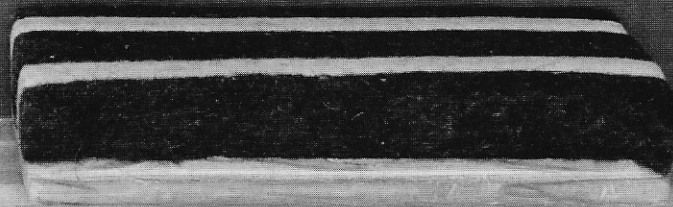


Schools for Individualists

TNI's Interview with Marsha Familiaro Enright

BY SARA PENTZ





Marsha Familiaro Enright has been attracted by the pleasures and problems of education since the third grade. Trained in biology and psychology, she has written research articles on psychology, neuropsychology, development, and education for a number of publications. She founded the Council Oak Montessori School near Chicago in 1990 and has served as its president since then. Recently, as founder and president of the Reason, Individualism, Freedom Institute, Marsha and her colleagues have been developing a new college informed by the Montessori Method, the Great Books, Ayn Rand's ideas, and classical liberalism. Information about that project can be found at its website, www.rifinst.org. Marsha also contributes articles and reviews to *The New Individualist*, including popular profiles of famous authors such as James Clavell, Cameron Hawley, and Tom Wolfe. Recently, she spent time with *TNI* contributing writer Sara Pentz to discuss the state of modern education, the prospects for its reform, and her own college project.

Facing page: Italian physician and educationalist Maria Montessori (1870 - 1952).

TNI: How did you get into the field of education?

Marsha Enright: When I was a kid, I loved school and I loved to learn. I looked forward to it every day. But I was frustrated by the many kids around me who were miserable in school and often disrupted things. There was a lot of teasing and ridicule. I did not understand why that was happening, especially why the smart kids were not interested in learning. I vowed to myself that I would find a system of education that would really support kids in their learning and be a good environment for my own kids when I grew up. That is how I got interested in education.

But, ironically, that is not what I decided to go into when I went to college. At first, I wanted to be a doctor, like my dad. I was a biology undergraduate. After a while, I got interested in psychology, and toward the end of my college years, I decided that that was really where most of my interest lay. So I went on to graduate school and got a Masters in psychology at the New School for Social Research.

In high school, I read *The Fountainhead* by Ayn Rand and got very interested in her ideas. And in one of her journals, *The Objectivist*, there were some articles about the system of education called the Montessori Method. They were by a woman named Beatrice Hessen; I think she owned her own Montessori school. When I read those articles, I said, "Wow, this sounds like a fantastic system." I read all the books that I could get my hands on about the Montessori Method, and I visited many Montessori schools to observe how they worked. I determined that that was what I wanted for my children.

So, when I started having my children in the early 1980s, I looked around for a Montessori school. There was one in the neighborhood for preschool, three- to six-year-olds. I put my kids there, and I was very happy with it. When it came time for elementary school for my son, I found a Montessori school in a nearby suburb that he went to for three years, but then it closed. I wanted to make sure that he and my other children could continue in Montessori, so I organized

some of the other parents to open a Montessori school in our neighborhood. And that is how I got started as an educator, running Council Oak Montessori School in Chicago.

TNI: What interested you about Maria Montessori and her approach?

Enright: Montessori was a great scientist. She was trained as a medical doctor, the first woman doctor in Italy, and she approached human learning as a scientist, observing in great detail what children did and trying out different materials and activities with them to see what would work best.

Her method is very concerned with the individual child. She started out working with retarded and autistic children. And she became almost instantly famous around the world in the early part of the twentieth century because, after working with these children for a year and applying her observations and her methods, they were able to pass the exam for normal children.

But while everyone thought this was wonderful, she was thinking, "My gosh, if my poor retarded children can pass the exam for normal children, what is happening if normal children are only being asked to learn up to that level?" That is when she started working with normal children. And there, again, her results were so phenomenal that she gained even more fame.

