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IS WORK A NATURAL INSTINCT ?

SOME REFLECTIONS ON A VISIT TO A

MONTESSORI SCHOOL

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The writer of this article has worked for many years in collaboration with Dr. Maria Montessori in Italy, Great Britain and other countries. He has written and lectured on the Montessori Method as Dr. Montessori's personal representative.

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SOME REFLECTIONS ON A VISIT TO A MONTESSORI
SCHOOL

Have you ever visited a well-run Montessori School ? If not
come with me (in imagination) and you will see many things
which please and surprise you .

(over)

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The General Arrangement

We enter a large n bright room with long low windows , gay with flowers and ~~other~~ all sorts of other brightly coloured objects . The moment we ~~enter~~ ^{pass in we} are at once ~~conscious~~ ^{aware} of a general stir of activity, ^{arising} ~~which arises~~ from every part of the room . People going and coming ; people conferring together ; people actively engaged in all sorts of different occupations . In fact we are reminded more of a busy emporium or a large bank than a schoolroom . Who are these people so busy , so active , so concentrated , so serious, yet at the same time so joyful ? They are ~~the~~ children - little children of ages 4-7 years ~~always~~ . It is truly an astonishing sight ~~to~~ to see these tiny mites , thirty to forty of them , all going serenely about their work with the seriousness of grown-ups . Each has a little table at which he works , either alone or in company with one or two of ~~his~~ comrades . A few , here and there , are working on ~~small~~ ^{tiny} coloured rugs spread out between the tables ~~which are dotted~~ ^{arranged} ~~about the room~~ like tables in a restaurant .

The Teaching Occupations

All round the room are long , low cupboards in which we see - temptingly spread out as in a shop window - an immense variety of fascinating objects . These are the famous Montessori Materials for Teaching , each of which represents an interesting and instructive occupation . ~~and~~ Each of these occupations is so designed that it serves as a means of research for ~~these~~ tiny ever-active fingers and equally active exploring minds . ^{for instance:} Those

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with

cubes of various sizes, which that little child of $3\frac{1}{2}$ is building ~~into~~ a tower, teach it - albeit unconsciously - to compare the sizes of objects, and ^{so} give it the idea of gradation. This ~~note~~ ^{occupation,} ~~is~~ in conjunction with others of a similar kind, ^{also} prepares the child's ^{mind to} ~~in~~ forming later & clear ideas of number. For after all upon what is the idea of number based ~~upon~~ if not on the measurement of graded quantities?] The little boy at the next table is occupied (how intently!) - with the "colour tablets" which sharpen and develop his sense of colour at an age when he is specially sensitive to such impressions. And what, is that child ~~doing over~~ ^{doing} in the far corner with those funny-looking objects, which look for all the world like silver mushrooms on wooden stalks? ^{She is studying musical pitch and} ~~She is~~ learning to distinguish the notes in the ~~musical~~ scale ^{a small note -} for each of those "mushrooms" is a little bell, and represents "do" or "mi". ^{or "fa" or whatever it may be} Without realising it ~~what she is doing~~ - for to her it is just a fascinating game - she is laying the sure foundations ^{of} ~~for~~ a musical training.] N.P.

N.P

It is impossible to explain what each child is doing: it would take up a whole book. Some of these occupations lead the child ^{on} ~~by~~ steps ^{equally} ~~by step~~ to a knowledge of how to read and write. ^{Reading + Writing} Others ~~series~~ ^{their} of fascinating "games" initiated ~~the child~~ into the structure of the Decimal System; ^{they are} that, almost before they are aware of it, ~~he is~~ ^{they are} doing such operations as Addition and Multiplication and so on.] And I am quite sure you would never guess what that little girl ^{over there} is taking out of those attractive-looking

graded

N.P

boxes with their variegated pigeon holes ! Not ^{toys} toys , nor sweets ,
 though , to judge by her expression , ^{it must be} something equally interest-
 ing. ^{You will be surprised to hear that} They contain , in fact , the Parts of Speech and she is
 studying Grammar ! On each of those little red tickets is a Verb,
 on the brown ones an ^{on the black ones a Noun} Adjective , and so forth . We cannot stop
 to explain in detail "how it works " - this Grammar Box - for we
 are only making a quick general survey . Suffice it to say here
 that ~~every~~ ^{like every other, this} subject of instruction is taught through the medium
 of something concrete and visible . ^{And} ~~More than this ;~~ ^{for they are not only visible, but also} ~~by something~~
^{Things} which evoked an ordered activity of body as well as of mind .
^{occupation}

