



The Montessori OBSERVER

Context and
Content

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Participants in the IMS International Montessori Convention in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia — May 30-31, 2009

2009 International Montessori Convention in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

On May 30-31, 2009, Lee Havis, IMS executive director, conducted a presentation of his technology of Montessori teaching at a gathering of some 400 educators in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Sponsored by *Success-Marks* (Malaysia), this event was entitled the *International Montessori Convention, 2009*, with its theme "Montessori Leading the Way in Reinventing Teaching and Learning." Attending this convention were representatives of over 20 nations in the Asia-Pacific region.

Lee's presentation was an abbreviated version of his ordinary 2-day IMS workshop, such as held recently in Pasadena, CA and Edmonton, Albt., Canada. It nonetheless included a slide-show with video clips of the technology in operation at the New Way Montessori School (Meridian, ID). The entire presentation was projected on a large viewing screen for easy, close-up viewing by all those attending, and was recorded on video for sale to interested participants.

Lee's presentation was warmly received by those attending, which included some who had attended his prior workshop in Malaysia 10 years before. Despite the large number of participants, he was still able to conduct several practical examples with members of the audience. All participants were given a 30-page study guide about the technology as a resource for practicing it in their own situations with children.

While in Malaysia, Lee visited several schools in the area. One, *Tasputra Perkim*,

was a day care training center for children with special needs. He also spoke to about 100 staff and students in the Department of Education at the SEGi University (Kuala Lumpur).

After the convention, Lee discussed plans to return to Malaysia in December, 2009 to conduct a series of further seminars and workshops to extend and develop true natural Montessori teaching in the region.



Lee Havis demonstrating IMS technology use with sensorial introduction lesson presentation at the 2009 International Montessori Convention in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia — May, 2009

Character Teaching *Progress update*

Sponsored by IMS, the *Character Teaching* (CT) project aims to overcome long-term cultural poverty by creating new conditions for true natural character development in young children. It is primarily active now in the initial planning stages in various countries through the efforts of local volunteers serving on the CT consultation board.

Pakistan

CT board member, **Abdul Reyman Sani**, Director, *Al-Sani Institute*, (Karachi) attended the IMS convention in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia along with one of his main staff members. At the convention, he presented two letters of support for the CT project in Pakistan, one from his institute, and one from another prominent educational NGO in Karachi, *Jamat Meerti Salawtan Pakistan*. To further support these efforts, Lee Havis, CT chairman, submitted a letter to the president of Pakistan and the mayor of Karachi requesting their support as well.

India

Sudev Suchan, CT board member in Karnataka state (Bangalore), met with the governor of his state on July 28, 2009 to explain the CT project and request his official support. The governor expressed his pleasure about the project and asked Sudev to meet with his staff to provide details. In Calcutta, West Bengal, **Sakyajit Banerjee** joined the CT consultation board. Sakyajit is on the staff of *Daffodil Buds Montessori school* in Calcutta.

Nigeria (Africa)

Rashidah Sulaimon joined the CT board in June, 2009 after having attended the IMS convention in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in May 2009. Rashidah is director of studies at the Ar-Rahman Montessori School in Lagos, Nigeria.

IMS Montessori Workshops

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
December, 2009

Technology of Montessori Teaching
for the Scientific Approach to Normal Being



Context and Content

by Lee Havis

"Something non-existent has to be produced, starting from nothing...and our minds find it very hard to grapple with this conundrum."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.174

As a science of the human spirit, Montessori teaching aims to bring about a whole new reality for true natural being in the world. This can be very difficult to understand, however, much less practice, due to long-standing confusion over its proper context and content. The mystery is that context is the 'nothing' of space that brings about the content of 'something' that is the child we can perceive and experience in reality.

While Montessori teaching can be a highly effective, scientific way to true natural being, this is only possible as it is carried out within its proper context. Ordinarily, however, it is recognized only for its content of specific terminology, distinctive materials, and particular organizational affiliation. Unfortunately, this content will not bring about the child's true nature if it is conducted in the context of conventional reality.

Conventional Reality

"The solidarity of adult society...assumes the power of suggestion and the appearance of an absolute truth on which all agree."

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

In conventional reality, the child's true nature isn't recognized because it doesn't exist in this context at all. For example, the word "normal" ordinarily means, at most, a child who is well-behaved and obedient — not the perfect normal order, peace, and harmony of being that Dr. Montessori discovered in 1907. Conventional Montessori teaching therefore limits the child's being to the restrictive, but understandable, context of personality or culture.

Montessori teaching that leads to the child's true nature only emerges in a context that recognizes its reality, which until recently, has been, at best, a psychological mystery, impossible to maintain over time. In such a vague and uncertain context, even the outward content of any aspect of this true natural reality doesn't emerge or sustain itself for long.

True Natural Reality

"If...it is discovered that the child is a great worker...who can learn by himself and who possesses discipline within himself, this seems to be like a fairy tale. It does not evoke surprise, it just appears utterly absurd. No attention is paid to this reality....It is impossible, it cannot exist."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Formation of Man*, p.48

In 1907, Dr. Montessori discovered a reality which has no meaning or existence in a conventional context. Infinite and timeless in nature, this new Montessori reality is only bound by laws of nature, which are beyond all human understanding.