Because motivation is so important in learning, she focused on the proper conditions to keep that fire burning. If you look at children who are one or two or three, you can see that they have tremendous motivation to learn everything they can—crawling around the floor, putting things in their mouths, looking at every book, following what their moms are doing, imitating. They are just balls of energy when it comes to learning everything they can about the world, about objects in the world, about how to move, how things taste, smell, look, about what people are doing with each other.

Montessori noticed, for example, that if she could get a child to concentrate on an activity and really be involved in it, when the child eventually stopped the activity he would be happy; he would be calm; he would be



Above: Marsha Enright works with a student in her Chicago school.

tired, but in a very contented way. And that would keep him interested. The next day, the child would want to learn and do more. So it became a self-feeding process.

TNI: What, besides motivation, is really important to learning?

Enright: Well, I see learning as acquiring the knowledge and skills that you need to function in the world—to be productive, happy, and successful. Just like a flower: If you put a flower under a rock, it is going to struggle around that rock to try to reach the sun and water, but it is going to become deformed. But if you put it in the right kind of soil with plenty of water and sunshine, it is going to be beautiful and flourishing. A child is like that, too. Montessori called the child “the spiritual embryo.”

TNI: What did she do to nurture that “embryo”?

Enright: Her method became famous in 1907 in Rome when she set up what she called the House of Children—*Casa de Bambini*—where she worked with slum children. It was a wonderful environment for learning that respected the individual child’s

interests and his natural learning tendencies. It used the teacher as a guide to learning and had the children collaborate with each other, but very respectfully.

Their behavior changed so markedly that people came from all over the world to train with her, and soon her method started spreading globally. Alexander Graham Bell’s wife became interested and opened the first Montessori school in the United States in 1912.

TNI: That’s remarkable.

Enright: It *was* remarkable, because she was able to get three and four year olds to concentrate for long periods of time.

She had a famous example of a little girl working on what is called the knobbed cylinders. It is made of a bar of wood with cylindrical pieces of different widths in it. Each cylinder has a knob on it for grasping, and the child has to take all the cylinders out of the bar and then put them back into the right-sized holes. If they do not put them in all the right-sized holes, then one cylinder is left over, and the child knows that he made a mistake.

This is what we call, in Montessori education, a “self-correcting” material. The goal, as much as possible, is to help the child see for himself if he achieved the goal or not, if he “got the right answer.”

TNI: So they are not constantly being corrected by someone else?

Enright: Exactly. If you want the child to be an independent individual when he reaches adulthood, he has to be able to know on his own when he has achieved something or when he has failed—to judge that independently.

In this example, the girl working on the cylinders was so engrossed in her work that it did not matter that Maria had a crowd of children around her singing, or that she moved her seat around or anything; the child just kept focusing on the cylinders for forty-five minutes.

TNI: That’s impressive.

Enright: You see this in Montessori schools all the time—this incredible concentration, which, interestingly, Montessori figured out back at the turn of the century, was a key to learning and self-motivation. More recent psychological research by professor Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, on the optimal conditions for the most enjoyable kinds of experiences, independently and completely supports her original observations and conclusions. Csikszentmihalyi called this kind of experience of engrossing activity “flow,” because when he first discovered it, he was studying artists in the ’60s who would be totally engaged in what they were doing. And they said, “I’m just in the flow.” They would forget where they were, they would forget what time it was, and they totally enjoyed what they were doing. In sports, it’s “getting in the zone.” When the Montessori people read his books and contacted him, he recognized what was going on in the Montessori classroom—that Maria had created this optimal flow environment for learning.

TNI: And the focus was on the individual.

Enright: Exactly—that we are all individual human beings with human wants and needs.

