



The Montessori OBSERVER

Environment

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Participants in the Honolulu, Hawaii workshop — *Creating the New Education* (February 12-13, 2005)

Creating the New Education Honolulu, Hawaii — February 12-13, 2005

This two-day workshop was held on the campus of Chaminade University in Honolulu, Hawaii. **Judy Iao**, local Montessori teacher, coordinated this event, which included the participation of educators from throughout the Hawaiian Islands.

Lee Havis, IMS executive director, led this event, which presented the Society's most current technology for Montessori teaching. Participants focused considerable attention on the nature and resolution of fantasy misbehavior in children.

Havis stated that fantasy is an escape from reality in the young child — a type of reaction to a condition of abandonment imposed by the teacher, associated with her own inner emotional drama of personality. He said, "we retain and repress painful experiences and feelings from childhood as a complex system of self-deception and psychological defenses. We can only fully resolve the resulting fantasy in children with faith and imagination in the child's true nature, which is fully attached to reality."

Havis indicated how such light techniques as eye contact and proximity usually best work to resolve fantasy in children over time. He said, "we may also at times use heavier techniques such as questioning when the lighter ones are not sufficiently effective. A questioning safe-word phrase such as "what are you doing?" will sometimes be most useful to expose the hidden feelings of pain and fear at cause in the fantasy."

Consultation in Nova Scotia, Canada

On January 12-13, 2005, **Lee Havis** conducted a school consultation at Harbour View Montessori School in Sydney, Nova Scotia. **Michelle Van** organized this event as a way to improve Montessori teaching at her school, and widen understanding about Montessori education in the surrounding region.

This consultation visit included a training seminar for interested teachers in the area, and a meeting for the general public, which included many parents from her school. Havis used these meetings to present basic technology of Montessori teaching, showing specific practical examples of such techniques as eye contact, proximity and distraction.

Havis emphasized the scientific nature of Montessori teaching, to conduct experiments to remove detrimental influences around each child. He said "we must particularly control our own presence in the child's environment, avoiding a dependency relationship with children. We do this by ordinarily positioning ourselves outside the children's activity area, only interacting in accordance with the protocols of good Montessori teaching. In this way, we can more easily recognize and control mistakes in the context of being committed to laws of nature."

R. Orin Cornett Dies **IMS Advisory Board Member**

Dr. R. Orin Cornett, IMS Advisory Board member for many years, died recently in Laurel, MD of a heart attack at age 89. Since the 1980's, Dr. Cornett served as a loyal and interested associate of the Society, particularly in support of the Society's efforts to achieve fair treatment in the government recognition of Montessori teacher education.

Dr. Cornett was former assistant commissioner in the US Office of Education, where he was instrumental in developing the original recognition standards for accreditation of postsecondary education. He also served as vice president of Gallaudett University, where he invented and developed an innovative aid for hearing impaired students, known as cued speech. Dr. Cornett's cued speech system has been favorably employed in the field of Montessori education to enhance the learning of phonics with children of all different hearing capabilities.

Montessori Workshops

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The IMS workshop presents most current technology for following laws of nature with children. It includes techniques, protocols, safe words and lesson presentations that anyone can use to create conditions for complete self-directed normal development in children as described by Dr. Maria Montessori.

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- Cooperative touching • Questioning •
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Email to — havis@erols.com

Environment

by Lee Haviv

"What is most characteristic of our system of education is the emphasis that is placed upon the environment."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Secret of Childhood*, p.110

Most educators agree that the environment is very important in Montessori education; however, there yet remains great confusion and difference of opinion over its exact meaning, nature and function. Unfortunately, Dr. Montessori gave only a limited idea of her unique learning environment that allows children to return to a state of perfect self-directed normal being in peace, order and harmony with others. Fortunately, teachers now have new technology they can use to help them accurately recreate the exact essential normalizing environment that Dr. Montessori provided in her first Children's House in Rome, Italy in 1907.

First Children's House

"The environment in which the first Children's House had their origins must have been extremely favorable, since the surprising results obtained during those first years have never again been equaled."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Discovery of the Child*, p.37

Dr. Montessori began her work as a scientific study of children, allowing them to freely use various self-directed learning materials designed by Eduard Seguin many years before. In her first Children's House experiment, she observed that children deeply concentrated on these materials, coming into a state of spontaneous self-discipline, order and complete harmony with the environment. Through further research, Dr. Montessori confirmed the consistency of these changes, and set about trying to recreate this special environment that allowed these profound changes to naturally occur in children.

Special Environment

"The child becoming incarnate is a spiritual embryo which needs its own special environment...the spiritual embryo needs to be protected by an external environment that is warm with love and rich in nourishment, which everything is disposed to welcome, and nothing to harm it."

