



# The Montessori OBSERVER

Beginning  
Conditions

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Child working with trinomial cube sensorial work at New Way Montessori School (Meridian, Idaho)

## 2008 Consultation at New Way Montessori School

Since January, 2007, **Lee Havis** has been conducting a series of consultation visits to *New Way Montessori School* (Meridian, ID) to study and improve the practical use of IMS technology with children. His latest visit, January 12-29, 2008, continued this field testing of the technology by focusing on controlling the adult personality to resolve various abandonment issues.

During the January, 2008 visit, Lee closely observed **Wendy Lieberman**, New Way School director, using the IMS technology with children in her classroom. He also directly supervised children at times to demonstrate specific skills and engage more fully in the practical learning experience.

The issue of abandonment arose especially at times of transition: at the end of the individual work period, lining up to come in from outside and getting settled for naptime after lunch. Wendy and Lee devised a two-teacher plan to deal with this issue by having one teacher directly supervise several difficult children while the other teacher supervised the rest of the group. Lee noted the successful results of this plan, which was later modified to function in a similar manner during the entire individual work period as well.

Following the consultation, Lee reflected on the particular difficulty of resolving abandonment issues due to its widespread

confusion with freedom. He said "In western cultures, freedom often means abandonment by letting children engage in idle fantasy behavior. However, resolving this problem is not a matter of imposing negativity instead. Rather, we must carefully distinguish between these two key detrimental influences of the adult personality, using the IMS technology differently as it applies in each situation."

Lee plans to continue consultation visits to the New Way School as needed in the future. He is using these visits to clarify and refine the presentation of IMS technology in his new book on the subject.

## Montessori Workshops

### *Technology of Montessori Teaching for the Scientific Approach to Normal Being*

The IMS workshop is a two-day weekend learning experience, featuring Lee Havis, IMS executive director, presenting the unique 2003 technology of Montessori teaching. This technology is precise practical knowledge for conducting the scientific approach with children that leads to true normal being as discovered by Dr. Montessori in 1907.

Workshops are scheduled according to local interest. Contact: IMS, tel. 301-589-1127; [havis@imsmontessori.org](mailto:havis@imsmontessori.org)

## Character Teaching in Nigeria

In January, 2008, **Kunle David Rotimi** joined the consultation board of Character Teaching (CT) in Nigeria. Since 1997, Kunle has been serving as principal consultant for Soreb Consultants Nigeria, an NGO providing educational and human resource services in this west African country.

At Kunle's suggestion, the CT project formally requested a letter of support from the deputy governor of Lagos State, Nigeria. Kunle plans to follow up this written request by direct, personal contact with the deputy governor. He has also agreed to contact other NGOs in Nigeria to obtain their support and participation in sponsoring an initial consultation visit to the country by Lee Havis, CT project director.

The CT project aims to overcome poverty by training teachers to use IMS technology to support true normal character development in children. In recent weeks, IMS has also received inquiries to initiate the project in Kenya and Sri Lanka.

## New Math Materials *Replacing the Seguin Boards*

In 1907, Dr. Montessori began her scientific approach with children using math materials that were originally devised many years before by **Eduard Seguin**. One Seguin device, the "Teens Board" uses large wooden boards, which Dr. Montessori combined with colorful golden beads to show the place value concept. In equipping the *New Way Montessori School*, **Lee Havis** has been seeking a more compact and uniform alternative to replace these bulky old Seguin materials.

Lee proposes to replace the Seguin Teens Board with a single compact tray of numeral cards, written numerals, and 10-base decimal counters. He says, "The layout for this new equipment is similar to the old Seguin Teens Board, except that the numerals are placed two on a card, instead of five on each wooden board as before. This new design is more uniform and compact, allowing children to easily carry the full set of materials from the shelf to the workspace in a single tray. Its format closely follows such protocols as *take out everything and enhance independence*".

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# Beginning Conditions

*"First stage of Montessori teaching with children who are new to the Montessori environment. With a new group of children, it lasts about two weeks, and includes a basic orientation to the order of the environment."*

**Lee Havis**

**Glossary of Montessori Terms**

Montessori teaching changes its intensity with children like a polishing process, moving from heavy to light techniques to control the environment through three distinct stages: (1) beginning conditions, (2) scanning and supervision, and (3) concentration. Stage 1 beginning conditions is heavy polishing, which you gradually lighten until arriving at the final stage 3 condition of full normal development. Heavy polishing in the beginning, however, is necessary to overcome a defensive attitude that many children have when they first enter the Montessori environment.