An Exploded Superstition

~~For~~ Bodily activity is as necessary for a child , at this age,
 as water to a duck . Dr. Montessori has swept away for ever the
 antique superstition that in order to teach something to a child
 we should ~~make~~ ^{oblige it to} sit still & fixed immoveably at a desk , list-
 ening to the interminable harangues ^{by a} of the teacher . (Have we
 "peripetatic"
 forgotten how Aristotle propagated his immortal philosophy ~~as he~~
^{walking} walking his students up and down the groves of his Academy ? How
~~is it necessary that we~~
 much more , then , ~~should~~ ^{should} allow freedom of movement to little
 children who are by nature ~~as~~ mobile as quicksilver & !

Speaking of teachers reminds us that we have not as yet
 introduced you to the teacher in this new kind of school . Indeed
 one is ^{at first} naturally so interested in watching the children that one
 forgets all about her . ~~But~~ ^{Besides} ~~the curious thing is that most of~~ ^{so much in}
 the children seem to have done the same ; for she is not ~~in~~
^{here} evidence ^{as} in an ordinary school . In fact most of the children
^{do not} don't seem to take any notice of her ; they are too busy with

with their own affairs ~~each at his self-chosen task~~. Nor do they seem to be disturbed by the presence of visitors. They give us a casual glance as we enter, and perhaps a smile of welcome; sometimes one will come up with a chair and invite ~~us~~ ^{us} ~~you~~ to sit down. But, in a few minutes, the mysterious attraction of their various occupations re-absorbs their attention, and ~~the~~ ^{visitors} ~~we~~ might be in Timbuktoo for all ~~the~~ further notice ~~they~~ taken of ~~us~~. ^{them} Work a Natural Instinct ~~Indeed~~ ^{school} The most astonishing fact about this novel and fascinating scene before us, the most revolutionary as regards our existing notions, is the revelation that the small child loves work. For the ^{most} significant thing about all these tiny beings in this Lilliputian world is that, though they are working at Arithmetic, Reading, Writing, Geometry, Grammar ^{etc} ~~and~~ ~~as~~, nobody is making them do so; nobody has even asked them to do so. They are working of their own free will because they like it. They love work. They revel in it. - Almost one might say they bathe themselves in it!

(Cahilals)

This is Dr Montessori's great discovery, - that work is natural to man, or at least to the child. Hitherto we have always associated the idea of play with ~~the child~~ ^{children} rather than work; but the great Italian "Dottoressa" has demonstrated, beyond a shadow of doubt, that the instinct to work is as profound as that of play. No threat of punishment hangs over the heads of these tiny scholars menacing them if they do not work; nor are they stimulated ^{to it} by any external rewards such as marks,

prizes , or class placings . They are under no external restraint from the teacher : each is quite free to rise from his seat , or talk to his neighbour , or even to do nothing at all (so long as he does not interfere with his neighbour) . Yet rarely does one see this freedom abused . This is because the old ~~form~~ ^{form} of discipline , imposed from the outside , has given way to a higher ^{of discipline} form , — a self-discipline which comes from within as the ^{consequence} ~~result~~ of an ordered personality .

