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**DR. MONTESSORI GIVING A LESSON
IN TOUCHING GEOMETRICAL INSETS**

THE
MONTESSORI METHOD

SCIENTIFIC PEDAGOGY AS APPLIED TO CHILD
EDUCATION IN "THE CHILDREN'S HOUSES"
WITH ADDITIONS AND REVISIONS
BY THE AUTHOR

BY

MARIA MONTESSORI

TRANSLATED FROM THE ITALIAN BY
ANNE E. GEORGE

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
PROFESSOR HENRY W. HOLMES
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WITH THIRTY-TWO ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS

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I place at the beginning of this volume, now appearing in the United States, her fatherland, the dear name of

The Directress of the Casa dei Bambini at Milan constructed under one of the windows a long, narrow shelf upon which she placed the little tables containing the metal geometric forms used in the first lessons in design. But the shelf was too narrow, and it often happened that the children in selecting the pieces which they wished to use would allow one of the [Pg 85] little tables to fall to the floor, thus upsetting with great noise all the metal pieces which it held. The directress intended to have the shelf changed, but the carpenter was slow in coming, and while waiting for him she discovered that the children had learned to handle these materials so carefully that in spite of the narrow and sloping shelf, the little tables no longer fell to the floor.

The children, by carefully directing their movements, had overcome the defect in this piece of furniture. The simplicity or imperfection of external objects often serves to develop the *activity* and the dexterity of the pupils. This has been one of the surprises of our method as applied in the "Children's Houses."

It all seems very logical, and now that it has been actually tried and put into words, it will no doubt seem to everyone as simple as the egg of Christopher Columbus.

[7] Incidentally, I may say, that I have invented a means of bathing children contemporaneously, without having a large bath. In order to manage this, I thought of having a long trough with supports at the bottom, on which small, separate tubs could rest, with rather large holes in the bottom. The little tubs are filled from the large trough, into which the water runs and then goes into all the little tubs together, by the law of the levelling of liquids, going through the holes in the bottom. When the water is settled, it does not pass from tub to tub, and the children will each have their own bath. The emptying of the trough brings with it the simultaneous emptying of the little tubs, which being of light metal, will be easily moved from the bottom of the big tub, in order to clean it. It is not difficult to imagine arranging a cork for the hole at the bottom. These are only projects for the future!

CHAPTER V. [Pg 86]

DISCIPLINE

The pedagogical method of *observation* has for its base the *liberty* of the child; and *liberty is activity*.

Discipline must come through liberty. Here is a great principle which is difficult for followers of common-school methods to understand. How shall one obtain *discipline* in a class of free children? Certainly in our system, we have a concept of discipline very different from that commonly accepted. If discipline is founded upon liberty, the discipline itself must necessarily be *active*. We do not consider an individual disciplined only when he has been rendered as artificially silent as a mute and as immovable as a paralytic. He is an individual *annihilated*, not *disciplined*.

We call an individual disciplined when he is master of himself, and can, therefore, regulate his own conduct when it shall be necessary to follow some rule of life. Such a concept of *active discipline* is not easy either to comprehend or to apply. But certainly it contains a great *educational* principle, very different from the old-time absolute and undiscussed coercion to immobility.

A special technique is necessary to the teacher who is to lead the child along such a path of discipline, if she is to make it possible for him to continue in this way all his life, advancing indefinitely toward perfect self-mastery. Since the child now learns to *move* rather than to *sit still*, he prepares himself not for the school, but for life; for he becomes able, [Pg 87] through habit and through practice, to perform easily and correctly the simple acts of social or community life. The discipline to which the child habituates himself here is, in its character, not limited to the school environment but extends to society.

The liberty of the child should have as its *limit* the collective interest; as its *form*, what we universally consider good breeding. We must, therefore, check in the child whatever offends or annoys others, or whatever tends toward rough or ill-bred acts. But all the rest,—every manifestation having a useful scope,—whatever it be, and under whatever form it expresses itself, must not only be permitted, but must be *observed* by the teacher. Here lies the essential point; from her scientific preparation, the teacher must bring not only the capacity, but the desire, to observe natural phenomena. In our system, she must become a passive, much more than an active, influence, and her passivity shall be composed of anxious scientific curiosity, and of absolute *respect* for the phenomenon which she wishes to observe. The teacher must understand and *feel* her position of *observer*: the *activity* must lie in the *phenomenon*.

Such principles assuredly have a place in schools for little children who are exhibiting the first psychic manifestations of their lives. We cannot know the consequences of suffocating a *spontaneous action* at the time when the child is just beginning to be active: perhaps we suffocate *life itself*. Humanity shows itself in all its intellectual splendour during this tender age as the sun shows itself at the dawn, and the flower in the first unfolding of the petals; and we must *respect* religiously, reverently, these first indications of individuality. If any [Pg 88] educational act is to be efficacious, it will be only that which tends to *help* toward the complete unfolding of this life. To be thus helpful it is necessary rigorously to avoid the *arrest* of *spontaneous movements and the imposition of arbitrary tasks*. It is of course understood, that here we do not speak of useless or dangerous acts, for these must be *suppressed*, *destroyed*.