## Defensive Attitude

*"...the child of three...is a fighter on the verge of being vanquished; he has already adopted a defensive attitude that masks his deeper nature... All that remains active is a superficial personality which exhausts itself in clumsy movements, vague ideas, and the effort to resist or avoid adult restraint."*

**Dr. Maria Montessori**

from *Absorbent Mind*, p.51-52

With new children, you generally need to use such hard polishing techniques as *cooperative touching*, *distraction*, *clear direction* and *repetition*. Applying these techniques in an intense, vigorous manner helps to work through the hard defensive attitude that some children have acquired from conventional home-life conditioning. It is wise, therefore, to begin this hard polishing process with a private meeting for parent and child alone in the environment.

At this introductory meeting, offer the child some simple activity to do, emphasizing the protocol *be friendly, get acquainted*. Then, observe how the child and parent interact together, noticing especially any tendencies towards negative language, power struggle or dependency. In this way, you are preparing yourself to deal with the initial disorder that is likely to arise during the first few days of the total group experience.

## Initial Disorder

*"During the first days when a new school is opened, we may consider a certain initial disorder as characteristic...If, indeed, the pupils...are well-to-do children...they are very rarely attracted at first by the stimuli presented to them."*

**Dr. Maria Montessori**

from *The Advanced Mont. Method I*, p.68

At the first total group session, keep the children together as much as possible to help overcome any initial tendencies towards

disorder. Start each session with a group meeting, having all the children sitting on the floor in a circle. Then, show the children how to sit with hands folded, stand up with hands to side, walk in a line, and coordinate other ordinary body movements. Also, give the children introductory lessons in using the materials that you will later lay out on low, open shelves for them to use on their own.

You can also introduce songs and body awareness games to keep the children's attention on reality and present-moment activities. The proper idea of freedom now is quite restrictive, allowing the children to do only what is clearly within their limited range of knowledge and ability.

## Idea of Freedom

*"To let the child do as he likes when he has not yet developed any powers of control, is to betray the idea of freedom."*

**Dr. Maria Montessori**

from *Absorbent Mind*, p.187

Following the Montessori principle *individual liberty* aims to support the child's true normal development in harmony with laws of nature. This idea of freedom is, therefore, not a pretext to abandon children to idle fantasy, which is commonly the first impulse of ordinary new children. Since stage 1 polishing comes before profound concentration, you can interfere with children in many ways to direct them back to present-moment reality.

## Before Concentration

*"Before concentration occurs, the directress can do more or less what she thinks best; she can interfere with the children's activities as much as she deems necessary."*

**Dr. Maria Montessori**

from *Absorbent Mind*, p.254

Your first interaction with new children is often to interfere with their ordinary fantasy activity, showing them such basic skills as how to walk, sit, carry objects, push in a chair, and roll up a mat for work on the floor. Before concentration, this type of active adult instruction is necessary to orient children to the basic order they will need for later self-directed activity. Even as children begin to freely move around the environment, you must be carefully watching and directing them in almost everything they do.

## Watching and Directing

*"A teacher of experience never has grave disorder in her class because before she draws aside to leave the children free, she watches and directs them for some time...eliminating their uncontrolled movements."*

**Dr. Maria Montessori**

from *Absorbent Mind*, p.245

Following the initial group meeting, provide a brief individual work period for children to practice handling materials you have shown before. During this time, you are watching and directing the children to make sure they are interacting with these materials in a careful, proper manner. You must also be constantly encouraging and praising the children, pointing out their positive, successful efforts at every opportunity.

## Encouraging and Praising

*"The teacher...can have them do various exercises...for example, can say cheerfully, 'Let's move all the furniture today!' and work with the children, encouraging and praising them all in a bright and pleasing manner."*

**Dr. Maria Montessori**

from *Absorbent Mind*, p.254

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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@yahoogroups.com](mailto:intmonsoc-subscribe@yahoogroups.com), and then follow instructions to request placement on the list.

