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Box 09, Folder 32 - "Play or Work?" (E.M.S.)

Edwin Mortimer Standing

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Play or Work?

Every child ~~is~~ ~~made~~ ~~to~~ ~~be~~ ~~an~~ ~~explorer~~... & must be so in the nature of the case. For to the n. b. infant the U. is (as Prof. T. said) nothing but a ~~6.6.6.c.~~ A bewildering chaos of impressions pours in upon its little mind that all at once at once; and out of this 6. c. the child must construct an orderly universe. - a cosmos.

It is no light task. Consider for a moment only a few aspects of it. It must learn to distinguish between things near & far in space; between the past, present & future in time; between reality in reality & in dreams & imagination; between the Self & the N. Self.

It must learn ^{the nature of} ~~the nature of~~ ~~the~~ ~~law of~~ ~~cause & effect.~~ ~~the~~ ~~law of~~ ~~cause & effect.~~ & to objects fall, that water rolls, fire burns etc. & ~~causes~~ & that these & countless other experiences derive to laws of cause & effect. And while it is engaged on these & scores of other problems it must learn the functions of its own hands & eyes; by by unremitting effort gains acquire an ever more perfect co-ordination of its ~~numerous~~ ~~sensory~~ ~~motor~~ ~~system.~~ Before long to these there is added the problem of language & the acquisition of speech. In fact we can say that the child is a philosopher before he can walk & a philosopher before he can talk.

By the time the child has reached the age of two, he has mentally mapped out great portions of this unknown country into which he was born; but there is still a vast amount of exploring to do. In fact his

mental world outlook can be compared to one of those quaint maps constructed by geographers when Linnæus was still young & unexploded. In the center one sees a zone in which the outlines of continents are fairly clearly marked out & with a certain degree of accuracy - but the account this central part is surrounded by countless seas with vague & shadowy outlines, where queer strange & fabulous monsters are to be seen sporting in unknown waters near the shores of mythical islands.

Hence the child of two is still an indefatigable explorer & every day is for him a South Sea of discovery. ~~all experience~~ Everything is of interest to him no matter how trifling & trivial it may seem to us: a stone, a piece of stick, a piece of grass, a puddle of water, a scrap of colored paper - these & similar objects fascinate him beyond words to describe.

The great German educationalist, Fraebel, recognized this trait in the small child & he says:

"The child (of two) loves all things which enter his small horizon & which has little value. To him the least thing is a new discovery." Then with luminous insight he adds: - "but it must not come dead into ^{his} little world". ~~In the~~

In this last phrase Fr. hints on the central problem of education to the small child (or any other child) - viz that things must not come dead into the mental horizon.

Fraebel, as we all know, thought he had discovered the key to this problem - Play. The By means of play & make-belief things were to be brought alive into the child's mental world.

We thankfully recognize the profound insight of Pracht in many things, especially in dealing with boys at a later age - and - incidentally we deplore the desecrating ^{not so} vulgar habit of some Montessorians of ~~making~~ ^{potholes} fun of a genius whose notes they have obviously never read.

But in ~~the particular question~~ there is no doubt - that Montessori has seen deeper into the problems; & has discovered a key which unlocks the most profound recesses of the child's soul. ~~And that~~ key is not play, but work, not make-belief but reality; not ~~the~~ imagination but the intellect.

Perhaps it would be better to say that the child himself possesses the key in his own nature, and that Montessori has made it possible for him to ~~use~~ use it. ~~She has done this by presenting to the child a~~ ^{Practically better said is} ~~In this sense one can say~~ ^{that} instead of finding a key to fit a lock ~~cast~~ ^{cast} by Dalmeida has made a number of ^{one} castlets to fit the key - ~~the key~~ which the child possesses in his own nature. - ~~and~~ ^{is} the ~~Montessori~~ ^{one} school to which opens ~~back~~ ^{one} ~~castlet~~ ^{the} after another with the greatest joy.

And what is this key the child possesses? It is the intellect - that august luminous faculty which separates man by an infinite distance ~~unbridgeable~~ ^{unbridgeable} distance from the animal kingdom. ^{man & animal} So that 25 centuries ago Aristotle described man as ^{the} rational animal

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How does the intellect work? It surges on
to raw materials presents of the senses &
by comparison & contrast, by abstracts

How does the intellect work? By comparison
& contrast, and through these to ideas &
to classification of ideas. In short it takes
surges on to raw material of sensation and
abstracts from it ^{abstract} ideas, through these
reduces that bewildering chaos to order, sequence,
unity, ^{low} coherence, unity - in fact to
a Universe.

To take a simple simile. One may compare
the impressions: confused & jumbled impressions
coming thro' the senses to the iron filings which
lie on a new, higgledy-piggledy, on the piece of
paper. The intellect is like the magnetic force
which those advent causes these chaotically
~~arranged~~ ^{disturbed} particles to arrange themselves in
an order of system.

But the universe is infinite & the mind of even
an Aristotle or Aquinas or a Kant is finite;
how can then the immensely meagre intellect of
a small child hope to cope successfully with
the problem of understanding universe (problem of
making order out of this maddling & perplexing world.