Lacking a suitable context for understanding this true natural reality, efforts at creating it invariably lead to confusion and misinterpretation which finally degrades it into limited forms of expression that are dependent on personality or culture. In 1979, however, a new context for properly understanding true natural Montessori teaching came to light as a type of commitment to laws of nature.

Laws of Nature

"Life increases, becomes manifest, and perfects the individual, but it is confined within limits and is governed by insuperable laws."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Discovery of the Child*, p.61-62

While Dr. Montessori did recognize the primacy of laws of nature in her approach, she didn't fully understand or explain how to apply this knowledge in practice. For example, saying "do nothing" or "don't abandon children" is simply too broad and indefinite for effective practical use.

Likewise, describing laws of nature in terms of fundamental principles, such as *individual liberty, observation, and preparation of the environment* is still too imprecise and limiting as well. In the end, Dr. Montessori simply left the problem of contextualizing her discovery to others. Instead, she focused her attention on its outward content, consisting largely of various distinctive materials and the visible effects of the child's behavior.

In 1979, the discovery of Montessori teaching as a commitment to laws of nature, however, made possible its experiential understanding and scientific practice through controlling the environment, not the child. At its most basic psychological level, this creative way of being is a process of giving space for the emergence of the child's true nature.

Giving Space

"The usual conception of direct correction and suppression of defects is wrong...Correction is possible only by expansion by giving 'space', by opening up the means for the expansion of the personality."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Formation of Man*, p.36

In a conventional context, space for all being is bound by relatively fixed knowledge and expectations built on experiences of

the past. By contrast, the context 'commitment to laws of nature' is constantly giving space beyond what is known or experienced before. With the proper tools, creating this expansive context can be an orderly, objective process of controlling the environment around each child in question.

Controlling the Environment

"To ensure the psychical phenomena of growth, we must prepare the 'environment' in a definite manner and from this environment offer the child the external means directly necessary for him."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Spont. Act. In Education*, p.71

At the contextual level, Montessori teaching is a scientific way of being committed to laws of nature. In content, it is all you do in controlling the environment around each

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Look for the November 2009 Observer featuring *Patient Waiting*

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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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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, and then follow instructions to request placement on the list.

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Moment of Peril

by Lee Havis

Dependency

The teacher here realizes the negative effects of dependency patterns she has created with children. However, she is still unable to disengage from these repressive patterns without going to the other extreme of "abandonment." (See *Observer*, May, 2009) The solution to this *moment of peril* is to avoid either extreme of negativity or abandonment, following instead the path of commitment to laws of nature.

The teacher's problem is actually fairly typical of ordinary adult personality expression with children — shifting between abandonment and negativity, without really discerning the way to fully support true natural development of children in the present moment situation. The point of entry into controlling this bipolar personality expression is to focus on the disobedience issue, which seems to trigger all the other reactive patterns.

Analyzing disobedience, there are only two reasons for this to occur: (1) the child can't or (2) the child doesn't know how. Where there is a clear negative reaction to the adult presence, this usually signals a power struggle, and the reason for disobedience is "can't." In this situation, the teacher is right to "reduce her involvement"; however, she still must maintain an observant patient waiting, rather than going to the extreme of allowing children to escape into fantasy. Applying *patient waiting*, the teacher must stay alert to the child's behavior, and reenter the situation as soon as the child's attention is distracted from her presence. Then, use *repetition* and *proximity*, and, if necessary, heavier polishing with *clear direction* and *distraction*.

In abandonment, the disobedience to *clear direction* is for the reason "doesn't know how". Here, the correct response is to re-engage with the child by offering *clear direction* as before, except, perhaps, using the protocol *emphasize main point* — *isolate variable* to show the child what to do in a slower, more precise and exaggerated manner. In this way, adjusting her response in a flexible manner based on the right reason for disobedience, the teacher will eventually resolve the repressive dependency pattern without reverting to the other extreme of "abandonment."

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child by removing its detrimental influences that arise in other children, physical objects, and the adult personality. Since 2003, the content involved in this type of scientific Montessori teaching has now become greatly clarified by the emergence of a precise technology for its effective application.

The IMS technology of Montessori teaching now supplies the basic content for true natural Montessori teaching in the form of such techniques as *eye contact*, *proximity*, and *distraction*. Using this content with the contextual controls of 20 protocols then becomes the functional equivalent of following laws of nature. However, even with this clear, precise technology, confusion still remains by viewing the child as content, rather than contextually as spirit.

Spirit

"...in the birth of every child...a spirit enclosed in flesh comes to live in the world."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Secret of Childhood*, p. 29

In Montessori teaching, the child is an unknown spiritual being guided by perfect laws of nature. However, in a conventional context, this spiritual child is confused with its content of external behavior, physical body, and personality. Then, controlling misbehavior often becomes controlling the child through various forms of repression and manipulation under the guise of help or teaching. This fundamental confusion about the child as content rather than context makes communicating its true nature quite difficult, if not impossible.