Montessori schools spread all over the States, and they were spreading all over the world, too, when along came this very influential professor from Columbia University Teachers’ College, William Heard Kilpatrick. Kilpatrick decided to “scientifically” analyze the Montessori Method. He went to some schools, he interviewed her, and he wrote a book called *The Montessori System Examined*. His book basically gutted the Montessori Method, discrediting it with the academics.

You see, Kilpatrick was a staunch advocate of John Dewey’s “progressive” method of education. Dewey’s method, if you look at its basic principles, is actually almost the opposite of Montessori—although a lot of people think that it is very similar because it emphasizes experiential, “hands on” learning.

For one thing, Dewey opposed the development of the intellect when a child is young; he considered it stifling to the imagination. Whereas Maria said, “Well, you cannot really do imaginative work until your mind has some content.” So, the imaginative work goes hand-in-hand with learning about the world.

In addition, Dewey focused on the socialization of the child. For him, the school was about teaching the child how to get along with other people and be a part of society—this was the crux of his “pedagogic creed.” You can see it in his famous declaration about the purpose of education, first published in *The School Journal* in January 1897. Dewey wrote, “I believe that the only true education comes through the stimulation of the child’s powers by the demands of the social situations in which he finds himself. Through these demands he is stimulated to act as a member of a unity, to emerge from his original narrowness of action and feeling, and to conceive of himself from the standpoint of the welfare of the

group to which he belongs.”

TNI: At that time, there was a big push for socialism in all aspects of our society. Anybody who promoted individualism was in the minority.

Enright: Exactly. Even Montessori herself was, politically, a socialist. I mean, it was generally believed that socialism was the most advanced political point of view. She understandably would have been seduced by all those ideas. That was not her field.

Now Maria Montessori’s method *does* teach social skills as a conscious element in the curriculum. We call it “the grace and courtesy aspects” of the curriculum. But contrary to Dewey’s approach, hers is about how people properly interact with each other to be productive and happy *individuals*, in the course of developing their minds.

You can see this in the whole system, starting with the very way that children are allowed to work with the materials in the classroom. They can go to the shelf where the materials are, select something, bring it to their own space defined by a rug or a desk or a table or wherever they wish to sit, and work on it. They can work by themselves with the material as long as they want; the children are taught to try not to disturb each other. They can share the material with the other children if they want to, but they are not forced to. Consequently, what happens is that they tend to be very happy to collaborate with other children.

TNI: How interesting.

Enright: And when they are done, they are required to take the material and put it back on the shelf where it was so that the next child can use it. To me, all of these principles taught in the Montessori classroom train children how to behave in a free society with other responsible individuals.

TNI: I can see that.

Enright: Montessori’s is not a focus on “You must get along with other people no matter what.” The focus is very much on intellectual development, on the individual trying

Montessori approached human learning as a scientist, observing in great detail what children did and trying out different materials and activities with them to see what would work best.



American educator and philosopher John Dewey (1859 - 1952). Dewey was a founder of the progressive education movement and The New School for Social Research.

to learn, to develop himself, and to interact in a respectful way. In some respects that is the opposite of the collectivist idea that Dewey had of how we should interact. One result is the consistent reports we get from upper-level teachers and employers that Montessori students stand tall in what they think is right.

Anyway, Kilpatrick said that the Montessori Method was based on an old-fashioned theory of faculty psychology. Now, at that time, 1918, the ascendant theory—the so-called “scientific theory of psychology”—was behav-

iorism, whose basic tenet is that you cannot scientifically say that there is a mind, because you cannot see it; you can only study behavior.

As a consequence of Kilpatrick's books, the Montessori schools started closing down. Only a few remained over the long haul, and they were quite small. Students going to teachers' colleges were discouraged from going into Montessori because it was considered old-fashioned—too much focus on the intellect, not enough on imagination; too individualistic, not the proper kind of socialization.

But the Method was rediscovered in Europe in the '50s by a mother, Nancy McCormick Rambusch, who was very dissatisfied with education in the United States. She brought it back to the U.S. and eventually started the American Montessori Society. Ever since, it has been a grassroots, parent-driven movement, not an approach promoted out of the universities.