In fact as D.M. says "The child of this world
comes upon the world as a heavy chaos"

How to help it make order out of the chaos -
that is the question. It is not having enough ^{intellect} unaided
to discern in the multiparous phenomena in the
experience that order ~~which is unknown in the~~
it.

But the universe is infinite & the mind even of an Aristotle or an Aquinas is finite: how then can the immeasurably vast intellect of the child hope to reduce to order the infinitely complicated of this middle world? "The end of it is, says D.: "she carries within her a heavy chaos"

How then to help the child to make order out of this chaos - that is the question. The feeble magnetic current of the intellect is not strong enough to arrange into a system the bewildering complexity of even its own very limited world of experience. The light of the intellect - to say the metaphor - is not strong enough to divine amidst the multifarious phenomena about it that order (or "inner connexion" as Fraebel named it) which is inherent in it.

So what does D.M. do? She simplifies the universe! How? By removing from it (as far as the child is concerned) a vast number of confusing elements & presenting the child with the carefully chosen residue. In effect what she does is to prepare for the child a little world of its own - a world which lacks strength - above all a world simplified and set in order - i.e. the prepared environment of D.M.S.

Now the child, unassisted intellect - immature as it is - is not sufficiently developed to recognize the order that reigns in this little world. This order ~~is~~, manifest in the environment & in the materials when properly used, goes forth to meet the cognate principle of order in the child's mind (i.e. the intellect) & to two unite.

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In fact what happens is exactly what F. was always striving to obtain - "to make the inner world fit".

In tracing the teacher to the necessities again again in the impulsive desire of the M. D. children of keeping the teacher in. ^{also} ~~the~~ ~~child~~ ~~generally~~ in the most scrupulous order. - for it is just this order in the child's world which creates the ~~order~~ helps to bring order to the child's soul. A M.D. could not find a better maxim than that of St. Augustine

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It is not to be forgotten that the object of the M. S. material is not to give the child new sensations but to bring into order those sensations (and ideas images & memories) which the child has already received.

And here we must value a point of the utmost importance. This "little world" in which the child has been placed small as it is is a real world; the objects in it are real objects; the relations are real relations; the order in it is a real order. It is not a world of make-believe and play. As far as it goes it is as real as the big universe outside, & the child lives a real & not imaginary existence in it.

And what has been the main & most surprising result of placing the child in this real but simplified world and setting free in it from adult interference. The result has been

That the child reveals a passion for work which must be seen in order to be believed.

Let us ~~now~~ ~~in~~ ~~conclusion~~ consider for a moment the essential feature ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~work~~ ~~which~~ ~~has~~ ~~to~~ ~~be~~ ~~done~~ ~~a~~ ~~regular~~ ~~course~~ ~~for~~ ~~hours~~ ~~at~~ ~~a~~ ~~time~~. It is not like the adult work. There are no trade-unions to limit it; there is no ~~of~~ ~~"~~ ~~down~~ ~~limits~~ ~~"~~ before it is finished. Stronger of all as often as ~~not~~ ~~when~~ ~~the~~ ~~work~~ ~~is~~ ~~finished~~ ~~finished~~ ~~the~~ ~~limits~~ ~~are~~ ~~not~~ ~~put~~ ~~down~~. Just the child will begin to work all over again & repeat it many times beyond all apparent reason or necessity - whether it is washing a table, or doing the exercises, or putting a neat little word into the m. alphabet.

There is no relation to the amount of effort expended & the external aim to be accomplished. In fact the child does not work to accomplish an external aim: it works because it must; because to work answers an imperious inner need: it works because it is creating itself building up its own personality. It works as if ~~in~~ ~~creed~~ ~~of~~ ~~appetite~~ ~~had~~ ~~grown~~ ~~by~~ ~~what~~ ~~it~~ ~~fed~~ ~~on~~ which is indeed ~~the~~ ~~actual~~ ~~truth~~ of the earliest work of the intellect. That serene joy which shines on the faces of the concentrated workers is the seal which is set by God on the right use of our faculty: it is the surest sign that they are carrying out those laws of growth by which He intended them to develop & grow.

We stand before the phenomenon of the free child working as before some darkly mysterious beautiful, something we cannot fully understand,

for it is a form which has its roots
in the profound & mysterious depths of life
itself: it is ~~so~~ something akin to the
germs of a plant to a seed or a caterpillar
for a seed going into a plant, or
a caterpillar into a butterfly chrysalis.
It is the mystery of creation. And as the great
spring is how a cocoon is hatching - the
mystery - for the life of the butterfly so the
Christ ^{living} ~~living~~ in, "living in the present" with
no thought for the future is creating that which
will be to be.

Play at its best is re-creation; but
work is creation itself

Something
- occult, which has its roots
in the profound nature of life itself -

We stand before this phenomenon of the free
Christ ^{which rises in} ~~which rises in~~ as before something mysterious
& occult, like a ^{seed} plant going into a
plant or a caterpillar into a chrysalis.
It is the mystery of creation which has its roots
in the unexplained nature of life itself.
And as the great