The Montessori Adult

Introduction
At the beginning of a human life, the means necessary for survival and the means necessary for self-construction – for self-development – must be taken from the environment; but the new-born individual is in the greatest state of dependency he will ever normally experience. His dependence greatly limits his capacity to actively seek these means of development – it limits his interaction with the environment. As we have seen, the young child is profoundly and indelibly affected by the elements present or absent in his environment, but has no control over which elements are present and little control over his direct access to them.

This means that one of his great developmental needs is the need for other, more mature humans to serve as his caretakers – mature humans who do have the capacity for effective interaction with the surrounding environment; who can control elements in the child’s immediate environment; and who can facilitate the child’s access to those elements necessary for his self-development - who can, in short, mediate between the child and the environment.

Under normal conditions, the human infant is born ready to interact with such caretakers – in fact, he is born ready and able to control caretaker behavior. He does this by communicating his needs, feelings, and motives, in order to gain access to necessary elements in the environment as and when he needs them. The linchpin of normal individual development, then, is the adult – the adult prepared and willing to respond in a care-taking relation to the child; prepared and willing to respond to the child’s communicated needs, feelings, and motives; prepared and willing to connect the child with experiences for development as and when needed from the environment.

1 AMI, “Directress/Guide/Teacher?” AMI Communications #2-3, 1988, pp. 58-59, for discussion of the difference between the use of the terms directress, guide, and teacher to describe the Montessori-trained adult working in the prepared environment. It concludes: “... all three terms may be correct depending on the situation for which they are used. ... it should always be defined what is actually meant (by a term when used). As one word can have so many different meanings and connotations all over the world, a universal term to indicate the Montessori-trained adult may be difficult to find. For this reason, using the different terms and defining them regarding the situation in which they are used may avoid further confusion”. A useful analogy is in The Discovery of the Child, pp.161-162, re: the gymnastics teacher is not a lecturer, he is a guide.

2 An individual’s relationship to the environment changes over time. That change can be described in terms of the degree of interaction in the relationship: as the Human Tendencies are realized, a human individual increasingly impacts his environment in significant ways; and through social organization over time, human individuals collectively affect and alter their given environments.

3 “After birth, brain development depends on how patterns of stimulation from the outside world meet the varying inner states of brain activity. Stimuli to the infant are regulated both by the infant’s movements and by the behaviour of caretakers who mediate between the environment and the infant, and the immature brain has powerful control of this caretaker behaviour, especially through emotional expression. Indeed, the most precociously mature functions of a young child’s brain are those that communicate needs, feelings, and motives to other persons, and that lead them to present the world to the child in precisely regulated ways.” Colwyn Trevarthen, “Brain Development”, in The Oxford Companion To The Mind. Richard L. Gregory, ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987, p. 108. [The implications for human behavior when this natural control of caretaker behavior is thwarted are worth pondering; in particular, failure to achieve such a relationship with a caretaker in the first weeks of life could be a significant factor in the failure to develop a capacity for trust.]
It is important to remember that humans do not live only in the domain of “Nature”. They also live in the human-constructed domain which Montessori called “Supra-nature” – the domain of human society and culture. The caretaker-adult mediates between the child and the domain of nature; and the caretaker-adult mediates between the child and the domain of “Supra-nature”, as well: and Supra-nature is the source for most of the raw material, the necessary means, for the child’s self-construction, cultural adaptation, and psychic development.

We have already seen that in the realities of our less-than-ideal world, human self-development proceeds in fits and starts. There is great misunderstanding of the true needs and tasks of human development. Obstacles meet the individual at every stage; and human unhappiness and misery seem endemic. According to Montessori, this is because there are errors in the supra-nature humans have constructed; and these errors originate in the fact that we adult humans have created supra-nature only for ourselves, to fulfill adult desires and accomplish adult goals. We are, for the most part, far and irrevocably removed from the domain of the natural world with its natural guidance for the caretaker relationship; and, we have constructed no compensatory place for children in our complexly organized domain of supra-nature. In doing this – in leaving children out of the equation – we have severely limited the adult’s capacity to respond to the child’s expressed needs; to take on the caretaker role under the natural guidance of the child. The unhappy result of this deficiency is all around us, measured in the difference between our present image of optimal development and the thwarted, deficient, and deviated reality of adult maturation.

