



The Montessori

Understanding

# OBSERVER

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## IMAC Accrediting Activities

Since 1994, the International Montessori Accreditation Council (IMAC) has been actively accrediting Montessori teacher education programs through two review committees; i.e., the IMS Review Committee for programs affiliated with the Society and the Generic Review Committee (GRC) for non-IMS programs. Each committee has specific criteria within broader inclusive standards that apply to all IMAC accredited programs.

The Society's correspondence course is presently before the IMS review committee study for renewal of its IMAC accreditation. Serving on this committee are **Aaron Evans**, Director of *Morning Glory Montessori* (Houston, TX) and **Donna Curtis**, IMS course graduate, now teaching in Bitburg, Germany.

The GRC committee is presently evaluating the self-study report of the GEAR Innovative Montessori Institute in Bangalore, India. Committee members are: **Lee Havis**, IMS executive director, **G.S. Pitigala**, Montessori educator in Centreville, VA and newly appointed **Judy Iao**, Director, *Montessori School of Venice* (Venice, Florida). Since 1992, Ms. Iao has been active in Montessori teacher education in Russia, Hungary and Czech Republic.

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Participants in the IMS 'Creating the New Education' workshop in Boise, Idaho, October 15-16, 2005

## Montessori Workshop in Boise, Idaho

On October 15-16, 2005, the Society conducted its 'Creating the New Education' workshop in Boise, Idaho. **Wendy Lieberman**, owner and director of *Independent Child Montessori School* (Kuna, ID) provided local coordination for this event. Attending were educators from the states of Idaho, Oregon, Utah, Colorado and Rhode Island. A group of educators registered to attend from West Africa could not participate because the United States government denied them visas to enter the country.

**Lee Havis**, IMS executive director, led participants in a presentation of the latest technology for Montessori teaching. He included examples of how to use various techniques, protocols, lesson presentations and safe words in many practical situations with children. Participants engaged in active exercises and dramatic role-play scenarios to directly experience the use of the workshop technology in practice.

Havis especially emphasized the importance of distinguishing between the child and the environment, to effectively apply the approach of *control the environment, not the child*. He said "We must clearly recognize that the child is not its physical body or personality. In truth, the child is a spirit that may well be the hub of some very problematic misbehavior scenario. The child's physical body and personality are actually aspects of the environment you may need to actively control

at times through such techniques as *co-operative touching*. This process may well become quite physical and dramatic when there is extremely violent disorder."

The workshop discussion also brought out the importance of flexibility in applying knowledge to present moment reality. Havis noted, "Real-life experience with children is infinitely more complex than our ability to fully understand. We cannot therefore use the workshop technology as a rigid set of rules to follow exactly the same in every situation. Fortunately, it contains a built-in flexibility to guide you to set priorities in an effective practical manner; e.g., the main global protocols *well-being of the total environment* and *least amount of adult involvement* having greater weight than others. This will help moderate and control the ordinary tendencies to over-emphasize certain actions based on restrictive habits and fixed understanding of the past."

Before and after the workshop, Havis spent a considerable portion of time in consultation with staff of the Independent Child Montessori School. The issue of abandonment and use of the technique *co-operative touching* were given particular attention. He indicated his hope to work more closely with this school in the future. He said "I believe this Boise experience could be the beginning of great progress, direction and growth for the *new education* throughout the entire northwest region of the United States."

## Montessori Workshops

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

For full cost and registration details, contact: IMS,  
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# Understanding

by Lee Havis

*'The point of departure for a true understanding of our work is not to consider it as a method of education, but rather the contrary: our method is the result of having observed the development of psychological phenomena which had hitherto been unknown and unobserved.'*

**Dr. Maria Montessori**  
from *Discovery of Child*, p.326

Dr. Montessori urges us to understand her work and discoveries by observing and experimenting with children on our own in a scientific manner. However, there are many obstacles to this type of scientific observation due to the self-deceptive tendency to distort and limit Dr. Montessori's discovery of the child's true normal nature in 1907. We cannot therefore effectively understand how to create conditions for this new normalized child by just following the indications of incomplete research and limited ideas reported in the various publications she wrote on the subject before her death in 1952.

