

Montessori wrote about "the secret of childhood". describe what she meant by this...



Montessori wrote about " The Secret of Childhood". Describe what she meant by this. In one of Dr. Maria Montessori's book, " The Secret of Childhood" where she continued and further elaborated her work on child development, one of her important findings in her research was " Sensitivity Period" in the child. These are important periods of childhood development. A sensitive period is a period of time when a child passes through special times in his life and spends much of his time to focus on one certain skill or activity.

She felt that this was importantly true during the first few years of the physical life, from birth or even before the birth until the brain of the child had completely developed. In her observation, she noticed that the child is particularly sensitive to certain types of interaction during certain overlapping periods. The child is able to acquire certain abilities and to learn certain skill quicker and more effectively. This special time in his life enables him to incorporate a particular skill into his schema easily if the child allowed utilising his ability and practicing it exhaustively during this sensitive period.

This is a basic instinct reflecting the child personal need for that acquisition in order to live in this new world. However, once the sensitive period for a particular ability is over, the child is still capable of learning it but with more efforts putting it and will be more of challenge at a subsequent time. It is important for the adults to observe their child and take advantage of the sensitive period; it is often that adults do not realize this special times in their child, perhaps merely because they do not remember them in themselves when they are too busy to earn for a living.

If the adults pay more attention to the child's sensitive period, it will help to foster the independence and brings the sense of satisfaction to the child. At the opposite site, if the adults forego this opportunity, a thwarted sensitive period will manifest itself in a cranky child. Montessori described these as "tantrums of the sensitive periods (as) external manifestations of an unsatisfied need. (The Secret of Childhood, Part 1, Chapter 3, Page 44) According to Dr Maria Montessori's finding, the child will pass through six significant sensitive periods from age birth to six years old; those for order, sensorial experiment and refinement through five senses, social behaviour, refinement of motor skills and movement, sensitivity to small objects and language. During the period of unconscious mind creation, the child acquires the above mentioned abilities and later on he concentrates on refining these newly acquired skills during the conscious period.

During the sensitivity to order period, the child operates this period most actively in his first three year of physic life. The child shows the need for order and seeks for it in order for him to acclimate himself to his environment through the period of unconscious creation. It is crucial for the child to be able to impose an order on it in a way that makes sense to him while the child is observing his world through his "absorbent mind" before he can incarnates it in his life.

This is equally important for the child develops a feeling of security when he is comfortable with the sameness and order that happen around him. There are two fold sense of order, according to Dr Maria Montessori. First is external, whereby the child relationship with his environment, and second is internal that brings an awareness of different parts of the child's own body

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and their relative positions. For the youngest child, he does not realize he is separate from his surroundings, until the order around him helps him make the distinction.

Thus, his internal orientations are created through the external order surrounding him. The child has a strong belonging of both place and of time. Everything should have a place and this sameness will settle the child in a routine life more quickly. In Montessori classroom, the materials are arranged in such the same way every day. Children come to rely on it and can get his bearings by own self. Gradually he absorbs the concept of that and after each use of the material, the child insists on putting thing back in their place.

Besides this, an infant can be very upset over things that adult would not notice at it; for example the baby who cried and acted very fussy as a result of being bathed after a meal when he has become accustomed to being bathed before a meal. The adult should take time in the beginning to respect this inner guide in the child, sooner the child can begin to create his own order and routine in his daily life. The child will be more comfortable with the same routine and consistency, by choosing to do the same thing at the same time or in the same way.

In conclusion, the unconscious mind of the child uses the external order from his environment to create his own internal order. Dr Maria Montessori mentioned once before that the child need an object to explore and to fulfil his natural curiosity in order to develop his mind. Montessori sensorial activities are those which refine the five senses - tactile (touch), visual

(sight), auditory (hearing), olfactory (smell) and gustatory (taste) senses.

Children are particularly receptive to developing their senses from birth to six years old.

Nevertheless, it is important for the adult to provide as many sensorial experiences as possible at those ages. For an example, baby will starts his first sensorial experience through his hand and then follows by his mouth. Baby likes to grasp things around him and put it into his mouth for better exploration and experience. Dr Maria Montessori concluded, therefore, " the tongue, which he uses for speaking and more of his hands, which he employs for work" are more intimately connected with his intelligence than any other parts of body. (Montessori, A Modern Approach, Chapter 1, Page 34).

Dr Maria Montessori really emphasized on sensorial activities in her classroom, materials in her classroom are in various textures, sizes, which that some are soft or hard, and that objects have different colours and shades. The child needs to freely explore in his prepared environment so he can differentiate among these qualities. When the child grows older, he is now has more interest in refining his sensory input. A more in depth of exploration into sameness, differences and gradations of same and different objects in his environment is now realizes by him.

Through these senses, the child is able to study his environment and through this study, he is then begins to understand his environment and learns from it as well. Dr Maria Montessori here referred the child as a " sensorial explorer". The child learns through the sensorial materials by given an opportunity to classify the meaning of the material around him which in

return leads to the child making his own experiences in his environment.

Sooner and later, the child learns to adapt to his environment and now he gains a decision making skill, which is not far from being an independent individual.

Once the child is becoming relatively stable in his physical and emotional environment from two years through six years old, he is now ready to attend himself in the social environment. The social order is about the importance of the child forming good relationships with others and working alongside. A multi-age group in Montessori's classroom is at the heart of the Montessori environment that encouraged the child to contribute positively to the school in various ways. The older child will become a role model to the younger child and helping each other.

Besides this, Montessori's philosophy in grace and courtesy is to help the child to develop a respect for people around him. During the first physical year, infant goes through the most intense period for his movement. The baby at birth who is being motionless and unable to control any of his movements is transform to an individual who is able to walk by himself when he is at about one. This shows that the baby has a strong urge to learn and reveal himself if the adult is providing the opportunity to him.

At two and half years till about four years old, the child enters in the sensitivity period toward coordination and movement. During this period, performing a repetitive work is crucial to the child in order for him to further gains greater and precise control of his movement. Once the child had mastered walking, his hand has become free to work. Montessori strongly

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emphasized by working on hand, the child mind can be fully develops.

Furthermore, the child is very sensitive to small objects at about two years old.

The child has a strong urge to pay attention to small objects compared to other period. Nevertheless, this sensitivity is important for the child in building his concentration and enhances his power of observation. He is now able to focus on work to refine his hand eye coordination and his hands truly become an instrument of his mind. The final sensitive period is that for language as it begins as early as birth. The baby will begin imitate the human sounds surrounding him even though there are all kind of sounds such as music, vehicles sound, and etc.

Hence, it shows that babies possess sensitivity towards the human language that deeply heard by them. By six months, he is uttering his first syllables, by one year he is able to speak his first intentional word, and follows by few phrases and by about two years old he is now able to speak a language and finally at three years old, he is speaking in sentences and paragraphs with proper syntax and grammar and fully express his needs in speaking with people. This is such a wonderful and amazing skill that born in human that the absorbent mind of the little child makes a big difference compared to animal.

If we as adult have a strong understanding in the young child who comes into the world with his unique abilities and that it is he who will unfold by himself, then we should take advantage of his first six years according to the crucial sensitivity period. From there, the child creates the man he is to

become. Bibliography Paula Park Lillard, Montessori: A Modern Approach, Schocken Books New York, 1972 Maria Montessori, The Secret of Childhood, Ballantine Books, 1982 Maria Montessori, Absorbent Mind, Henry Holt and Company, New York, 1995