Montessori’s mandate is that we correct this error and “… construct an environment that answers the needs of young people.” Speaking in Copenhagen in 1937 she stated:

> It is not enough to love in an abstract way; we must begin to do something concrete, something practical - to construct the supernature necessary for the life of children and young people.

The environment heretofore available to human children has, for the most part, been a legacy of chance; of misunderstanding; of ignorance; or of disregard: an environment which does not serve the child’s self-construction and whose effect has been to distort human development. Montessori states this quite plainly:

> The adult’s environment is not a life-giving environment for the child. Rather it is an accumulation of obstacles, leading him to a creation of defences, to deforming efforts at adaptation, or else leaving him the victim of suggestion.

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4 “Fifth Lecture”, *Education and Peace*. Helen R. Lane, trans. Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1972, p. 79: “Contemporary man no longer lives within nature, but within supernature. ….. His unhappiness is proof that there must be errors inherent in human society and in the supernature that humanity has constructed.” And, p. 80: “Unlike animals who build extensively for their young, man, the intelligent being who labors with his own hands, has failed to build on a similar scale for his progeny.”

5 Education And Peace, p. 80. On p. 81, she further elaborates: “It is time now to correct these errors. To bring about a great reform, to offer young people the means necessary for their development and the enhancement of their personalities. This task cannot be entrusted to private efforts alone; it is society as a whole that is called upon to fulfill it.” See also, *The Secret Of Childhood*, p. 214: “It is no exaggeration to say that man who up till now has built only a world for the adult must set to work to build up a world for the child. The treatment of the child is so complex and so delicate that it needs something more than an awakening in the mother, or the training of new types of nurses and teachers. The response to the child’s needs must be a mental and spiritual renewal of education, which will be the centre of many collateral sciences, till the crowning result is achieved, a new outlook on life, a renewal of life.”
Adult humans, guided by a new understanding of normal human development, can break this historical pattern and replace this legacy. And, as we have already seen, they can prepare a special environment which will assist natural human development, within which optimal development can occur: “an environment suited to the child, in which he can find what he requires to develop his functions”: in other words, a Prepared Environment. The success of such an environment depends upon continued adult collaboration. In The Secret Of Childhood, Montessori reviews for us some details of this collaboration in an environment prepared for the child, affirming that as a part of the environment, the adult must adjust himself to the child’s needs in two ways:

1) so as not to be himself an obstacle to the child’s development, and
2) so as not to substitute himself for the child in the activities essential to growth and development.

We can deduce that this relation is very different from that of the “teacher” in a conventional educational setting of “school”. A new type of environment requires a new type of adult. Who is this new educator – the Montessori Directress / Director? What are her significant characteristics? And what is her role in this new relation to the child?

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6 The Secret of Childhood, p. 107. See also Lloyd DeMause, ed. The History of Childhood: The Untold Story Of Child Abuse; as well as the works of Alice Miller, particularly, For Your Own Good: Hidden Cruelty in Child-Rearing and The Roots Of Violence.

7 Basic Ideas of Montessori’s Educational Theory, Oxford: Clio Press, 1997. See also, The Secret Of Childhood, “Guiding Instincts”, especially p. 220 on the convergence of adult and child instincts in harmonious collaboration. In examining the pivotal role of the adult, and the precarious reciprocity within the child-caretaker relationship, keep in mind the implications of the following, which continues the reference in (3 Trevarthen) above:

In future research, brain science will be concerned with breaking through the veil of ignorance that still conceals how developments in human brain tissue over the years of childhood relate to psychological maturation. In this phenomenon, unique in developmental biology, the state of morphogenetic regulators in an immature organism depends upon the affections and interests of more mature conscious beings, and upon the way the brains of these beings from the preceding generation have been programmed with cultural rituals and beliefs in an earlier childhood. Growing human brains require cultivation by intimate communication with older human brains. Thus are built the powerful collaborations of human society. [emphasis added] Colwyn Trevarthen, in Oxford Companion To The Mind, p. 108.

Also, “The Child Sets Limits”, in Alice Miller’s Banished Knowledge: Facing Childhood Injuries, p. 176: “On the basis of the pedagogy that was practiced on us, the exerting of unlimited power by the adult over the child is still taken for granted. Most people know nothing else. It is only from a child who was never injured that we can learn entirely new, honest, and truly humane behavior.”