## Following Indications

*"It is not necessary that the whole of research be accomplished. It is enough that the idea be understood and the work be taken in hand following its indications."*

**Dr. Maria Montessori**  
from *Formation of Man*, p.21

We can only begin to understand Montessori teaching by recognizing its basic idea to observe children who are free to interact with materials prepared for their self-directed learning. Following these indications, you will still encounter unknown errors and inner obstacles to observing children due to the defective psychology of human nature, which lies deeply hidden within the adult personality. We must learn to observe a very misunderstood child who initially appears as a superficial personality already warped by destructive conditioning in the past and the continuing harmful influences of surrounding adult society.

## Misunderstood Child

*"An attempt is being made to transform education...all this, however, is being effected around the same figure of the misunderstood child who is seen through eyes distorted..."*

**Dr. Maria Montessori**  
from *Formation of Man*, p.73

The challenge in Montessori teaching is to observe the child as an unknown entity — a spiritual being that is totally distinct from its physical body and personality. This is the misunderstood child with its own perfect inner guidance for self-directed development — a child that does not even exist in the context of ordinary conventional society. In fact, all children

have an inherent inner urge for perfect order, spontaneously self-discipline, independence, attachment to reality and complete harmony with their entire environment.

## Inner Urge

*"...an inner urge had been...causing him to make an effort to understand..."*

**Dr. Maria Montessori**  
from *Ed. for a New World*, p.19

The young child possesses powerful natural instincts to directly experience the physical environment and intimately form these experiences into a basic context of understanding for life. Before the age of about six, this inner urge functions through the child's uniquely absorbent mind to build a stable personality with its firmly fixed sense of reality. During the early years, this basic formative development occurs naturally through spontaneous movement and interaction with physical objects and other people in the environment.

## Movement

*"...the child uses his movements to extend his understanding. Movement helps the development of mind, and this finds renewed expression in further movement and activity."*

**Dr. Maria Montessori**  
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.142

The young child has a fundamental tendency to explore its environment by handling physical objects according to the direction of a mysterious guiding force of nature. This inner-guided movement brings about experiences that ultimately form patterns of thought and stable understanding as the child attaches words and meaning to these experiences. Montessori teaching supports the normal development of this understanding by giving children freedom to explore a wide range of materials designed for their completely self-directed learning.

## Freedom

*"If freedom is understood as letting the children do as they like, using or more likely misusing the things available, it is clear that only their 'deviations' are free to develop; their abnormalities will increase."*

**Dr. Maria Montessori**  
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.206

Montessori teaching applies the principle of individual liberty with children to allow them to interact with the environment according to their own particular needs and interests of the moment. This freedom however does not abandon children to 'do what they like', but rather to follow the normal direction of their own perfect teacher within. It offers children a wide range of opportunities to understand materials through their own inner faculties

and independent activity, rather than filtered through the ordinary distracting influence and presence of a controlling conventional teacher.

## Understanding Materials

*"The teacher...should explain the use of the material...She must be able to choose an object suitable for a particular child and place it before him in such a way that he understands it and takes a keen interest in it."*

**Dr. Maria Montessori**  
from *Discovery of the Child*, p.151

The Montessori environment aims to simplify the use of materials by isolating their variables to emphasize specific attributes of nature; e.g., size, shape, color, sequence, etc. Young children then come to understand these materials at the level

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Look for the  
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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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IMS ON THE INTERNET

An on-line IMS discussion group, *intmonsoc* (International Montessori Society) is available for anyone to join at no charge. To subscribe to this list, send an email to [intmonsoc-subscribe@yahoo.com](mailto:intmonsoc-subscribe@yahoo.com), and then follow instructions to request placement on the list.

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## Moment of Peril

by Lee Havis

### Eye Contact

The technique *eye contact* always helps to resolve misbehavior. However, this lightest of all polishing tools of Montessori teaching may certainly not be enough in every situation even if it is applied correctly in a non-judgmental, neutral and friendly manner. See *Observer, September, 2005*. The teacher here is finding that eye contact alone is inadequate in a *distraction* lesson presentation that involves re-directing a child away from some misbehavior scenario.

Using the distraction technique, eye contact is a signal that you have the child's attention for safe word *clear direction* 'come over here'. However, the child is only looking for a brief instant, and then returns to misbehavior. In this moment of peril, the teacher's eye contact is probably too light a polishing tool and must be combined with heavier techniques, such as *repetition, cooperative touching* and *reflective language*.