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## Moment of Peril

by Wendy Lieberman

### Running Away

The teacher has a problem with several children who run away when she tells them to line up to go inside (**See Observer, November, 2007**) It is a priority level 3 misbehavior scenario (fantasy), because it doesn't involve physical harm to children (level 1) or harm to physical objects (level 2). The primary detrimental influence to control in the environment is "other children", which is particularly difficult here since there are so many children involved. In addition, the hub child changes very quickly from one moment to the next.

The teacher is right to approach the children in fantasy to bring back the non-hub child most likely to favorably respond. However, her mistake is not completing her interaction with this child, since she leaves him alone in the line before he is settled enough to stay there on his own. The teacher is, therefore, abandoning this child, giving too light polishing at the critical *moment of peril*. This allows him to return to the group fantasy, which is simply too strong an attraction to resist.

To solve the problem, the teacher must intensify and prolong her polishing with the non-hub child. For example, she must use *cooperative touching* to initially interact with the child, saying "Take my hand", walking with him hand-in-hand back to the line. Then, she must stay with him for as long as it takes to be sure that he will remain there. During this time, she can still use *eye contact* and *patient waiting* on the other children not lined up, giving them a *clear direction* to come and line up also.

The teacher can test the child in line to see if he is really going to stay there by letting go of his hand. She must, however, still stay close enough to touch him if he starts to move away again. The teacher can also give a *clear direction* to help the child settle down more completely, for example, by saying "Keep your arms to your side" and "Face forward". This also helps other children stay in line by distracting them away from the fantasy activity of others. Gradually, the teacher can move away from the child to see if he will stay in place, using only *proximity* and *eye contact*. However, only when the teacher is certain that he will stay in line should she go to get another child.

Staying in line with the non-hub child tends to break up the group fantasy activity because it separates one of players from

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## Beginning Conditions Cont'd. from Page 2, Col. 3

Children naturally seek to bond with each other through vigorous physical activity. However, you must guide and coordinate this spontaneous social activity as much as necessary to prevent any undue physical harm. For example, show the children how to move tables and chairs to set up a special place for a group snack or lunch. Encouraging and praising the children in this process will help them stay focused and attentive to the present-moment task at hand.

A group snack activity allows you to show children how to eat a piece of fruit, place a cracker on their plate and pour juice without spilling in a neat and orderly manner. During this pleasant social activity, you can also show such basic skills as holding objects, sitting in a chair, cleaning the table, and throwing trash away in the garbage. These exercises all help develop care and respect towards others and the environment, providing also a basic orientation to the order and schedule of the day.

### Exercises

*"Some exercises are particularly useful, such as the one to put all the chairs and tables in their proper places without making any noise; to make a row of chairs and sit on them; to run from end to end of the room on tiptoe."*

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Absorbent Mind*, p.245

Young children naturally exercise their physical movement through vigorous interaction with each other, which you must closely supervise by using such techniques as *proximity*, *clear direction* and *cooperative touching*. In addition, during your regular scheduled group meeting, you must also show children the individual exercises for handling simple, basic objects with care and attention as well. Gradually, the children will begin to work with these practical life materials from the shelf on their own.

### Practical Life

*"The carrying out of practical life affords an abundance of exercise...By a habit of work a child learns how to move his hands and arms and to strengthen his muscles more than he does through ordinary gymnastic exercises."*

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Discovery of the Child*, p.245

In beginning conditions, the daily schedule consists of initial group meeting, individual work period, group snack and final group meeting. At these group meetings, you introduce a few simple practical life exercises every day, showing such basic skills as pouring, scooping, cleaning and dressing. During the individual work period, the children can choose to work with one of these exercises on their own. Doing these exercises, they begin to coordinate their movements, gradually becoming more settled and calm in their behavior.

### Calm

*"Now we see the class calm...The children come into contact with reality; their occupations have a definite aim, such as to dust a table, remove a stain, go to the cupboard, take a piece of apparatus, use it properly, and so on..."*

Dr. Maria Montessori

from *Absorbent Mind*, p.245-246

As children become more calm and orderly, you must shorten and finally eliminate the initial group meeting. Also, you will eventually replace the group snack with an individual snack activity for children to choose as they wish during the individual work period. Finally, the children begin working on their own free-choice activities as soon as they enter the environment. Following this period, there is, however, still a final group meeting to put all work away and transition to the next activity, such as outdoor recreation, lunch or going home.