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

Dr. Montessori described the environment she created only generally as scientific observation and following laws of nature. We must therefore now look deeper to find the exact parameters of her special environment, to reliably duplicate these same conditions with children today.

Such parameters certainly differ from those of the hostile environment of conventional teaching, which is sadly so widely embraced by many professional educators in the field.

Hostile Environment

"...the child has not been able to actualize his primitive plan of development because of the hostile environment he encountered in his formative period."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Secret of Childhood*, p.155

Dr. Montessori observed that young children are extremely sensitive to the environment, intimately absorbing it into their whole being through their sensory experiences. She viewed conventional teacher-directed education as a hostile environment for normal development, particularly during the child's critical early years of basic character development. Such conventional teaching subjects the child to a fear-based adult environment, which continues defective personality formations from one generation to the next.

Adult Environment

"An adult environment is not a suitable environment for children, but rather an aggregate of obstacles that strengthen their defenses, warp their attitudes, and expose them to adult suggestion."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Secret of Childhood*, p.109

The ordinary adult environment represents a complex web of camouflaged fear, deceit and illusion. Little children will instinctively incorporate these conditions into their whole personality for life through the workings of their absorbent minds. After the age of about six, the child loses this absorbent mental faculty, then viewing the environment as only a mysterious entity that fundamentally represses its true normal self-expression.

Mysterious Entity

"The master of all is a mysterious entity. The tyrant is all powerful, like a god. It is the environment that swallows up and crushes the man."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Formation of Man*, p.13

The individual human being must contend with a massive underlying environment of negativity and abandonment in the world. This mysterious entity actually reflects our own inner negative conditioning from childhood, which is externalized as a drama of fear, violence, dependency and illusion in society. We tend to avoid, deny and disregard the inner nature of this reality because of a psychological quirk in the make-up of our human personality.

Psychological Quirk

"Because of some psychological quirk, adults are little concerned with preparing a proper environment for their children."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Secret of Childhood*, p.2

Montessori teaching aims to control the environment around children, which most notably includes the teacher's own personality. Human nature however has a psychological quirk that resists the type of self-awareness that is necessary for effective control of the adult personality. We must therefore overcome this serious inner obstacle if we are to properly prepare the environment for the child's normal development as described by Dr Montessori.

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Lee Haviv, Executive Director

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Moment of Peril

by Lee Havis

Dependency on Teacher

The teacher here wants to remove a dependency relationship she senses with children in her lengthy lesson presentations (See *Observer*, November, 2004). She realizes she must follow more closely the protocol 'least amount of adult involvement'; however she does not want to abandon children in the process either.

Of course, the teacher must shorten her lesson presentations with materials; to be sure they only provide the most basic introduction possible to show their proper use. She must also only give such lessons when there is a sufficient 'basis of interest'.

The 'basis of interest' protocol directs the teacher to make lesson presentations with materials only with a green light signal of (1) child asking in specific words or (2) touching a specific piece of work while looking at the teacher. We assume this basis of interest also in misbehavior lessons, which come about through using the technique of distraction or basic ordering of the environment relative to practical life.

The teacher must therefore generally stand and observe outside the activity area of the children, using such verbal techniques as reflective language and questioning with children who approach her at times for undue involvement with their activity. The teacher must not leave this position for lesson presentations with materials if it would violate the protocol 'well-being of the total environment'.

The 'reflective language' technique has the teacher return the problem to the child, by stating back the same words as the child; e.g., (child) "what is the answer to this problem?" (teacher) "What is the answer to this problem?" With questioning the teacher can guide the child to a more self-directed, independent solution; e.g., (child) "will you help me with this work?"; (teacher) "who else could help you with that?"

Following the pertinent techniques and protocols, the teacher here can effectively remove her dependency relationship with children, without leaving the children in a condition of abandonment. In this way, the children gain their solutions less through interaction with the teacher, and more through their work with each other and the self-directed learning materials.

Fantasy or Work?

Four-year-old George spends a lot of time on the same simple piece of practical life work, which he seems to manipulate

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Adult Personality

"Adults are also part of a child's environment...They should not be an obstacle to a child's independent activities, nor should they carry out for them those activities by means of which a child reaches maturity."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Secret of Childhood*, p. 110

Montessori teaching is a way of being committed to laws of nature — a special psychic space for children we refer to here as the Montessori environment. Distinct from our being as adult personality, it is a spiritual context that is likewise distinct from the tangible environment we must control around each child, consisting of (1) physical objects (2) other children and (3) adult personality. The teacher must particularly control her personality, which ordinarily represents the greatest obstacle of all in the environment.