8 The Secret of Childhood, p. 109. On p. 213, she elaborates: “... it is not enough to set the child among objects in proportion to his size and strength; the adult who is to help him must have learned how to do so. If the adult, through a fatal misunderstanding, instead of helping the child to do things for himself, substitutes himself for the child, then that adult becomes the blindest and most powerful obstacle to the development of the child’s psychic life. In this misunderstanding, in the excessive competition between adult work and child work, lies the first great drama of the struggle between man and his work, and perhaps the origin of all the dramas and struggles of mankind.”
The New Educator
There are chapters which discuss this new teacher in The Child In The Family, The Secret of Childhood, The Discovery of the Child, The Absorbent Mind and The Advanced Montessori Method (Spontaneous Activity In Education), Creative Development in the Child Vols. 1 and 2, and The 1946 London Lectures. In addition, Montessori refers throughout her writings to the characteristics and role of the adult who assists development. Her point of view ranges from the very practical to the esoteric, which can seem confusing. But there is a reason for this wide range – a reason grounded in both the work and the character of this new educator.

We have already seen that human development is holistic - it is more than a physical process, and the child is more than a physical being. He is body, mind, and spirit – and his development occurs on all of those levels. The human adult is also a holistic being of body, mind, and spirit; and so, this adult who plays such an integral part in facilitating normal, holistic development, does so at all three levels of her own being. There are physical, mental (or psychological), and spiritual aspects of her work. Each aspect is significant according to the adult’s purpose as a part of this environment.

Physical Aspects

The physical aspect of the adult is significant in terms of her activities - what she does in this environment; in terms of her manner or behavior towards the children; and in terms of her personal appearance as part of the environment.

First and foremost, the adult prepares and maintains the environment to assist the self-construction of the children who live in it – she is its “keeper and custodian”. The Guide preserves the order and beauty of the environment, keeping it clean, attractive, pleasant, and complete. This preparation includes her own personal appearance: “… the teacher also must be attractive, pleasing in appearance, tidy and clean, calm and dignified. These are ideals that each can realize in her own way …”, Montessori tells us; but they are essential and basic, because “… the teacher’s appearance is the first step to gaining the child’s confidence and respect … care for one’s own person must form part of the environment in which the child lives.”

Through her activity, the prepared adult initiates each child into the use of the materials: she presents for the child’s consideration the use of the material, providing the connecting link between the child and these materials as motives of self-constructive activity. Montessori’s discovery of how ‘normal’ children responded to the materials was the first hint of a new role for the adult: the materials ceased to be an aid to the teacher, ceased to be a means of teaching; they became an aid to the child, becoming means of development or learning.

This has important implications for the Guide’s activity and her behavior towards the children. Montessori writes:

9 The Absorbent Mind p. 277
10 The Discovery of the Child, pp. 160-161; also, pp. 187-190. For reference to the realization of the changed function of the materials, see The Secret of Childhood, p. 121. This first role of the teacher is very different from the stereotypical image of the Montessori teacher and is often surprising to the uninitiated – yet understanding and applying the difference and proper sequence of these two roles in relation to the children is the single most important factor in successful Montessori education, especially in the First Plane.
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The objects and not the teaching given by the mistress form the principal agent and as it is the child who uses them, it is he, the child, who is the active being and not the teacher. 11

However, the teacher’s behavior towards the children varies according to a two-fold purpose – that is, according to the absence or presence of normalizing concentration.

Before the connecting link with the material is made – before normalization – the adult is active in a particular, often startling way: in fact, her activity at that stage is essential in facilitating the initial connection which leads to concentrated work and thereby, normalization. Before normalization, the teacher’s activity is directed to entice the child. Montessori describes this in evocative ways: the teacher is seductive; she charms, amuses, inspires, encourages, even praises - whatever serves best to build upon that confidence and respect she attracts from the children. Montessori writes that

… before concentration has shown itself, (the teacher) must be like the flame which heartens all by its warmth, enlivens and invites; and every action … can become a call and invitation to the children.