Freedom and Discipline

" " one of the beneficial effects of the)
 This inner discipline is ~~the result of~~ ^{the result of} ~~right~~ use of ^{in the schoolroom} freedom . It could only be born in the soul of a child who ~~has~~ ^{is} free ~~been given the freedom~~ to direct his own actions ; to organise his movements from within ; to choose a line of action and carry it through independently of the Teacher . How indeed ^{could} ~~can~~ a child's ^{become strong to control himself} will develop ^{itself by use . ?} except by use — as every function must develop .
 How can he form the habit of choosing good and orderly activities unless ^{ies} the opportunities ^{are constantly} of free choice [?] be presented to him . In the ordinary school this is denied him ² because at every moment [?] in everything he does ² he is carrying out the will of the Teacher, which is substituted for his own . By freedom ~~of course~~ ^{let it be clearly understood} we do not mean licence — far from it — ^{This is} ~~and this is~~ a point often ^{and} misunderstood by those who have but a superficial ^{and} hearsay knowledge of the Montessori Method . The fact remains , however , that the child would never , and could never have revealed to us this love of work and self-discipline ^{with} ~~2~~ Dr. Montessori had ~~not~~

first

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tyrannous and ever -

liberated him from the tyrannous and dominating personality of the teacher . For tyranny it was, albeit unconscious and well-intentioned: ^{for we must remember} ~~is~~ which shows us clearly that even love, ^{far} undirected by knowledge, may go astray .

"Directress" not Teacher

The Teacher in the Montessori School is no longer a "Dictator " who ~~perpetually~~ commands a regimented society, perpetually saying "Do this " , "Do that " or "Don't do the other " . Rather she is one who directs the inexhaustible and insurpressible energies of childhood into creative channels. That is why Dr. Montessori calls those she has trained "Directresses" instead of Teachers . The Montessori Directress is in fact a new type of teacher, corresponding to this new type of child . She is their guide , philosopher and friend . It is true that her knowledge is greater than theirs - in particular she knows how to instruct them in the right and fruitful use of the hundred and one Teaching Materials - but she never obtrudes herself ^{nor} ~~of~~ her knowledge . A large part of the teaching is done by the Materials themselves . Or to put it more accurately, the children teach themselves ^{by} ~~by~~ ^{through} ~~using these~~ ^{the} materials, which have been designed just for that purpose ; and the teacher forms a link between the child and the materials. The less she teaches directly herself and the more the children learn by their own self-activity in working with the materials, the better is she pleased . ^{For} Generally speaking, what you learn by your own discovery is not

only more interesting than what is told you at second-hand by another, but remains more permanently fixed in your memory. What you learn in this spontaneous way you learn with pleasure and it enters more deeply into you, becoming, as it were, built into the living structure of your personality. Hence the golden maxim of the Montessori Teacher with respect to her pupils is this: "Every useless aid I give to my children, not only does not help them, but arrests their development".

*Why The Child Works Spontaneously
(or Work and Growth)*

- after all -
For how does anything grow, - whether it be plant, animal, body, mind or soul? It grows by its own God-given activity. The sun shines, but the plant grows by its own activity, by the unfolding of those mysterious and inexplicable potentialities within it. So too with the child's intellect - exactly. The Teacher is like the sun - the great encourager - and the "Prepared Environment" of the Montessori School, the right soil; but unless the child's mind is to be as a mere sack stuffed with unrelated facts tied up by memory, it must be allowed to grow by its own spontaneous activity, by the action of those profound potentialities ~~of~~ in its intellectual and moral nature, which are, as the poet says "deep seated in our mystic frame". This law holds ^{right up} good even in the highest sphere of human development, the growth of the religious sense: Paul may plant, Apollo

may water , but " it is God who giveth the increase " .

Montessori classroom,

As we stand and contemplate this ^{more} scene of so much spontaneous activity , fragrant with the innocence and charm of childhood , we cannot help being impressed by its singular beauty . But to the philosophic mind it brings also a sense of something deeper , a feeling ^{It is} akin to awe , as though we found ourselves in the presence of a great mystery , ~~as indeed we are~~ ^{- which is indeed the case.}

~~is~~ . We ask ourselves again and again : What is it that makes these tiny children continue to work in this astonishing manner , hour by hour , day by day , month by month , even year by year , with no other incentive than the work itself ?

When an adult works he does so to achieve some external end , - ^{Such as} to build a house , or a bridge , a hospital or a business , or it may be to carve out a name for himself ; and so on . But these children have no such external aim . They are not working , as we have already said , to obtain good marks or pass examinations ; and since they have no external motive the question is forced upon us : Why do they work at all ?

