

Help me to help myself

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**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The phrase ' Help me to help myself' portrays the child's sensitivity to do things him/herself with the help of his/her carers, peers and people with whom s/he comes in contact with. Maria Montessori was the one to first recognize this need of the child and went further to research on it. " As a rule, however, we do not respect children. We try to force them to follow us without regard to their special needs. We are overbearing with them, and above all, rude; and then we expect them to be submissive and well-behaved, knowing all the time how strong is their instinct of imitation and how touching their faith in and admiration of us.

They will imitate us in any case. Let us treat them, therefore, with all the kindness, which we would wish to help to develop in them". -(Montessori, 1965) Due to time and social constraints, we adults often ignore our children's individuality and abilities. We need to help the child to help him/herself to become more independent. A child learns from the time s/he is born. The more the experiences the more the child learns and it is the adult's duty to provide the means for these experiences. The child's real challenge for independence starts at about age of one, when s/he starts walking.

The child will just walk up and down with no motive in his/her mind but to just master the new achievement. The primary carer helps the child just by providing a safer and stimulating environment for him/her without any interference. " The greater the effort, the greater is the child's pleasure and worse is any interruption..... Things done spontaneously by children are done for the formation of man. The nurse must stay near them and watch

them, be ready to help them if necessary". Maria Montessori (1946, pg. 117-118)

Freddie is in a setting where it has been set up, keeping in mind the needs of the child. He is free to choose any activity he likes and he knows that he has to keep the activity, which he was playing with, back in the right place. He gets the help when needed. Freedom brings out independence. The more the child is allowed to choose what s/he desires to do the more the child becomes confident and interested in doing things him/her self. It brings in the child self esteem, sense of belonging to the society and the child will be motivated to behave in an acceptable manner.

The teacher is close to Freddie so that she can help him if he needs it and observes him too without interfering and respecting his desire to do the button frame. " It is by helping the child to help himself we render him that help which will make him independent. To teach the child to brush his hair, we must give him a small mirror, a small comb and a suitable brush. If we want the child to wash his hands we must provide him with things fit for his size. He will rejoice being able to do things. He will do what he does with enthusiasm. Thus the child is introduced into a form of life, which is necessary for him". (Maria Montessori, 1989 pg. 10)

Montessori believed that education starts from birth. She believed that a child develops differently at each stage of his/her life. The first developmental stage being The absorbent mind(0-6 years), the second Childhood(6-12 years) and the third Adolescence(12-18 years). During the first three years, the child's actions are guided by an inner drive, where the child learns unconsciously through his/her actions. The adult helps the child by

providing an environment, which is safe, stimulating so that the child learns through exploration, manipulation and discovery.

The adult should stay close to the child and observe rather than interfering or restricting a child to one place. As the child grows, the child's actions are more of intentional/conscious mind. Horme is replaced by 'will'. Freddie's will is reflected when he uses the button frame. As he was given the freedom to choose the activity and use it, Freddie displays the characteristics of a 'normalised child'. Freddie is responsible as he has put away the puzzle in the right place and respects others as he waits for Jonnie to finish the button frame before he can use it.

Montessori not only suggested that freedom forms the basis of independence, but also encouraged freedom with limitations. The ground rules in a nursery setting lay down these limitations. The child is expected to behave in a manner that shows respect to his/her peers, and to the environment. Freddie is given the freedom to chose an activity but he also knows the ground rules, so he waits for his turn, returns the activity, tucks his chair in. These actions not only show his social development but also his sensitivity to order.

There is consistency and predictability in his environment. Freddie knows that he has a teacher to ask for help when he needs it. He knows where he can find the activity he wants to do. He also knows what is expected from him. The teacher's non-interference in Freddie's choice of the button frame makes him feel trusted to be able to do things for himself. Freedom of movement and physical activity is an important aspect in a growing child. A

child becomes independent with exploration and exploration requires movement. Miss J takes Freddie out in the garden when he desires to do so.

He waits patiently for his other two friends to get ready. The teacher plays an important role in helping the child. According to M. Montessori(1946, pg. 34), “ The teacher must be a servant to nature, show respect and care, and be humble. Her plan must be to nurture life, which is a force, a force full of wisdom and power”. The teacher must be facilitator and show respect to all children. She should put in efforts to provide the children with an environment that is motivating, stimulating to them. The teacher should be a silent observer and help the child only when the child needs it.

In Freddie’s case the teacher is a silent observer and helps Freddie when he wants to and also allows easy access to the garden. Montessori emphasised that a favourable environment helps the child learn independently at his/her own pace. A favourable environment meant that the physical environment of the setting should be such that the child can see things at her/his level that acts as help in the development of the child not a hindrance. Montessori’s idea of favourable environment was to provide children with child sized furniture, homely, beautiful, neat, tidy and organised environment.

If a child is given a chair his/her size which can be moved freely by him/her, s/he is motivated to do more activities rather than sitting on a stationary chair. Freddie could pick up the button frame on his own as it was kept in a cupboard his size. This nurtures independence. According to Standing (1984, p. 265) “ What Montessori has done is this: realising the peculiarly absorbent nature of the child’s mind, she has prepared for him a special environment;

and then, placing the child within it, has given him freedom to live in it, absorbing what he finds there.”

Montessori designed materials after observing a child's developmental needs. She also designed some activities of everyday living that boost a child's independence and bring in him/her a sense of belonging to the society s/he lives in. Freddie is doing the button frame that helps him to be more independent while dressing himself up. The button frame is only one of the many activities of everyday living designed by M. Montessori that helps the child to become more independent. These activities helped children to be able to do things for themselves and also helped them to be sociable, considerate and respect others.

“ Development is the construction of personality, reached by effort and one's own experiences; it is the long road which every child must travel to attain maturity”-Montessori, 2001a, p 187. In order for a child to develop, s/he must be provided with opportunities. These opportunities can be provided to child by creating an environment that attracts and motivates the child. It is necessary to understand that each child learns at his/her own pace. The favourable environment offers the child freedom of movement, freedom to do, freedom to do nothing, predictability, consistency.

This freedom comes with limitations so that a child knows that s/he is responsible for his/her own actions. Self-discipline and obedience are the results of such freedom with limitations. Montessori believed that the child works to construct a man. And in this construction, the child requires a lot of support from his/her environment. The child needs guidance and not a person who will do things for the child. After a lot of observations on children

and a research on those observations, Montessori has tried to create a system that is the most favourable for a child's development, both physical and mental.

She has truly supported the child's sentence- " help me to help myself". She designed materials for children which she thought would develop the child's personality as a whole. Both physical and mental activities are equally important. A child has to be given the freedom to choose what s/he wants to do rather than being directed to do a specific thing. She respected the child's needs and believed in letting the children to be. It is very easy for us to do things for the child not realising that this acts as a hindrance in a child's development.