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Box 11, Folder 37 - "Continuation of the Chapter on Montessori and the Liturgy" (E.M.S.)

Edwin Mortimer Standing

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(Continuation of the chapter on Montessori and the Liturgy)

In the Montessori approach it is quite different .Except at certain times the Montessori Directress does not concern herself directly with the centre her job is " to feed the periphery " . And she does this by means of specially devised teaching materials . Each of these is so constructed as to set up an activity at the Periphery, a manipulation of materials which often involves a movement of the whole body as well as for instance in the number rods or the time-line)The directress shows the child exactly how to use the particular material in question - it might be for instance the movable alphabet or a material for teaching the Parts of Speech or for Long Division etc--and when she sees the child has cottoned on to the manner of using it properly she goes away and leaves him to it . She knows that as long as he uses the materials correctly his repeated activity with them will set going and keep going a a corresponding activity deep down in the centre .That is why if you go into a Montessori school the chances are that at any moment the majority of the children working individually at the various materials quite independently of the directress .The activity which you will see there as you go in is a peripheral activity but along with this peripheral activity the children are learning from the material itself . In fact it is true auto-education which is going on .And the particular bit of knowledge which is atis were latent in each material gradually impresses itself on the child's mind as he works away happily with the material at the periphery !

The Point of Contact

Each of these material occupations acts as a "Point of Contact " between the "Centre " and an external reality .It is thought this Point of Contact - and the repeated activity which it brings about -

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that this external reality makes itself known to the child's intelligence . Take for instance that young fellow you might see over in the corner working away at the multiplication table board Without going into details we may say that this material permits the child to work out by means of pegs and a special number per-board ~~xxxxxx~~ to work out for himself the multiples of any number up to ten he chooses . Actually at the moment he is at work on the seven times table , and has got as far as six sevens equals forty-two . He has just counted the six sevens on the peg board and having done so he records the number on a prepared slip of paper . So he proceeds now to the next multiple of seven and having found that records it : and so on until he comes to ten sevens and the table is completed.

It is in fact a genuine mathematical research , and at the end of it he is not the same as he was at the beginning . A genuine portion of the great world of mathematical reality outside him has recorded itself at his Centre . A reality from without has - passing through the Point of Contact - made itself known within him and become a part of himself .

This we might notice , in passing , is very different from letting the child just play with the pegs in any particular manner which is fancy might take him , as for instance to "make a garden " or " a pretty pattern ". For in such occupation there takes place - one might say - a movement only from within out . Nothing from without has been recorded . no new reality has impinged itself , no new piece of knowledge has recorded itself from without. In fact , as far as new knowledge is concerned , the child is left exactly where he was . Not there is anything wrong in letting the child do this, but only that we wish to point out that - in the case of a child thus working at his own whim with the material he is master of the whole situation . in the sense that he dominates the

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material , making it subseriviebt to his will , as it carries out his own wishes .That is to say he is not subject to the discipline of an external reality . It is entirely a movement from within out .

You may say "But this is a form of self-expression " ; and so it is up to a point , and not without its value as such ; but it is emphaitically not a process by which the child's mind grows and expandsby its own self-activity , and the absorption and digestion of new facts from without .

The Point of Contact brings Limitation

There is another important feature of the Point of Contact which is formed by the Montessori materials,one which is allied to what we have just been talking about,and it is this ,—that the Point of Contact always bringd with it adefinte limitation, a precision , the exactitude which comes inevitably with order . This is because the directress always insists on the child using the material in definte and precise manner :for it isonly by doing this that the materials will yield up their secret, the portion of knowledge which , in a manner of speaking , is concealed within each of them , which impresses itself on the child's intelligence pari passu with the manipulative activity which is taking place at the periphery .

Many persons criticise the Montessori Method on this account, inferring that , by this limitation and precision - this prescribed manner of working with the materials -we are inhibiting the child's free development .But in point of fact just the contrary is true . It is just bycarrying out this limitation and precision which is involved in the right use of the materials ,that the shild's further development is assured .Thus you will find that it is just the child who has been working with the geometric insets1 in the orthodix manner ,that is feeling their contours with his first two fingers ,

"Let us keep then constantly before ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ us this picture of the child -mind , called - through the point of contact -to a small work limited and exact - to a real work not a make-belief . As - to take an example - a piece of music played in the childrens presence summons them from just making any kind of music - to the performance of precise and limited movements in accordance with the rhythm of the music , so in the mental sphere the point of contact , summons the mind of the child from wandering at large in fantasy to something definite and real , which opens up a new pathway " $\frac{1}{2}$