Communicating Normal Being

"...it is impossible to discuss education without first establishing the basis for the discussion... we must speak of the liberated child whose condition of life is normal..."

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Child in the Family*, p. 71-72

The child's true normal being has never fully emerged with any permanence since 1907 due to lack of a sufficiently strong context for its understanding and perception. Absent this context, therefore, any normalized behavior in children appears to be accidental or as if caused by some external effect, such as a set of special materials or a particularly skillful teacher or parent.

Even with the 1979 context of true natural Montessori teaching, communicating what is normal being has been difficult due to the stubborn persistence of conventional reality and the lack of practical guidance for creating the distinctive Montessori context. Since 2003, however, the IMS Montessori technology has greatly simplified the process of creating this new reality for true natural being.

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Messages to IMS

June, 2009
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Hi Lee

I enjoyed myself attending the 09 International Montessori convention in Kuala Lumpur. Thanks for sharing the incredible technology...I did learn a lot of skills and it is really amazing when I saw the feedback from children...I remembered most the settling down activity...cross your legs, fold your hands...Now it becomes a routine for me whenever I want to start an activity...Of course, I wish to see you again in the future and looking forward for your next workshop.

Connie Tan

Participant, KL convention

August, 2009
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Lee

I have been running a Montessori school for the past 12 years and I never grow tired! But your technology was rather new, yet very interesting. I managed to practice on my 3 year old school children when they started to snatch...it was wonderful to see how they take after me, asking for something they want by showing a hand...it worked! I even told my school staff to model after me. This surely takes a huge effort but I know it works! Thanks again. Be waiting for you to come by again to teach me new things...

Grindyl Sia

Participant, KL convention

July, 2009
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Dear Lee Havis,

I feel so grateful that KL has its 1st Montessori convention finally. Your valuable presentations and lessons during that period were so fruitful to me as a Montessori teacher. I wish the relevant organizations would have these arrangements more often in Malaysia...

Kelly Loh

Participant, KL convention

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Asking a question from audience at the International Montessori Convention (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia)

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The Montessori



Context and Content

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Creating a New Reality

"The continuity of anything which nature has not fixed but which evolves gradually as a social pattern must do...is a creative operation which may come under our control"

Dr. Maria Montessori
from *Absorbent Mind*, p.174

Creating a new reality is a matter of acting in accordance with the conditions of that particular reality over time. As occasional or separate actions become consistent patterns and habits, the new reality acquires a certain permanence that others can perceive, understand, and recognize in its external form and expression. So, as long as you continue acting in harmony with laws of nature, the child's true normal way of being will eventually take on the permanent external form of personality for life by about the age of six.

Creating the unique Montessori context is now essentially a process of using a content of various techniques and lesson presentations under the contextual control of 20 protocols. Applying this IMS technology to assure the right context and content for Montessori teaching allows the child's true nature to fully materialize in the world.



Lee Havis visiting Tasputra Perkim, a day care training center for children with special needs in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (May, 2009)

Messages to IMS

Cont'd. from Page 3, Col. 3

June, 2009

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

June, 2009
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Dear Lee

Thank you...for your talk at our college. The techniques on dealing with behavior are most helpful and we use them frequently these days in our lectures. Just yesterday, for example, when the college students were practicing with the Large Moveable Alphabet, one of the students decided to play the role of the disruptive child and messed around with the letters. The group was asked about what could be done. Immediately, they adopted the technique of *distraction, eye contact and clear direction*....We also make frequent references in our lectures these days to "green light". In more ways than one, the information gained from the conference has enriched our lectures at the college...The lecturers also plan to share the techniques with our teaching practice students...When we visit the schools and see how they sometimes struggle to work with the children, we now have the language to discuss what went wrong and techniques to recommend for them to try out.

Carolyn Choo

Head, Department of Early Childhood Education
SEGi College Subang Jaya

Dear Lee Havis

Thank you so much for all the tips that you shared with us in the convention. I have been using the techniques and it is working with my children...There seems to be some peace and calm in the house lately and I'm so grateful to you for showing me the way...The other day my sister came over to my house and she commented that the house looked more settled now and that kids are being wonderful.

Vasanthi

Participant, KL convention

June, 2009

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Dear Lee:

Every day...I am more determined to develop further into your techniques of the New Technology in Montessori. I have no children yet myself but worked a fair bit with other children from needy and orphanage home. I am particularly interested to work with the special need children with this method...Hope to receive your guidance and be my mentor.

Michelle Wong

Participant, KL convention

Moment of Peril

Cont'd. from Page 3, Col. 1

Grabbing and Squeezing

In any conflict situation with children, 3 year-old Larry has the habit of grabbing and squeezing other children very hard. He seems especially violent with the youngest and most fragile children. Since Larry is large and strong for his age, his grip is extremely hurtful when it does occur. Although the teacher stays close by Larry as the hub child of the group, she is still unable to always protect other children due to his quick and unpredictable reactive behavior. What to do?

Answer in *Observer*, November, 2009