Repetition is simply doing the same technique over again until it works. For example, repeat the distraction technique as before by holding the abused object to get the child's attention, and then repeating the same clear direction safe words as before; i.e., 'come over here. Let me show you something'.

Beyond repetition, you may need to get a child's attention by the heavier polishing technique *cooperative touching*. This technique might involve getting attention by holding the child's physical body while gently guiding the child to resolve some problematic misbehavior of the present moment. This is most often necessary to overcome patterns of extreme abandonment in the past.

Of course, you will release hold of the child's body as soon as possible to resolve the misbehavior with lighter polishing techniques. You can then successfully use such technique as eye contact and patient waiting, following the protocol *least amount of adult involvement*. The danger of over-using heavy polishing techniques is to do greater harm in the situation, perhaps bringing about a negative and destructive power struggle with the child.

As children become more aware of reality, their behavior will certainly improve. You can then use the lighter techniques to get very good results all by themselves. Eventually, even eye contact polishing will be unnecessary as the children become so engaged in their own independent activities that they are happily oblivious to any adult presence at all.

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## Understanding

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of this basic order — a self-directed integration with laws of nature that comes through profound concentration with a piece of work that brings about the transforming psychological event of *normalization*. Unfortunately, this normalization rarely results in any long-term normalized behavior in children due to so much adult misunderstanding about its cause and effect.

### Cause and Effect

Human nature tends to confuse the superficial effects of some psychological event with its actual cause; e.g., assuming a child is normalized because it is well-behaved and obedient, rather than that it is well-behaved and obedient because it is normalized. Similarly, many confuse Montessori teaching with its superficial physical appearance and outward effects; e.g., presence of certain well-known physical objects, academic achievement, multi-aged grouping, certification or other forms of approval or recognition from others. Montessori teaching is actually a way of experiential understanding that is constantly expanding your knowledge and skill in following absolute and eternal laws of nature with children.

### Experiential Understanding

We can only follow laws of nature over time as a dynamic process of continuing new experiences in a context of growing understanding; i.e., understanding that leads to new experiences you create as you conduct experiments to *control the environment, not the child*. This process of experiential understanding aims always towards the perfection of present-moment normal being in children. In practice, you can best sustain this never-ending commitment to laws of nature by following scientific technology that closely corresponds with this experimental way of being with children.

### Scientific Technology

*"If science began to study man, it would not only succeed in offering new techniques for the education of children...it would further lead to a profound understanding of many human and social phenomena that are still enveloped in obscurity."*

Dr. Maria Montessori  
from *Formation of Man*, p.9

We can't directly follow laws of nature with children because they are beyond our ability to fully understand. However, we can employ less perfect means of techniques, protocols, lesson presentations and safe words that effectively approximate a complete commitment to these laws. Applying these tools of scientific technology is like writing the script of a new reality — a totally distinct and independent way of being from the automatic, reactive drama of existing conventional reality. Sharing and communicating this new experience of being with others projects it outwardly in the world as a new reality, to ultimately bring about a deep level of mutual understanding and unity throughout all humanity.

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## Messages to IMS

Step. 27, 2005 (England)

Hi all out there,

I attended Lee's workshop in Scotland and was totally fascinated by it. A lot has been put in practice and good results too..

Parkash Sungum

Participant in Scotland workshop (July, 2005)

October 20, 2005 (Kuna, Idaho)

Listers,

Wow! I had a wonderful experience when Lee visited our school before and after the Boise workshop...The workshop was also very good. It was a chance to share with others my experience and what I was learning. It also was good for reinforcing the parts of the technology I wasn't quite getting...I would like to have another one probably next year...I am more than ready for the emergence of the normalized child. I just have to keep working hard to allow it to happen."

Wendy Lieberman

Participant, Boise, ID workshop (October, 2005)

October 5, 2005 (Netherton, Scotland)

Hi Lee,

The technology...I'm very happy with the results...Making it a firm part of what I do and say all the time; it's a question of getting into good habits. I have found your suggestion for the sandpaper letters particularly useful; it makes so much sense to be word building.