TNI: At that point, education was inundated by the ideas promoted by Dewey. Is that correct?

Enright: Right. You have to remember that traditional education was mostly either self-education or education of the wealthy, who could afford to hire tutors. The problem of mass education arose because a republic like ours needed an educated populace. But because not all parents could pay for school, public education started with the basic problem of how to educate so many people on a limited budget. To solve that, they came up with the factory model, which is to have everybody in one room doing the same thing at the same time. The teacher is the one lecturing or directing everything that the children are doing.

TNI: Sort of like mass production.

Enright: Right. And in some respects, it worked. I do not think it would have worked so well if not for the fact that many children going into this system were highly motivated immigrants—because motivation is the key to learning. Even today, as bad as some of our public schools are, you will find reports about immigrants from Somalia, Serbia, Poland, China, all doing fantastically in public schools where other children are failing.

People look back at nineteenth-century traditional education and early parts of the twentieth century and say, “Look at how well people were educated then, compared to now.” Yes, we have many examples of remarkably high-achieving people from all levels of society at that time, but what proportion of the population were they?

Actually, discontent with public education runs back a long way. There is a book from the '60s by Richard Hofstadter called *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*. He has a chapter called “The School and the Teacher,” in which he talks about the American

bad effects of egalitarianism in public education. They said, "See what this egalitarian approach to education, where everybody is worrying about hurting somebody's feelings, has done to education. It has gotten teachers to give kids social promotions, which means that even though they have not mastered third-grade material, they are still promoted to fourth grade. We need to impose standards on public schools to make sure children are being educated to a certain level."

So they imposed a centralized, top-down testing system for all schools, to try to make sure everybody was up to the same standards. This reflects the traditional way education is organized, because it is all about making everybody do the same thing at the same time.

TNI: And advance through the grades.

Enright: Right, advance through the grades. The other use of the term "grades" has to do with the evaluation of the child's work on a task, essay, or project. Did you know that the use of the term "grades" came from the idea of grading shoes and saying that "this group of shoes is the best group, this group is just okay, this group is not too good, and that group must be thrown out"? What's bothersome about this is that, as educators, our job should be to craft an environment to help each child, whatever his ability or background, so that he can learn and achieve as much as he can, so he can fulfill his best potential as a unique individual.

But in the grading system, you are thinking about how to decide whom to pass and whom to fail. In the traditional view, failing was the child's fault, not the educational system's—the child just didn't try hard enough. One thing that traditional education was criticized for, and one reason why these newer methods were incorporated, was that we were losing all this human potential. But that truth was twisted through egalitarianism.

TNI: Then, at some point, there are classes where no grades are given at all, so nobody gets his feelings hurt? Or like the Little League where no score is kept?

Enright: Right. Nobody is labeled

a winner or a loser.

I think that for young children, this is not always a bad idea, because grades and scores focus on competing with other people. In Montessori schools, we do not generally keep grades. We focus on whether or not the child is mastering the material. And each child is evaluated separately. A child also learns how to evaluate himself. "Have I mastered this material? Can I go on to the next level?"

TNI: And this is easily determined by the teacher?

Enright: Easily. Because the teacher knows the curriculum well; she knows what the child should be working on. And we have a general idea, from the scientific study of development, at what level children usually should be functioning at a given age. Not everybody will fall into the statistically normal sequence of development, because there is so much individual variation in human development and potential. We use a very broad category of what is objectively normal development.

TNI: This is also based on the biology of the child?

Enright: Exactly. One of the reasons we do not use grades in Montessori is that we recognize that education is, at root, self-education. Our job is to guide children in their self-education; we are very concerned that each child be concerned with doing his best and challenging himself. This only happens in the right educational environment because, you see, human beings are naturally very competitive. That, I think, comes from our nature as social animals competing in the social hierarchy, and it is very easy to let that trump the desire to learn.

