachers to disturb normal development in children to gain some compulsory level of knowledge or obedience. This run after illusion damages the child's whole character and personality for life, undervaluing or

totally ignoring the destructive consequences to the child's true wealth of spiritual development and growth. Too often, our life in association with others aims mainly to conform to the restrictive demands of conventional society, rather than pursuing the higher purpose of the true well being of all.

Life in Association

"Life in association is a natural fact and belongs, as such to human nature."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.215

Our inherently social nature draws us to engage with others as a necessary means to achieve various personal goals and purposes in life. However, we can only achieve success in these efforts through the support and cooperation of a life in association with those who share our particular aims and values. Regrettably, we

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Lee Havis, Executive Director

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Moment of Peril

by Lee Havis

Parent Participation

By Lee Havis

Montessori schools must regulate and monitor the involvement of all adults with children on the premises — including the participation of parents who from time to time interact with children in various situations. When such parent participation violates the classroom commitment to laws of nature, the teacher must control and correct this detrimental influence of the adult personality. (See **Observer**, September 2004).

When parents engage in loud speaking, negative language, unnecessary help or excess movement around children at school, the teacher must immediately approach and interrupt this behavior. A phrase such as 'excuse me' and 'come over here' is most suitable at such times. If necessary, repeat this until the parent complies by moving away to a location outside the activity area of the children. In this position, the teacher can then safely counsel the parent about the pertinent behavior.

To initiate discussion, the teacher may politely and briefly describe how adults function indirectly with children, and ask permission to offer a few personal comments on the matter at hand; e.g., 'may I make a few comments about what you were just doing?' Permission given, the teacher should use simple, objective language to point out errors—describing or showing the most effective alternative action most consistent with good Montessori teaching technology. If the parent enters into an argument, the teacher should encourage the parent to continue observing from outside the activity area, assuring that there will be more time for discussion when the children are not present and needing of attention.

As a long-term measure, it is best to have parents sign a discipline policy when they first enroll their child, to establish the basis for all later discussion on the subject. The statement must include an agreement that the parent will accept correction if at any time the teacher observes any violation of the policy.

Contact the Society to obtain a free copy of its model discipline policy that provides a suitable basis for discussion with parents about their participation with children at school. With a friendly, open manner towards parents, and a clear understanding of the school's discipline policy, the teacher is well equipped to properly resolve and control any adverse parent participation that may occur with the children.

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HUMAN NATURE

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tend to choose negative forms of association, to play out a past drama of fear, pain and struggle from childhood — expressing this outwardly now by repressing natural feelings of love and friendship towards the children we supervise today.

Natural Feelings

"...natural feelings of admiration and love are effectively buried...because this phenomenon belongs to human nature...the whole of society forms a collective subconscious agreement when they remove and suppress the child."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Formation of Man*, p. 50

The ordinary adult personality is built up with an underlying defensive mechanism that protects us from feeling the pain of unresolved experiences in the past. This operates at an unconscious level, drawing us to act out and project a drama that replaces our natural feelings of love towards children, with a repressive type of control under the guise of duty or necessity. Montessori teaching must notice and control the outward expression of this inner drama — following instead a new way of being that frees the child's true nature to completely emerge according to its own inherent plan of creation.

True Nature

"The teacher must believe that this child before her will show his true nature when he finds a piece of work that attracts him."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind* p. 252

Dr. Montessori found that young children would show their true normal nature as they deeply concentrate on a piece of work that interests them. We must however create the right conditions for this normalization to occur, by applying a precise and exacting technology of scientific education. We can only do this by coming into harmony with infinite and eternal laws of nature — separating ourselves from the customary tenets of vanity in conventional teaching.

Tenets of Vanity

"...desire for the admiration of others, this pretense at dignity, the demands for gratitude from the child, all these are the tenets of vanity on the other side of human psychology, all these will vanish."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Voice of Dr. Montessori*, Jan '42, p. 8

Montessori teaching calls us to humbly follow the guidance of absolutely perfect laws of nature, which we can only approximate by such principles as (1) Observation (2) Individual Liberty and (3) Preparation of the Environment. These Montessori principles nevertheless can significantly help guide us away from the ordinary tenets of vanity with children that

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Montessori Workshops

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Kamloops, Canada — Cont'd.

— to locate and resolve those inner errors that are so central to our successful continuing progress with these skills."

After the workshop, Havis visited several area schools, to help staff implement the pertinent technology directly with children. He said, "Further progress depends on continuing inner preparation. Otherwise skills acquired at the workshop will be only temporary and partial at best. Kamloops has the advantage of being a relatively small, isolated community, where even a single school fully implementing the workshop technology could have a profound impact in the larger community."

Houston, TX

October 30-31, 2004

Educators attended this workshop from the states of Texas and Louisiana. The discussion considered many specific applications and examples of workshop technology with children from infancy to adolescence.