Greatest Obstacle

"...the teacher can be the greatest obstacle of all..."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p. 341

The adult personality is hard to control because it is difficult to notice and so subtly pervasive in all its automatic, reactive expressions. The teacher must therefore use such tools as 'safe words' to overcome the common tendency

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Practice exercise using distraction technique to resolve misbehavior scenario at the IMS workshop in Honolulu, Hawaii (February 12-13, 2005)

Messages to IMS

February 14, 2005
Honolulu, HI

Dear Lee
Thank you for a wonderful, enlightening weekend...Look forward to reading your book...

Ms. Shayna
Participant in Honolulu, HI workshop
(February 12-13, 2005)

November 30, 2004
Kingston, NY

IMS list:

"...Getting rid of circle this first thing was an immediate stress reliever. That was such a teacher control time. I had to admit it but I think that we felt that we needed it to use up time so there would be less work time that we had to be in control of! So getting rid of that first circle time was great advice and highly recommended...We are getting our personalities out of the classrooms, using eye contact, proximity and reflective language..."

Ronnie Hazzard

November 2004
Tavernier, FL

Dear Mr. Havis,
Your workshop in Miami was very enlightening. Looking for the inner guidance and seeing it at work in my son has brought light to a new aspect of our relationship. Thank you!

Debbie Vorndran
Participant in Miami, FL workshop
(November 13-14, 2004)

November, 2004
Beaumont, TX

Lee:

I attended your workshop (Houston, TX, October 31-31, 2004). Your presentation of being committed to the laws of nature, controlling the environment, not the child, analyzing scenarios, applying techniques, disobedience and the beginning of polishing the environment, proved very beneficial to myself as I went back to the Montessori school and applied the techniques I learned from your seminar. Not only was I surprised, the children were as well...Thank you for an enjoyable learning experience."

Shalini Monga
Participant in Houston, TX workshop
(October 30-31, 2004)

September, 2004
Perth, Ont. Canada

Hi:

...I am training myself and my assistant to follow what I have learned. I am on the alert and catch myself every time I stray. I am working out how best to translate the ideas and techniques for each situation that falls outside the specific examples you gave. I have always thought of the classroom as a lab of learning, both for me and for the children, and so it is easy for me to try and test out new good ideas. The children are happier and more independent than before I went to your workshop.

Lorri Lavender
Participant in Toronto, Canada workshop
(September 18-19, 2004)

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OBSERVER
The Montessori



Teacher showing sensorial materials to child at the Harbour Valley Montessori school — Sydney, Nova Scotia, Canada

Moment of Peril

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without deep concentration. The teacher wonders if his activity is fantasy or work, and what she should do to find out. If it is fantasy, she wonders how to resolve the matter in this situation. *What to do?*

Answer in *Observer*, May, 2005

Reflections

By Wendy Lieberman

Reflecting on her experiences with children applying the IMS technology presented at workshop, Boise, ID — May 22-23, 2004. Reported to IMS list, January 30, 2005

Applying Proximity

...I noticed how sensitive the children were to my motion. I noticed one time that I just shifted weight from one foot to another and there was a reaction by the children. I noticed that I would just take a couple of slow steps towards some children misbehaving and they would calm down.

One time in particular, there were four children engaged in some quiet fantasy. I slowly, cautiously approached. I stopped and waited every couple of steps. I finally sat in a stool next to the children. They hadn't looked up at me once that whole time I was approaching, but I was sure they sensed I was coming. Then I waited.

One child looked at me. Another child touched me. Then 3 out of the 4 got up and got out work and started doing it without me saying a word or touching a thing. It was awesome.

ENVIRONMENT

Cont'd. from Page 3, Col. 2

towards harmful negative or judgmental language with children. She must also work to overcome the equally harmful tendency towards abandonment, which occurs if children are left in a purely passive environment.

Passive Environment

"Our concept of education of children thus differs not only from those who do everything for a child themselves but also from those who think that they can have the child in a purely passive environment."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Secret of Childhood*, p.198

The teacher must at times use such active techniques as *proximity* to create an effective Montessori environment; i.e., moving closer to interact with children when they are involved in fantasy or other misbehavior. She must certainly not relegate the children to a passive environment of idle play and escape from reality. The teacher instead provides a wealth of self-directed learning materials to meet the needs of normal children for stimulating intellectual activity.

Normal Children

"In the surroundings that we provide...excited fantasies and restless movements disappear...(the children) calmly face reality and begin to perfect themselves through their work. They become normal children."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Secret of Childhood*, p.156

Since 1907, teachers have largely failed to create and sustain the original Children's House environment because of a fundamental lack of reliable knowledge and technology in the field. The Society is now making this technology available through workshop training and other types of teacher education. With this technology, anyone can now conduct proper experiments with children, to ultimately create the unique normalizing environment required in Dr. Montessori's vision of a new education.