So, when you introduce grades and all those comparisons in the early ages, children tend to focus on comparing themselves to each other and determining who is on the top of the heap and who is not. Their focus tends to be, "What is my grade? Am I pleasing the teacher? And am I better than the next guy?" They do not tend to focus on "What am I actually learning? Am I understanding what I'm doing? Do I know how to use it?"

TNI: That can be very dangerous. And it can undercut their self-esteem.

Enright: In the sense of undercutting their *real* self-esteem, their deepest sense of self-confidence. "I'm not good at math—I can't do it as well as Johnny." But maybe he's just a late bloomer. Einstein was supposed to be a mediocre math student in the early grades. Being constantly compared to others can cut a child's motivation to persevere and keep learning something, even if it's difficult. So, we are very concerned to downplay that kind of competition. Competition happens anyway, but to a reduced degree. A child will look at what another is doing and say, "Hmm, I want to be able to do that." If there is not a lot of *pressure* to compete, this natural tendency will actually motivate him in a good way.

TNI: It's more of a healthy, inner competition—

Enright:—than something externally directed. You want to encourage this intrinsic motivation to learn and achieve that we see in the two year old, because when you become an adult, you want to be self-motivated—to achieve things yourself and to know what you enjoy doing, in order to be happy.

TNI: Why do conservatives not like the Montessori Method?

Enright: Well, I do not know if I can speak about all conservatives. Some send their children to Montessori schools. But, politically, the conservative approach is, "Let's go back to what was done before." They tend to think in the paradigm of what was done traditionally in education. That ends up being the factory method.

And they want to reintroduce standards, since egalitarians following the Dewey method took standards and mastery out of the picture because they did not want to hurt anybody's feelings. So, since nobody is learning or acquiring the skills needed to succeed, the conservatives' response is, "Well, let's reintroduce standards." Their way of doing it is by using these tests. It is ironic that conservatives, who seem to want a more free-market approach to things, should introduce the federal Education Department's top-down, one-standard idea about what everybody in the whole country should be doing.

My teacher friends now call it the



“No Child Left Standing Act,” because of the tremendous focus on producing higher test scores at all costs. The money that schools get is so tied to the test scores that the focus of teachers and administrations is almost solely on whether the children are passing these tests at the designated levels—not whether the children are really learning things. As we all know, it is very easy for many kids to learn only what they must for the short-term, to pass the test, but in the end they know very little about the subject.

TNI: It’s the old practice of “cramming for the test” until the last moment, taking the test, and then forgetting everything.

Enright: Exactly. Whereas real learning is about gaining the knowledge and skills that you need, relating these to other things you know, figuring out how you can use it all in your own life, and understanding how it affects the world.

The conservatives wanted to revert to traditional testing to assess what the

child was learning. But, unfortunately, a test is not generally an authentic measure of what the child understands. Many smart kids are encouraged to compete to get good grades and learn to “game the system.” The kids who succeed the most in school oftentimes are the best at doing whatever the teacher tells them. They know what they need to do to get good grades, to get into the good high school and college. We see students who do fantastically on the SAT and may even do well in college, but they do not know how to think well. They just know how to play along by other people’s rules. When they get out into the real world, they are not necessarily especially successful or great employees.

TNI: They don’t succeed in reality.

Enright: No. Sometimes they are tremendous failures.

There was interesting research done on millionaires by Thomas J. Stanley. He discovered that quite a few of them got under 950, total, on their SAT scores, and yet they are fantastically

successful in business. Obviously, their talents were not served or assessed well in school.

TNI: So, it is ultimately an issue of learning how to think, is it not?

Enright: Exactly.

TNI: And that is never taught, is it?

Enright: Rarely.