Although stage 1 polishing may cover a two-week period, you can extend or shorten this time based on the progress and ability of the children in your group. You can also re-establish these beginning conditions any time a number of new children enter an ongoing program at once or when you are converting the whole group from a conventional classroom situation.

After *beginning conditions*, Montessori teaching enters stage 2 *scanning and supervision*. During this time, you are mostly standing in the corner of the room, watching and supervising the children in a relatively passive manner.

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## Messages to IMS

September, 2007  
Meridian, ID

IMS list:

I see that yesterday I allowed children to move a lot around the room without a purpose... Because of that, they started wandering right away and it became very difficult to resolve the fantasy scenario that they got into... I thought a lot about how I will handle that situation today. I am going to make sure that each child who comes in has work to do right from the beginning. I am going to approach them right away and if they don't have any idea what they are going to do I'll give them something or make sure they are sitting in one spot.

**Wendy Lieberman** (Wendy is describing her experiments with using IMS technology with children at the New Way Montessori School (Meridian, ID)

December, 2007  
Zrenjanin, Serbia

IMS List,

...I am reading every single mail I get from the IMS (list), and thanks to Wendy (Director, New Way Montessori School) we learn a lot. Tell her that she is heard all the way in Serbia. It is lovely that she describes the days when you are there. Keep teaching us.

**Sanela Jakovljević** (Participant, IMS Discussion List)

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## OBSERVER

The Montessori



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### Beginning Conditions

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#### In a Corner Watching

*"The children are moving about, each one fulfilling his own task, whilst the teacher is in the corner watching."*

**Dr. Maria Montessori**

from *Dr. Montessori's Own Hand.*, p. 59

Stage 2 polishing involves a long period of time that the children are working with materials on their own. Standing in a corner watching, you will then intervene only to resolve misbehavior or to present some piece of work to a child who is interested. Stage 3 *concentration* begins when children normalize, showing now the complete order, harmony, peace and self-discipline of true normal development. Then, you can look back to stage 1 polishing as the beginning conditions that led to the ultimate emergence of the normalized child.



Child working with new math materials that replace the old Seguin Teens Board. (New Way Montessori School, Meridian, Idaho)

### Moment of Peril

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the drama. When all the children do eventually line up, the teacher must then make sure they all stay lined up properly before going inside. If any children run away from the line at this point, she must start the process over again, bringing the children back outside, if necessary, to make the line once more until all are lined up and staying in line as they walk inside.

When children feel the order of the environment enforced in this firm, consistent manner, they will eventually line up on their own at the proper time.

#### Looking Around the Room

The teacher has a recurring problem. She tends to get overly involved with individual children and doesn't look around at the rest of the class for eye contact or to observe their behavior. This results in misbehavior coming up in the classroom that she is not aware of until it is very disruptive. She knows that this is a problem and yet she continues to make the same mistake over and over. What to do?

Answer in May, 2008 Observer

### Marketplace

#### Positions and Placements

**Montessori teachers:** Palm Harbor Montessori Academy (Palm Harbor, FL). 250 students, ages 1-year to 8th grade. Competitive salary with benefits. Fax or e-mail resume and letter of interest: Christine Varkas, Palm Harbor Montessori Academy, 2355 Nebraska Ave., Palm Harbor, FL 34683, (727) 786-1854; Fax. (727) 786-5160; www.floridamontessori.com, e-mail: cvarkas@gate.net

### New Math Materials

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The new place value math equipment also includes written words to match each number as well. For example, the word "eleven" matches with the numeral "11" and its respective quantity of one plastic ten rod and unit. Lee says, "Field tests with these materials at the New Way School show that children use them precisely as intended, with very good results".

Lee is also designing other math materials using the same compact, uniform approach. For example, he is replacing the "thousand chain layout" that uses golden beads for skip counting by tens with a set of colored tags and plastic counters, which all fit together in a single compact tray.

For dynamic addition and subtraction (the old "bank game"), Lee has designed another tray that holds all the necessary items of quantity, counting pieces and numerals. He says, "This work allows children to solve addition and subtraction problems from the most simple single-digit type to very complex three-digit calculations. The tray also includes compartments for holding specific written problems with answers on the back."

Lee thinks these new math materials will considerably improve on the old Seguin boards and golden bead material. He says, "These new designs provide more order, clarity and economy of space in the presentation of various math concepts to children. Hopefully, they will become more widely used by others as they are fully developed and field tested at the New Way School."