She elaborates:

There is no need to fear that she will interrupt some important psychic process, since these have not yet begun. Before concentration occurs, the directress may do more or less what she thinks best; she can interfere with the children’s activities as much as she deems necessary. 12

This interference will include interruptions meant to “… break the flow of disturbing activity” – addressed as needed to the entire group or to a particular, disruptive child. However, I would like to emphasize one caveat: The directress may do more or less what she thinks best as long as it has the purpose of leading the child towards concentration, of facilitating the opportunities for normalization.

The Guide’s manner and attitude changes completely once this normalizing concentration appears. The child has made his link, and the psychological event of normalization is now possible; this will liberate the child’s developmental energies and set him on the path of normal development. The child’s activity with the materials is now paramount. Using them, he is the agent of his own optimal self-construction. After normalization, the adult must become passive; she withdraws her energy so as not to interfere “in any way.” Everything she did previously – charm or amusement, praise or encouragement - would now threaten the child’s concentration and so would become obstacles to development. Rather than seduction and inspiration, the guiding principle now must be to “… act as if the child does not exist”. 13 This is not to say that she now ignores the child: in fact, she will probably pay even closer attention in her observation of his activity. But as concentration leads to the liberation of normalization, the adult exercises a form of detachment, such that the child is no longer aware of her presence or her influence as he works. From this stage on, a new facet is added to the adult’s role: she becomes the protector of work – protecting the

12 The Absorbent Mind, p. 278. Note - for those concerned that the ‘method’ will only work with ‘certain types of children’: “Having considered the environment, we must ask how the teacher shall behave toward the children. What can we do with these disorderly little people, with these confused and uncertain little minds that we hope to attract and cause to fasten upon work?”

concentrated work at the heart of the normalized work cycle; protecting the work which is preserved by the three rules of the environment.  

Amongst all of this – both before and after concentration appears – another set of activities runs parallel. First, the activity of observation: the trained capacity for observation becomes fundamental, particularly in light of her own behavioral response to the exhibited behaviors of the child. This task of constant and meticulous observation is the hallmark of Montessori teaching: it is so important that we could say 

With observation, we are Montessori teachers.

Without observation, we are conventional teachers with really cool manipulatives.

Secondly, there is the task of keeping careful records of the presentations offered to each child, and notation of those observations she has made of the children and their development.

All of this – her appearance, her manner, her activities – are what we see on the surface of the Montessori Directress at work in the Prepared Environment of the Casa. But they are not only surface: for they draw their inspiration, their justification, and their possibility from the depths of the adult’s psychological and spiritual life. These physical aspects of the Guide’s role are grounded in mental aspects which are first prepared in the training course; and in spiritual characteristics which are prepared and then continually expand through her subsequent experience and practice.

**Mental/Psychological Aspects**

The Guide’s mental or psychological development begins with information dispensed in the training course. This information is then tempered and enriched through the tasks of the course – through the adult’s interaction and engagement with this information, her own practice with the materials she will present, and her practice of the techniques for presentation; through the experience of compiling her own Material Reference Books, based on that practice; through the opportunity for guided observation and practice in an existing Casa; and through her own personal integration of all of this information and experience into a coherent pedagogical system. All of this information combined with practical experience leads to knowledge and understanding: knowledge and understanding of the previously hidden nature and true developmental work of the normalized child; ... of the principles by which to prepare and maintain an environment which will assist the child’s development; ... and of the materials which she will present as motives of activity for that development.

**Knowledge** married to ever-expanding experience results in an even more significant aspect of her psychological capacities: cultivation of a vital discernment, leading to wisdom. This discernment guides her...
behavior as she observes the children and chooses when and how to be active, when and how to withdraw; this discernment guides her work of choosing materials to present to children, of matching the developmental interests of a particular child with an appropriate motive of activity; and this discernment recognizes and distinguishes between disruptive energies which she must interrupt and concentrated energies which she must protect.  

The Guide also applies this same cultivated discernment to examine her own role in the environment: part of the technique of this new education is that when the Guide observes less-than-ideal conditions in the environment, she seeks out her own errors as reflected in those conditions, and then corrects them according to the pedagogical principles she has integrated. Montessori is very specific about this:

... when her class becomes undisciplined, the teacher sees in the disorder merely an indication of some error that she has made; she seeks this out and corrects it. The teacher of the traditional school would feel this to be humiliating; but it is not humiliating, it is a part of the technique of the new education.”