Emma Wetherley

Participant in Scotland workshop (July, 2005)

November 2, 2005 (Wappingers Falls, NY)

Hi Lee,

I have been reading what the IMS list discusses...very interesting and I not only enjoy your insight...but find it extremely useful...if you publish this list...it would be a wonderful reference for teachers as well as parents to read...I save certain ones and often find myself returning to reread them.

Debbi Golden

Participant in IMS discussion list

## Reflections

By Wendy Lieberman

Wendy reflects on her experiences after consultation with Lee Havis at her school in Boise, ID at time of IMS workshop, October 15-16, 2005.

Reported to IMS list, October, 2005

### Hard Polishing

I was feeling a little worried about how little I have been concerning myself with the mistakes I have been making in the area of being too controlling or active with the children. Now I realize that those mistakes are insignificant compared to what I really need to work on which is controlling the other detrimental influences in the

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## Understanding

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### Mutual Understanding

"It is not enough to say that in humanity there must be mutual understanding. Conditions must be provided, so that man can develop in such a way that he is capable of mutual understanding."

**Dr. Maria Montessori**  
from *Four Planes of Education (AMI)*, p.71

Conventional teaching limits understand and experience to the bounds of prevailing culture and human nature — a pattern of reactive behavior that repeats the fundamental conditions of abandonment and negativity of the adult personality. By contrast, Montessori teaching creates an expanding condition for the experience of normal being — a new unconventional reality that is bringing about a comprehensive mutual understanding of complete peace, harmony and order for all. Happily, anyone can now successfully understand how to create these conditions in an experiential manner by simply applying the scientific technology designed and available for this purpose.

### Laboratory for Experimentation

Anyone who will adapt this method will make of every school where it is used a laboratory for experimentation."

**Dr. Maria Montessori**  
from *Discovery of the Child*, p.319

## Reflections

Cont'd. from Page 3, Col. 3

environment. I have heard Lee say, "the last and most difficult detrimental influence that you remove from the environment is the adult personality." That is the thing that is nagging me in the back of my mind.

Now I see I don't really have to worry about it too much. The other influences are so major that my little mistakes don't matter that much. I can solve those problems later. If I can stop the big obvious problems in the environment I will be able to move on to smaller and smaller ones. It is the process of polishing. You start very hard and become softer and softer. There is no point in using a soft cloth on a crusted rusty pot. That really frees me to worry about the big problems, the hard polishing I need to do. I am going the right direction. If I can just get them to stop trying to hurt each other I can move on to smaller problems.

### Cooperative Touching

I was under the mistaken impression that the child was its physical body. I was always very careful not to touch them except in the very lightest way and if they said, "no" I always backed up. This was a mistake that caused the children to not know what they were supposed to be doing. They had very little focus on reality because of it. I learned that with *cooperative touching* I am cooperating with the child's inner guide, which may be opposed to the child's personality, which may just be a reflection of evil.

Now I am doing a great deal of *cooperative touching*. I try to start by getting *eye-contact* and giving a *clear direction* and *repetition*, but if it is very important that the child does something I go ahead and use *cooperative touching* even if the child's personality is not cooperating. I see that it is important to make judgments about what is too much for me to do and what is too little. Now I think I have the ability to figure out what will work and what won't.

## IMAC Accrediting Activities

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Lee Havis has been closely involved in developing Montessori accreditation standards since the 1970's. He believes that the IMAC agency is showing how broad inclusive standards can assure program integrity without unduly stifling creative innovation and useful alternatives in the field. He said "this approach also helps to more clearly represent Montessori education to the general public."

The Society closely collaborates with the accrediting activities of the IMAC agency. For further information, contact IMAC: 301-589-1127 or email to: havis@erols.com.

## Moment of Peril!

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### Throwing Things

The teacher is dealing with five year old Brian who has established a pattern of throwing things whenever he becomes upset or angry in any way. She senses that her personality is part of the problem, because Brian usually looks at the teacher during this violent outburst with a look of gleeful defiance. The teacher doesn't know how the misbehavior pattern begins, but is concerned to avoid any power struggle once it is taking place. Unfortunately, Brian continues throwing things even while the teacher controls her personality through patient waiting and avoiding any negative attention to the child's misbehavior. What to do?

Answer in *Observer*, March, 2006