

Why are sensorial materials an essential part of the prepared environment and how...



Why are sensorial materials an essential part of the prepared environment and how does the sensorial materials assist the child in his explorations of the world? Undeniably sensorial materials play a prominent, positive and profound influence to help the child in his exploration of the world around. In the early nineteenth century, the British romantic poets also could visualize the significance and importance of sensuous sensibility of five senses. Dr. Montessori contributed in putting her ideas in practice. In the modern academic environment, sensorial materials and the exploration of same five senses has profound and significant relevance. In reality, we adults add to the confusion of a child. David Gettman contributes on this view as “ In such an environment, amid the whirl of family activity, wild and fleeting images, colours, noises, rhythms and movements incessantly bombarded the child’s senses. The available field for experience is intensely visual or auditory; touch is either forbidden or confined to smooth unbreakable plastic, temperatures are constant, smells are masked, and the taste is of necessity guarded against.. In a prepared environment a child is provided with all the opportunities which we unknowingly deny him. Furthermore, Dr. Maria Montessori discovered six sensitive periods in a child’s life. She described the sensitive periods as the blocks of time in a child’s life when he is absorbed with one characteristic of his environment to the exclusion of all others. The sensitive periods are: sensitivity to order, learning through five senses, and sensitivity to small objects, sensitivity to co ordination of movement, sensitivity to language, and sensitivity to social aspect of life. Out of these six sensitive periods Dr. Montessori explains that the child learns through his five senses and he has his sensitive periods. If his sensitive periods are

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discovered at the right time and he is exposed to sensorial education by giving him sensorial impressions, his five senses will be more sensitive, agile and developed and he will be able to discriminate and appreciate and maybe visualize his surroundings. That is when she created her thoughtful creation — ‘ sensorial education’ where the children were given a hands-on on different materials which enable to sort and classify impressions, thus developing their intellect. She made sensorial education an important part of her ‘ prepared environment’. For her environment was of prime importance. She explained the importance of environment in her beautiful words like this “ It can modify in that it can help or hinder, but it can never create .... The origins of the development both in species and in the individual, lie within. ” The child then does not grow because he happens to be placed in a nourishing environment. He grows because the potential of life within him develops, making itself visible. Further, it can be added that the sensorial materials act as a base to develop the sense organs in a child through the sensorial impressions. They enable a child to relate to his surroundings. For example he works with long rods, he holds the rods from ends and understands that they are growing in length; he traces and reinforces again the change in length. Finally visually he is able to perceive the change in length when he sees them arranged in an order. He relates to himself then. He feels I have grown the same way and so has the plant which I planted few days back. Now he is able to connect with environment that change in height or length happens and is positive. He works with his brown steps and moves his hand over the steps and immediately relates to the steps he walks across. Again he perceives the change in dimension when he works with the

pink cubes. He builds a tower and appreciates the beauty of the tower by going around the tower and having an aerial view of the tower. The day he goes out with his parents and sees a big tower he can relate to it. At the same time he appreciates the beauty of the tall building as by now he understand that it is an art piece which has different dimensions and it must be looking all the more beautiful from a different angle. A child can see different colours around him and eventually one day he will learn that there are many colours in environment. But in sensorial education his sensitive period is discovered and he is given exposure to different colours through chromatic sense exercises. Here the child perceives different colours and learns how to categorize them and how they grow from tints to shades and what is light and dark colours. This way we develop his chromatic sense on the right stage. He has a bend towards art now, he can appreciate colours more. He can appreciate that sun is yellow and sky is blue and mountains are brown. He appreciates his environment with a different outlook. Later when he grows he is a more polished person with an aesthetic sense. Its imperative to understand that sensorial knowledge varies from child to child. Its not a sensation or a feeling which can be equally and equitably divided in each personality. As the child grows he is gathering up perceptions from his environment constantly. All that is to become an idea, and abstraction, first sprang from a touch, or a smell or some other physical contact. The stimuli are first perceived by the senses, which activate the nerves which send the impression to the brain. The intellect, through the senses, creates abstract ideas. For example the touch exercises. The child is able to touch and feel the difference between rough and smooth. He even feels the rougher and

roughest. This way he is able to understand the degree of difference between all. Later he can relate to his environment as well. One day while playing he has a fall and his knees are brushed with road. He knows my mother prohibit me to play on road as it is rough and encourage me to play on grass as it is smooth. His perceptions to his environment are modified with his sensorial education. Another example of tactile impression and its relation to environment will be the tactile impression of fabrics. While doing his exercise he closes his eyes and feels the fabrics and matches them. Now he can understand that there are various kinds of materials available in his environment. Some are rough and others are smooth. Today I wish to wear a smooth shirt to park. He can judge better, concentrate more and decide with logic now. The exercises are graded so that the child can perceive first strong contrasts and are gradually refined to finer and more delicate differences. The child is provided with an opportunity to repeat these exercises as often as he wishes for repetition is what builds and exercise the senses. For example the baric tablets exercise. The child is familiarized with the concept of light and heavy in initial exercise. In later exercise he can feel and make his judgments for the same concept. Now he can even make more delicate difference between light, medium and heavy. He carries the concept with him home. One day while helping his mother put the grocery in order he shares with her that this bag with watermelon is heavy, the one with cookies is medium and this one which has bread is light. The child is getting adapted to his environment on the right age. Sensorial education helps a child to clear his concepts at the right age and prepares him for his future education as well. Apart from this he can relate better to his surroundings too. For

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example he can understand not only the difference between hot and cold but also various grades of temperature through his thermal bottles and thermic tablets exercise. At the shopping mall he finds the coke can very warm and he wish to have cold. He is suggested to have from the freezer but he finds it very cold. He is offered one ice cube to make the warm coke just right. Just with one touch a child of four years is able to understand the difference. Once again he is ready to face his challenges later as his base is strong now. Same goes with his gustatory training. He knows the difference between salty, spicy and sweet and he makes his mother's work easy by letting her know that he wish to have something sweet and not salty. Again his auditory skills are enhanced to a large extent with his sound boxes and bells exercises. Through his sound boxes exercises he can understand the various levels of sounds. While watching his favorite cartoon show he can understand too loud will be noisy, too low will not be audible and yes this is just right. The child is so cleverly given sensorial impressions that they are sensorial educated enhancing their senses. To conclude we say that in David Gettman's words " Finally, the Sensorial Activities can have a moral and spiritual importance for the child. A very young child, who has not yet organized sense experience, sees the world as consisting of lively, responsive ' things' which behave like fountains of impressions, spouting changing sensorial stimuli in response to playful proddings. "