TNI: What about the kids of single parents or kids from minority homes lacking the usual advantages—kids who may not be instilled with much motivation to learn? Also, why do children from some ethnic groups, such as kids from India, seem to be more motivated to learn?

Enright: Indian culture really emphasizes education.

TNI: As does the Chinese culture.

Enright: Yes. So your question is: What can we do to motivate children who come from less-supportive backgrounds? Well, for one thing, research finds these children tend to do very well in Montessori classrooms.

Also, speaking of motivation—I remember a John Stossel TV special

some years ago. There was a segment about Steve Marriotti, a former businessman who decided to teach in a Harlem high school. And he just had an awful time. Almost the whole year, the kids made fun of him and caused trouble.

Just before the end of the year, as he was about to quit, he asked his class, "If I did one thing right, what was it? If one thing I did was interesting, what was it?" And he said, "A fellow at the back of the class, a gang leader, raised his hand and said, 'Well, when you talked about how you ran this import/export business and how you made it successful.'" Right there, this gang leader basically reconstructed Marriotti's income statement for him. Obviously, he was an intelligent student—he had absorbed all the facts about the economics of Marriotti's business.

It dawned on Marriotti that what would really motivate these kids to rise out of poverty was to learn how to become entrepreneurs. So he instituted a program that is now worldwide, to teach kids how to be entrepreneurs—the National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship. One thing he found is that children from these backgrounds are used to tolerating uncertainty and risk, which you must be able to do to be a good entrepreneur.

TNI: Right.

Enright: But people from a very stable background will not easily have that ability. In fact, we have an opposite kind of problem nowadays. We have so many kids from wealthy families that they lack the motivation to make money, and they do not have any direction. Their parents do not instill in them enough sense of purpose and drive. They end up being profligate, drunks and drug addicts, just spending money—Paris Hilton or whatever.

Because we are such a wealthy society, that is another reason why teaching our children in ways that nurture their intrinsic motivation right from the get-go is so important.

TNI: Back to an earlier point. If conservatives don't have the right approach to education, what about libertarians?

Enright: The libertarians have

mostly been encouraging school choice—the idea that parents should have a right to decide where their child goes to school. Encouraging school choice is a good idea; it is certainly a step away from this monolithic public education system we now have and towards a more individualized educational market.

TNI: That means supporting the voucher system, right?

Enright: I have to say, the voucher system scares me, in this respect. With the government paying for private-school education through vouchers, on the scale of money we're talking about, there will inevitably be corruption. And then political people will say, "Well, if these private schools are going to take government money, we have to have government oversight and control." It is a real, dangerous possibility that the government will step in and standardize everything, and that will be the opposite of a free market in education. It's what happened in the Netherlands.

TNI: Is that where libertarian educators are moving?

Enright: What I understand is that libertarians originally were encouraging tax credits for education. Milton Friedman talked about that, years ago. Individuals could take money off what they had to pay in taxes in order to use it for private-school tuition. Also, non-parents and organizations could give money to educate others, like poor children, and get tax credits. If there weren't enough monies that way, I imagine that you could set things up so that children whose parents did not pay enough taxes would get some kind of voucher.

But, at some point, many libertarians decided that that was not going to fly, politically, and so they turned instead toward vouchers for everybody. But the politicians will end up regulating private schools that use vouchers, maybe saying that all voucher-accepting schools have to have state-certified teachers or curricula.

TNI: So this may put Montessori out of business.

Enright: Yes. Because once the government begins to issue vouchers, the schools are going to have to accept them—except, perhaps, for the schools of the very wealthy. All the other

private schools, where middle-class and lower-middle-class students go, will either have to accept them, or they will go out of business.

TNI: Ah, yes.

Enright: So, the libertarians are encouraging a free market in education, which is a good thing. The thing I do not hear from them, however, is much talk about *what kind of education* is objectively best for human beings. That is because most libertarians believe in a free market, which is the political end of things, but they think that your moral standards and ethical beliefs are entirely private and subjective.