This depth of knowledge and this refined discernment distinguish a mind educated in an entirely new way: a mind re-shaped, in order to help the child in his self-construction. This new mind is the goal of all of her psychological preparation. Montessori writes:

... it is sufficient to have a mind prepared to assist the hidden mind of the child. Then common sense will suffice to make us its followers.

But remember: this is the common sense of a mind which has been re-shaped to serve the spirit of the developing child. What is “common sense” to such a mind is, in our world, not common at all, but quite rare; it is out-of-step with the minds of most adults, as well as out-of-step with most social institutions. The heavy weight of conventional wisdom accepts deviation as ‘characteristic’ and sees true normality as ‘abnormal’. This new common sense stands in radical opposition to such conventional wisdom. This re-shaped mind, the intellect alone – for all its knowledge and growing discernment – is not sufficient to counterbalance in day-to-day activity the weight of conventional wisdom; the inertia of erratic thinking which is accepted unquestioningly in human society; and the deadly sway of those errors which have left no place for the child

17 *The Discovery of the Child*, p. 161: “(The teacher’s) co-operation is very far from being excluded, but it becomes prudent, delicate and takes a varied form. There is no need for her words, her energy, her severity, but what is needed is wisdom, keen-eyed in observing, in serving, in approaching and in withdrawing, in speaking and in keeping silent, in accordance with the occasions and needs.” Also p. 162: “She will be able to study theoretically certain general principles of the highest importance for guiding her in practice, but only through experience will she acquire those delicate variations which vary in the training of different individuals. She will learn that she must not hold back minds already abnormally developed by giving to them material less than their individual powers can handle, which creates boredom; she will learn not to offer objects which are beyond the capacity of the child, thus discouraging and destroying the first childish enthusiasm.” Also, *The Absorbent Mind*, p. 272: “… a teacher untrained in observation can trample on (free choice leading to concentration) before she even discerns it, much as an elephant tramples the budding flower about to blossom in its path. ... Even when helping and serving the children, she must not cease to observe them. ... She observes in order to recognize the child who has attained the power to concentrate and to admire the glorious rebirth of his spirit.”


19 *The Secret of Childhood*, p. 44.
in the structure of supra-nature. For the new educator, a spiritual transformation is needed to support her hard-won intellectual re-orientation. 20

**Spiritual Aspects**

I have already cited two stipulations: first, that adults must construct the human, cultural environment necessary for the life of children; and, second, that as a part of this environment, the adult must adjust herself to the child's needs. These stipulations cannot be met at the superficial, external level of behaviors and techniques. Nor can they be motivated at a purely intellectual level. They require a *spiritual* foundation as well.

The adult who wishes to live in this new, radical relation to the child must also examine her own deeply held beliefs and attitudes about children and childhood. Theoretical knowledge and the study of pedagogical technique are not enough. There must also be “… a radical change in our own inner state …” 21

This inner state of attitudes, beliefs, prejudices, and assumptions takes many forms. It is the adult’s heritage from her own childhood; it contains the images she carries from the way adults treated her as a child, and the images which are rampant and institutionalized in family and social life. The more unconscious they are – the stronger they are. The adult must identify those of her own deeply held attitudes and beliefs which conflict with her *new* knowledge and understanding, and which represent obstacles to this new relation with the child. And she must eliminate them. Montessori is very clear about this:

> The crucial point of the whole question is the manner in which (the teacher) considers the child, and this cannot depend on external factors as though it demanded merely a theoretical knowledge of child nature or of modes of teaching and correction. … the educator must prepare himself inwardly. He must examine himself methodically in order to discover certain definite defects that may become obstacles in his relation with the child. … (and then) rid himself of the inner obstacles which make the child incomprehensible to him. 22

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20 *The Secret of Childhood*, p. 109: “The educator must not imagine that he can prepare himself for his office merely by study, by becoming a man of culture. He must before all else cultivate in himself certain aptitudes of a moral order.”

21 *The Secret of Childhood*, p. 116. Also, see *The Child In The Family*, which concludes on p. 126: “Until the adults consciously face their errors and correct them, they will find themselves in a forest of insoluble problems. And children, becoming in their turn adults, will be victims of the same error, which they will transmit from generation to generation.”

