

Montessori and Sensorial Toddlers

Maria Montessori's view on the learning child sees not so much the task of filling the mind with information, but rather of constructing the mind through activity according to inner directives and urges.

*--- Dr. Peter Gebhardt-Steele
physicist & Montessori teacher trainer*

Before the age of six, a child learns from direct contact with the environment, by means of all the senses and movement. The child literally absorbs what is in the environment. The toys and materials in the home and school should be of the very best quality to call forth self-respect, respect and care from the child toward the environment, and the development of an appreciation of beauty.

Children of this age are driven by their senses. They must see, hear, touch, and taste their environment. All the materials in a toddler classroom are based on the child using two or more of his senses at once. Maria Montessori stated that children learn best when the work uses two or more senses. She specifically designed her materials for this purpose.

As the child explores the environment, she becomes aware of an interest in the variety of colors and shapes in the indoor and outdoor environment. This is the time to give very simple shape and color puzzles as children love to put things inside containers and on dowels.

The use of knobbed puzzles and other toys that call for special finger and hand grips will prepare the child for writing and other fine muscle activities, while it satisfies her need to think and solve problems.

It is specifically the opposition between the thumb and the index finger that has made it possible to execute the extremely refined movements that have produced the whole of human culture – from architecture to writing, from music to painting, and all the technology that enriches our lives.

--Dr. Silvana Montanaro

Some toys, such as puzzles, have a specific way to be used and others. Such as dolls and blocks, are more open-ended in their usage. Both are creative.

Children delight in knowing the correct way to use toys with specific procedures, just as they are proud to learn the correct way to use a woodworking tool or a musical instrument.

Through early experiences with such puzzles, children can develop many useful skills: handling materials, refining movement, completing a cycle of activity, carry out logical steps in order, and solving problems.

With open-ended toys, children learn to apply these skills and to express and process their unique mental information. They process and relive experiences, for example while playing with dolls or animal models.

With good toys children learn to bring the use of the body under the control of the will, to concentrate, to make a plan, to follow a train of thought, and to repeat and perfect. This is the foundation of creativity.

The quality and variety of open-ended, imaginative play depends on the quality and variety of experiences in the world of reality.

--- Adapted from The Joyful Child