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Educational of the Senses by the Montessori Method

Robert Bray

Education 490

Special Studies

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105

Education of the Senses by the Montessori Method

Maria Montessori (1870-1952), the first Italian woman M.D., was one of the great germinal pioneers in studying the intellectual development of the young child. Her philosophy of education (incorporated into the Montessori Method) is that only through movement and manipulation, through thinking with the senses and remaining active, does the child proceed to later abstract thinking. Thus, it is essential that the development of the senses be started early.

Dr. Montessori uses didactic objects which are pleasing to the child and which stimulate him to be creative. One is a block in which solid geometric forms are set. Ten small wooden cylinders are set into corresponding holes in the block, each cylinder fitting only one hole. The instructor takes the cylinders out of the holes, shuffles them, and places them on a table before the child. As he develops the ability to replace the cylinders in their proper holes, the child is educated to the differential perception of dimensions. The technique can be used with normal, gifted, or deficient children. More difficult exercises would be used with the gifted child, in which the cylinders would vary only slightly in size. In the case of the deficient child, the sizes of the cylinders would be greatly contrasted, making the learning easier.

... the child's confidence and ability to solve problems with the materials.

Children of two and a half and three years of age enjoy this exercise. They soon develop confidence and push away anyone who tries to interfere or help them with the exercise. By trial and error they improve their technique. The didactic material controls every error. The educational importance of the didactic material lies in these errors, for as the child corrects himself he is learning to distinguish dimensional differences. This makes the game a valuable psycho-sensory exercise.

Auto-correction and auto-education are the important points. The teacher must not interfere in the slightest way; the pupil must perfect himself through his own efforts and thereby educate his senses. The importance of self-education becomes more and more evident in higher education. This is evidenced by the increasing popularity of programmed educational material with which the student progresses at his own rate.

The refinement of the differential perception of stimuli by means of repeated exercises is also important. De Sanctis has developed a test using a series of cubes of different sizes placed at varying distances. The cubes are graduated in size from the largest with an edge of ten centimeters to the smallest with an edge of one centimeter. The exercise consists of throwing the cubes (which are pink) onto a green carpet, and then using them to build a small tower with the

largest cube as base and smallest at the top. By repeated trial and error construction of the tower, the child refines his perception of stimuli. Again, self-correction and self-education are a must.

Dr. Montessori feels that the differential perception of stimuli and the refinement of this ability through repeated self-correction and self-education are basic to the establishment of a foundation for further education of the student.¹

¹Maria Montessori, The Montessori Method, (New York; 1964), pp. 169-174.

Reference

Montessori, Maria. The Montessori Method. New York:
Schocken Books, 1964.