22 *The Secret of Childhood*, pp. 109-110. On these pages Montessori also addresses the importance of training for this new educator: “To discover defects that have become part and parcel of his consciousness requires help and instruction … In this sense the educator needs to be ‘initiated’ into his or her inner preparation. He is too preoccupied with bad tendencies in the child, how to correct his undesirable actions, or the danger to his soul left by the residues of original sin. … This inner preparation is something general; it is not the same as the specific seeking for perfection as in the case of members of religious communities. It is not necessary to become ‘perfect’, free from every weakness, in order to become an educator. Indeed it is possible for those continually concerned with the perfection of their inner life to remain unconscious of the defects that prevent them from understanding the child. That is why it is necessary to learn, to be guided, to be trained to become educators. … Our instruction to educators consists in showing them what inner dispositions they need to correct, just as a doctor might point out the particular and definite disease that is weakening or threatening a physical organ.”
Montessori identifies for us two prominent features of these adult attitudes and the adult behaviors they drive: anger and pride.\textsuperscript{23} When we discern either of these affective forces – anger and/or pride – driving our own behaviors towards children, this signals an opportunity to stop, to examine, to reflect, and to eliminate some obstacle to understanding and truly helping the child. In true Montessori fashion, it is not simply a process of removing obstacles. We must replace what is removed with positive, alternative attitudes and motivations.

For the confused, erroneous, and damaging misconceptions we inherit concerning the child and childhood development, the adult must construct and internalize a new vision to guide her work. This vision is the image of normalization. It is an image which does not yet exist in the children when she begins her work with them. In fact, as we have already seen, the behaviors and characteristics of the children when they first enter the Casa can be very different from the clear, simple image of the normalized child. But the Montessori adult must see beyond what \textit{is} to what \textit{will be}. Here is Montessori’s own description:

... (the Directress) must keep her imagination alive ... (she) is constantly looking for a child who is not yet there. The teacher, when she begins work in our schools, must have a kind of faith that \textit{the child will reveal himself} through work. She must free herself from all preconceived ideas concerning the levels at which the children may be. The many different types of children (meaning they are more or less deviated) must not worry her. In her imagination she sees that single normalized type, which lives in a world of the spirit. The teacher must believe that this child before her will show his true nature when he finds a piece of work that attracts him.\textsuperscript{24}

As for those emotional forces – anger and pride – they must be replaced with \textbf{patience} and \textbf{humility}. Patience and humility are important components in our attitude and behavior towards the children. They also form a spiritual basis from which we offer materials and activities to the child. And patience and humility are \textit{essential} to someone working in an educational environment where the adult is a \textit{passive} facilitator for the child’s active learning – 

\textsuperscript{23} \textit{The Secret of Childhood}, pp. 111-112.

\textsuperscript{24} \textit{The Absorbent Mind}, p. 276. The importance of this vision is echoed in Norbert Wiener’s example that the most important fact about the atomic bomb (a fact which was \textit{not} kept secret), was the \textit{possibility} of its construction. He elaborates: “In the problem of decoding, the most important information which we can possess is the knowledge that the message we are reading is not gibberish. ... Once a scientist attacks a problem which he knows to have an answer his entire attitude is changed. He is already 50% of his way towards that answer.” in \textit{The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society}. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1950, pp. 137-138. Two other comments are worthy of note. From Chulee Fernando, “Normalization”, \textit{NAMTA Journal}, Vol. 15, #2, Spring 1990, p. 12: “Do not focus on specific, individual deviations. Do not label the child. Do not overemphasize. Deviations are like a sickness, a psychological illness that can be cured. See them as ‘common’ childhood characteristics which can be overcome with our help, through the environment and work.” And from J.K. Miller, “The Prepared Environment”, \textit{NAMTA Quarterly}, Vol. 4 #1-2, Fall/Winter 1979, p. 3-5: “There also is the intangible quality of the ‘tone’ of the prepared environment which is set by the adult. This ‘tone’ may be either positive or negative in relation to the whole group or in relation to individual children. The adult can choose to address him or herself to either the best or the worst in any given child and by so doing ‘feeds’ that part of the child. The correct choice for a Montessorian is to provide positive support so that the good within each child can grow and develop. Montessori said: never speak ill of a child in his presence or in his absence, because she understood that even speaking ill of an absent child would set up a feeling tone that would be sensed and responded to by the child.”
(The teacher) must acquire a moral alertness which has not been demanded by any other method, a mingling of calm, patience, love and humility. Virtues and not words form her main qualification.\textsuperscript{25} Qualities such as patience and humility are also essential to the Guide’s capacity for observation. As an observer, she must cultivate the patience of the scientist, watching and waiting for the hidden child to reveal himself; watching and waiting for the phenomena of normal development to manifest themselves in the community of the children. This requires great self-control, in order to recognize and appreciate the truth of these phenomena as they appear.\textsuperscript{26} Humility is also essential in this process of observation. It is humility which allows us to work tirelessly at tasks often considered small and insignificant, including this task of patient, withdrawn watchfulness. And humility is necessary if we are to let the child be our guide – if we are to follow the child, according to what we observe. It is humility which gives us the power to let go of cherished pre-conceptions and beliefs, and it is humility which cultivates the moral honesty to acknowledge and embrace the truth of what is unexpectedly revealed – revealed about the children; and revealed about ourselves.\textsuperscript{27}