Okay, I do not think that the government should be regulating morals, either. However, although I think that what is right and wrong is often a complex question, I also think that you can look at human nature and reality and say, "Just as certain things are good for human health, certain actions are good for human education." It is a matter of science and experience to figure out what is objectively good in education. But libertarians do not discuss objective standards of education very much; it is something they leave by the wayside.

TNI: I know that standards and discipline in education are important to you.

Enright: They are. But there is a good side to them and a bad side. The conservative view of education tends to be that children need to learn certain things, and we must *make* them learn them because they are not necessarily interested in learning those things right now. I call this the "Original Sin" view of education, because it fits many conservatives' ethical views: They think children tend to be naughty and would rather play, so you have to discipline them to make them learn.

TNI: Force them.

Enright: Force them to learn, right. And what Maria Montessori discovered was that they *love* to learn, *if you give them the right environment*, and they will do it of their own free will. You, as the adult, just have to be clever enough to give them what they need at the right time. You have to be the right kind of guide in their learning process, in their self-education. So, what tends to happen in the well-run Montessori

school—and this is one of the things that is remarkably different about them—is that the children are very well-behaved of their own accord.

TNI: Because they are focused on learning and their own self-fulfillment—on intrinsic competition, as opposed to getting the best grade, fighting with others, and worrying about their self-images.

Enright: Exactly, exactly. What is so striking when you enter a Montessori classroom is this busy hum of all these children doing their own individual work all around the classroom. They are working on things; they are excited about what they are doing and sharing it with each other, but quietly. They *are* allowed to talk to each other. Maria said, “We learn so much through conversation as adults. Why do we stop children from talking to each other?” Well, that happens in traditional education because children end up talking about things that are different from what the teacher is directing them to pay attention to, right?

TNI: Yes.

Enright: People often ask me, “How do you know that a Montessori school is better than other schools?” And here is some of my proof: Over the years at my school, I cannot tell you how many children have lied to their parents, saying that they are *not* sick when they really were, because they do not want to miss school! We get notes from parents all the time about this.

TNI: That’s fascinating. It’s also fascinating that you have taken these concepts and have decided to put together a college for young adults. Why did you decide to do that, and how it is going to work?

Enright: It is well known that leftist philosophy dominates academia. Stories about how people with conservative or libertarian views are kept out of the academy are common. Furthermore, on campuses you have a proliferation of anti-cognitive, anti-free-inquiry ideas, like political correctness. The kids are not allowed to talk about things in certain ways because it might offend somebody. If they hold politically incorrect views and express them, they are ridiculed. In many



Montessori in a classroom in London, 1946.

instances students are punished with bad grades by professors who do not like what they write—not because it is poorly done, but simply because the teachers do not like the content. Well, that strangles debate. That strangles the reasoning mind. That strangles independent judgment.

TNI: It’s all too common.

Enright: Plus, it concerns me that the many students coming out of college are not able to think well. These people will take over the leadership of our society; yet they cannot think for themselves, and they have been encour-

aged to strangle their minds with political correctness.

So, I thought to myself, maybe it is time to start another kind of college, one consciously devoted to reason, to individualism, and to encouraging students to learn how to think for themselves—not only by the *ideas* that we’d teach, but by the very *methods* that we’d use to teach those ideas. A school where the teachers are not authority figures telling you what the truth is, and you are just absorbing it and spitting it back to them on the tests. Instead, a school where the teachers are

expert guides to the best knowledge and ideas in the world—where reasoning skills are emphasized in every classroom, whether it is science or art, whether it is mathematics or history.

TNI: And you are going to find teachers able to do this—and wanting to do it?

Enright: Yes. I do not think it is going to be a problem to find teachers, because I have so many highly qualified people approaching me, saying they would be interested. It would be a matter of finding those with the right combination of skills, attitudes, and knowledge to properly implement the curriculum we have created.