"The Child is Father of The Man"

Dr. Montessori's answer is clear and definite, and fraught with great hope for humanity . Their real aim , she says , is an inner , unconscious one : "The child is working to produce the Adult that is to be " . He works as the bee works, or the ant, because an imperious inner instinct urges him to fulfil his destiny . He works because he is a creator; because he is creating the man that is to be . The inspired

utterance of the poet Wordsworth is scientifically true, "The Child is Father of the Man". ~~Looked at~~ With these ideas at the back of ~~the~~ our minds, ~~this~~ ^{of the Montessori School} intense, varied, incessant spontaneous activity ~~unfolding itself before our eyes~~ takes on a new + deeper significance. We feel as though a veil had been drawn aside ~~and we were~~ ^{that} looking into one of Nature's most intimate and mysterious secrets, ~~something~~ something inexplicable like the ordered activity of an ants' nest revealed by the upturned stone; but ~~only~~ ^{these} on a far higher plane. Bending over ~~the~~ tiny shoulders, where the curls still fall; looking out from those bright and innocent eyes, wide open with the wonder of existence, we catch a glimpse of the awful form of Life itself, Life the greatest mystery, the highest form of Creation. And in ^{too} ~~man~~ we have Life at its highest, made in the image of its Creator; ~~and because of this possessing also in its measure itself~~ ^{and because of this possessing also in its measure itself} ~~And because no man having also the power to create.~~ "Education for Personality" That is why in the ~~Montessori~~ "revealing environment" of the Montessori School we are privileged to see, in a way hardly possible anywhere ~~else~~, the mysterious process of "Personality in the Making". As you ~~might~~ ^{may} see outside a shop or factory a notice to the effect that "Chairs are made here", or shoes, or bicycles or whatever it might be, so one might ^{have a notice} put up ~~a notice~~ outside a Montessori school ~~saying~~ ^{to the effect that} "Personalities are made here". ^{Yes,} Real persons, true individuals, each differing from the others, because each ^{is} created by, and ^{is} creating itself. ~~These are not schools where~~ ^{These are not schools where} so many copies moulded on one type, ^{are} made to

order and turned out by the dozen or the score, by the Teacher or State. ^{For} ~~This then is~~ the true aim of Montessori Education, ^{is} to develop ~~a complete~~ personality by the full, harmonious and free exercise of all ~~the~~ faculties of ^{body soul} ~~the~~ ^{+ spirit}

~~is the~~ The Acid Test — Examinations

One can imagine ~~a~~ cautious reader saying, These high-flown ideas are all right in theory; or in an ideal world. But after all we live in a real world, ^{where} ~~and~~ we must be practical and use common sense as well as theory. What about examinations, for instance? In such a school my Jane may develop "personality" but will she know her Multiplication Tables? Tommy may become strikingly "individual", but will he pass his Common Entrance? If the reader belongs still to that class of parents - still the majority - who judge a system of education primarily by its examination results he may put his mind at rest. Experience has shown, in every country where the Montessori Method has been carried out long enough to test it, that children actually learn better and more quickly under it than under the old system; so that by the time they come to 12 years they are on the average one year or more in advance of the standard of knowledge usually attained by that age. (See Article "The Proof of the Pudding" "The Sower" April 1936)

But (in conclusion,) we repeat that this facility to take examinations as they come is the least important result

of the education given by this method, - in fact the whole present examination system is being more and more widely questioned (cf. "Examinations Examined" a collection of essays edited by Sir Michael Sadler ^(put this in as a footnote)

Education for Citizenship

What is important is that the child should have the opportunity of growing up in the way God intended him to; so that at every stage - according to his possibilities - he can think for himself, act for himself, and make the proper adjustment to ^{the society of} his fellows. At each stage he must be permitted to acquire that form of independence which is suited to it. Only thus can he develop into the free and independent citizen who has come to realise that he has a mission to perform for the common good, - a mission as important for himself ^m as for others; for, only by fulfilling it, can he attain to the ^{complete} ~~full~~ satisfaction of his nature.

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Black bullock

Knockando

Moraz