From all of this, we will come to understand Montessori’s meaning when she states:

\begin{quote}
The real training of the teacher who is to help life is something far more than a learning of ideas. It includes the training of character; it is a preparation of the spirit. \textsuperscript{28}
\end{quote}

Such is the preparation appropriate for an educator with a goal which is new to education: whose goal is “… not so much the imparting of knowledge as the unveiling and developing of spiritual energy”. \textsuperscript{29}

\section*{Conclusion: The Transformation of the Adult}

All of this preparation is only a beginning: her training will be completed by and through the children she will serve. Performing her many tasks to facilitate the self-construction of the children; moving towards wisdom as her theoretical knowledge and discerning understanding expand; and following her own path of spiritual self-perfection – the new educator approaches what can only be described as a personal transformation centered in her work with the children. Watching with patience and humility for the revealed phenomena of

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\bibitem{25} The Discovery of the Child, p. 161.
\bibitem{26} Spontaneous Activity in Education, pp. 131-133, including: “A thorough education is indeed necessary to overcome this attitude (of impatience); we must master and control our own wills, if we would bring ourselves into relation with the external world and appreciate its values. Without this preparation we cannot give due weight to the minute things from which science draws its conclusions.”
\bibitem{27} Spontaneous Activity in Education, pp. 133-135, concluding: “… how would it be if the master should seek the truth in the soul of the child? What an incomparable dignity would be his! To raise himself to this height, however, he would have to be initiated into the ways of humility, of self-abnegation, of patience; and to destroy the pride which is built on the void of vanity.” In The Secret of Childhood, p. 148, Montessori discusses the “negative role of the adult” as one of the three conditions produced by chance in the first Casa, and which led to “the emergence of normal characteristics”: “Here was a deeper calm; a state of emptiness or (better) of freedom from mental lumber, producing an inner translucency, a freedom from intellectual attachment. … Similar to this is the spiritual humility which prepares us to understand the child, and which should, therefore, be the most essential part of a teacher’s preparation.”
\bibitem{28} The Absorbent Mind, p. 131.
\bibitem{29} The Child In The Family, p. 107.
\end{thebibliography}
the children, the adult will discover unexpected revelations about herself and about the human condition as well; and this experience will be life-changing for her.

Montessori describes this as being initiated into “... the observation of the phenomena of the inner life”, and affirms:

When she feels herself, aflame with interest, 'seeing' the spiritual phenomena of the child, and experiences a serene joy and an insatiable eagerness in observing them, then she will know that she is “initiated”. Then she will begin to become a “teacher”.  

30 Spontaneous Activity In Education, pp. 140-141. For revelations of self, p. 135: “… the psychical manifestations of children evoke something more in him than interest in the phenomenon; he obtains from them the revelation of himself, and his emotions vibrate at the contact of other souls like his own.” Regarding the transformation of the adult, p. 131: “As in the little child internal coordination is the point of crystallization round which the entire psychical form will coalesce, so in the teacher interest in the phenomenon observed will be the center round which her complete new personality will form spontaneously.”
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**Maria Montessori**


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