Participants showed particular interest in dealing with the various forms of resistance to the normalized child in society; i.e., communicating with parents and other educators to break through various prejudices and misconceptions about Montessori and the child's true nature. Havis challenged those attending to engage these issues more through personal action and practice with children, rather than directly through philosophical argument or abstract debate.

Havis noted "we best overcome the arguments and opposition of others to the truth of the normalized child by putting into practice the particular technology of Montessori teaching that achieves this 'impossible' result in reality. Once we ourselves are convinced of this reality through personal practice and experience, it is relatively natural to communicate this truth to others in an authentic, clear and effective manner. In the workshop technology, you have the specific terms and tools to rationally lay out the case for this 'new education' to anyone who is willing to listen, learn and understand."

Miami, FL

November 13-14, 2004

Teachers and educators attended this workshop from throughout the state of Florida. It focused considerable attention on applying the IMS workshop technology to children at the elementary (6-12) age level.

Havis noted the importance of using such language techniques as clear direction, reflective language and questioning

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Human Nature

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would otherwise make the adult personality central and controlling in the lives of the children we supervise. Following Dr. Montessori's scientific new education, we allow each child to pursue its own unique path of development in harmony the perfect cosmic harmony of the universe.

Path of Development

"It is not in human nature for all men to tread the same path of development...Every human personality has its own way of doing things."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Absorbent Mind* p.133

Nature guides the young child to create its being in perfect harmony with others. In a group, each child normally flows with this harmony by following a path of development that is given by a flawless teacher within itself. The future of humanity therefore depends most fundamentally on how this development occurs during the formative period for character development in the early years of life.

Future of Humanity

"parents...must come to appreciate the mission that nature has entrusted to them. They...control the future of humanity in so far as they give life to their children."

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Secret of Childhood*, p.215

The young child has a uniquely sensitive absorbent mind that will closely adapt its essential character and personality for life to the surrounding conditions in the environment. Parents and teachers therefore greatly influence the whole future of humanity by how they create these conditions for young children — either helping their normal development by following laws of nature or hindering this process by following the conventional pattern of negativity and abandonment. Dr. Montessori invites us to choose her scientific approach with children, to help mankind's true human nature fully emerge in the world to ultimately realize a whole new and better humanity.

MONTESSORI WORKSHOPS

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Miami — Cont'd.

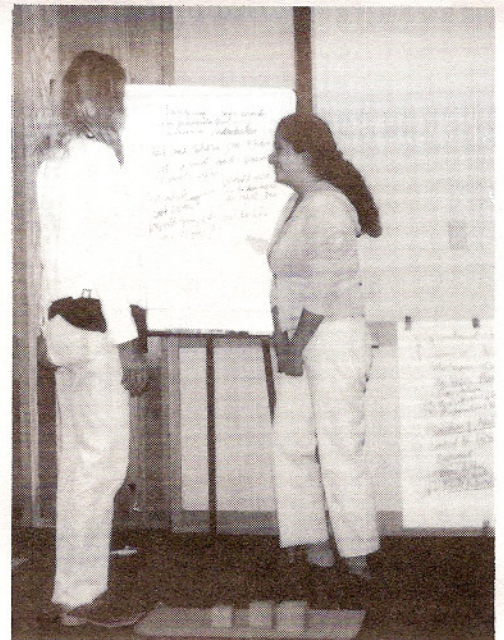
with older children who are more responsive and interested in this mode of communication to express abstract reasoning and normal social interaction with others. He stated "we must carefully control our words with children, to avoid drawing undue attention to our own opinions and feelings in the matter. This will allow children to solve their problems in a more self-directed, independent manner.

Havis indicated also the danger of specific types of verbal expression with children. He said, "Rather than answering specific questions or giving permission, we must use such means as reflective language and questioning. Using the workshop 'safe words', we can also avoid many destructive tendencies in our language communication with children."

After the workshop, Havis visited a local charter school, to help their staff better implement the various techniques, protocols, lessons and safe words from the workshop. He stated, "all staff must be made accountable first to following laws of nature, to assure that the positive initial learning from the workshop will actually manifest in practice."

Positions & Placements

Teachers: for toddler, primary and elementary classes. Immediate opening for candidate to start in early January. For more information, email: willowmontessori@hotmail.com or call 703-579-7979.



Penelope Bliss (left) and Maria Velosa (right) demonstrate lesson presentation procedures using 'safe words' indicated in chart behind them.

— Miami, FL IMS Workshop (November 13-14, 2004)

Moment of Peril

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Dependency on Teacher

Lucy is a kind, generous teacher who loves to see young children learning and benefiting from her well-prepared lessons about numbers and letters. Although the children too seem to enjoy this instruction from the teacher as well, they also show little imitative or self-direction in their learning outside of this controlling adult-child situation. When Lucy tries to turn their attention to solve their own problems, the children seem lost and abandoned. What to do?

Answer in *Observer*, March, 2005