TNI: Talk a little about that curriculum.

Enright: It is going to use what are called “The Great Books” as its foundation. These are group of classics first identified in the late 1920s and ’30s. Robert Hutchins, a far-seeing president of University of Chicago, was concerned, back in the ’20s, that college was getting too professionalized—that everybody was focusing on just getting a job, and that they were not being educated well enough in the great ideas of our world to understand what was going on around them.

So, he put together this committee of experts in ideas, works, and education—Mortimer Adler, a philosopher at U.C.; Richard McKeon and Mark Van Doren from Columbia; Stringfellow Barr from the University of Virginia—a number of people. They picked a group of books that they thought were the most influential, the best-reasoned, the most important works in Western civilization, and they called these “The Great Books.” Since then, the list has been expanded to include titles from civilizations around the world.

A person educated in these books knows a tremendous amount about the ideas, history, and people who have influenced the world we live in today. So, we are going to use that list of books, plus a select group of more contemporary ones, such as the works of Ayn Rand, Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich Hayek, Richard Feynman, and others. These will form the basis of our curriculum.

We will also incorporate philosophical questions in all classes—very reality-oriented philosophical questions. When the student is learning mathematics, he will also learn, “Why am I learning mathematics? What does it teach me about how to think? How can I use it in the way I live? How does it affect our society? What place does mathematics have in the marketplace?” So, when he graduates, he will have a firm grasp of the relationship between what he learned in school, and the workforce, and his life, and history, and political goings-on—all of these things. We will give him much stronger, more integrated knowledge of the world than does the usual curriculum.

TNI: And he will be independent.

Enright: And he will be independent. He will consciously know how to question and analyze. Through encouragement, reasoning skills, excellent philosophical knowledge, and the way the teachers will guide him, his independence will be highly nurtured. He will be much more confident of his own point of view because he will have thought it through so well. And whatever work he chooses, he will be able to be a confident leader promoting freedom.

Since I’ll bring Montessori principles up to the adult level in this school, a large component of the curriculum will be a “practical life component,” where the student not only intellectually grasps relationships between ideas and what is going on in the world but gains practical experience with that, too. We’ll give students an opportunity from their freshman year on to get involved in outside internships, research projects, and other activities where they can learn about whatever they might be interested in doing. They can try different kinds of work—

TNI:—actually working alongside business people, or interning with scientists?

Enright: Yes, precisely. The internship program will also demonstrate to people how well the students are doing, as they display their excellent thinking skills, their work ethic—all the kinds of things we are going to encourage and nurture.

TNI: Do you know for a fact that

people out there would be willing to bring these interns into their environment?

Enright: Oh, yes. I know quite a few businessmen who are involved with me in this project, and they are very excited about the idea. You know, businesses today have a great deal of trouble with employees who are not prepared to work in the right way.

TNI: So, is this college going to be a reality?

Enright: If I have anything to do about it.

TNI: How are academics throughout the country responding?

Enright: I have quite a group of enthusiastic academics on my advisory board. When I go to conferences of the Liberty Fund and the National Association of Scholars and tell them about the college, many people are extremely interested. And, as I said, there is a lot of interest from professors who would like to work there.

TNI: You sound like an educational optimist.

Enright: I am. I think the basic principles of education—and educational reform—are now well-established. You have to remember that when Maria Montessori started, she basically taught slum children.

TNI: And proved that, given the right kind of education, these kids could rise out of poverty and become successful.

Enright: Absolutely. Every day, through a combination of factors, including drive and their own free will, people emerge from the worst of backgrounds and succeed. But what you want to do, of course, is to make it possible for more of them to succeed. And that is what education should be about: crafting a learning environment that allows the greatest number of children to develop themselves.

TNI: Well, it is a fascinating subject—and as your own project develops, I’m sure that we will talk with you about it again. Best wishes, Marsha.

Enright: Thank you, Sara. **TNI**