Actual training and practice are necessary to fit for this method teachers who have not been prepared for scientific observation, and such training is especially necessary to those who have been accustomed to the old domineering methods of the common school. My experiences in training teachers for the work in my schools did much to convince me of the great distance between these methods and those. Even an intelligent teacher, who understands the principle, finds much difficulty in putting it into practice. She can not understand that her new task is apparently *passive*, like that of the astronomer who sits immovable before the telescope while the worlds whirl through space. This idea, that *life acts of itself*, and that in order to study it, to divine its secrets or to direct its activity, it is necessary to observe it and to understand it without intervening—this idea, I say, is very difficult for anyone to *assimilate* and *to put into practice*.

The teacher has too thoroughly learned to be the one free activity of the school; it has for too long been virtually her duty to suffocate the activity of her pupils. When in the first days in one of the "Children's Houses" she does not obtain order and silence, she looks about her embarrassed as if asking the public to excuse her, and calling upon those present to testify to her innocence. In vain do we repeat to her that the disorder of the first moment is necessary. [Pg 89] And finally, when we oblige her to do nothing but *watch*, she asks if she had not better resign, since she is no longer a teacher.

But when she begins to find it her duty to discern which are the acts to hinder and which are those to observe, the teacher of the old school feels a great void within herself and begins to ask if she will not be inferior to her new task. In fact, she who is not prepared finds herself for a long time abashed and impotent; whereas the broader the teacher's scientific culture and practice in experimental psychology, the sooner will come for her the marvel of unfolding life, and her interest in it.

Notari, in his novel, "My Millionaire Uncle," which is a criticism of modern customs, gives with that quality of vividness which is peculiar to him, a most eloquent example of the old-time methods of discipline. The "uncle" when a child was guilty of such a number of disorderly acts that he practically upset the whole town, and in desperation he was confined in a school. Here "Fufu," as he was called, experiences his first wish to be kind, and feels the first moving of his soul when he is near to the pretty little Fufetta, and learns that she is hungry and has no luncheon.

"He glanced around, looked at Fufetta, rose, took his little lunch basket, and without saying a word placed it in her lap.

"Then he ran away from her, and, without knowing why he did so, hung his head and burst into tears.

"My uncle did not know how to explain to himself the reason for this sudden outburst.

"He had seen for the first time two kind eyes full of sad tears, and he had felt moved within himself, and at the same time a great shame had rushed over him; the shame of eating [Pg 90] near to one who had nothing to eat.

"Not knowing how to express the impulse of his heart, nor what to say in asking her to accept the offer of his little basket, nor how to invent an excuse to justify his offering it to her, he remained the victim of this first deep movement of his little soul.

"Fufetta, all confused, ran to him quickly. With great gentleness she drew away the arm in which he had hidden his face.

"'Do not cry, Fufu,' she said to him softly, almost as if pleading with him. She might have been speaking to her beloved rag doll, so motherly and intent was her little face, and so full of gentle authority, her manner.

"Then the little girl kissed him, and my uncle yielding to the influence which had filled his heart, put his arms around her neck, and, still silent and sobbing, kissed her in return. At last, sighing deeply, he wiped from his face and eyes the damp traces of his emotion, and smiled again.

"A strident voice called out from the other end of the courtyard:

"'Here, here, you two down there—be quick with you; inside, both of you!'

"It was the teacher, the guardian. She crushed that first gentle stirring in the soul of a rebel with the same blind brutality that she would have used toward two children engaged in a fight.

"It was the time for all to go back into the school—and everybody had to obey the rule."

Thus I saw my teachers act in the first days of my practice school in the "Children's Houses." They almost involuntarily recalled the children to immobility without *observing* [Pg 91] and *distinguishing* the nature of the movements they repressed. There was, for example, a little girl who gathered her companions about her and then, in the midst of them, began to

talk and gesticulate. The teacher at once ran to her, took hold of her arms, and told her to be still; but I, observing the child, saw that she was playing at being teacher or mother to the others, and teaching them the morning prayer, the invocation to the saints, and the sign of the cross: she already showed herself as a *director*. Another child, who continually made disorganised and misdirected movements, and who was considered abnormal, one day, with an expression of intense attention, set about moving the tables. Instantly they were upon him to make him stand still because he made too much noise. Yet this was one of the *first manifestations*, in this child, of *movements* that were *co-ordinated* and *directed toward a useful end*, and it was therefore an action that should have been respected. In fact, after this the child began to be quiet and happy like the others whenever he had any small objects to move about and to arrange upon his desk.

It often happened that while the directress replaced in the boxes various materials that had been used, a child would draw near, picking up the objects, with the evident desire of imitating the teacher. The first impulse was to send the child back to her place with the remark, "Let it alone; go to your seat." Yet the child expressed by this act a desire to be useful; the time, with her, was ripe for a lesson in order.

One day, the children had gathered themselves, laughing and talking, into a circle about a basin of water containing some floating toys. We had in the school a little boy barely two and a half years old. He had been left outside the circle, alone, and it was easy to see that he was [Pg 92] filled with intense curiosity. I watched him from a distance with great interest; he first drew near to the other children and tried to force his way among them, but he was not strong enough to do this, and he then stood looking about him. The expression of thought on his little face was intensely interesting. I wish that I had had a camera so that I might have photographed him. His eye lighted upon a little chair, and evidently he made up his mind to place it behind the group of children and then to climb up on it. He began to move toward the chair, his face illuminated with hope, but at that moment the teacher seized him brutally (or, perhaps, she would have said, gently) in her arms, and lifting him up above the heads of the other children showed him the basin of water, saying, "Come, poor little one, you shall see too!"

Undoubtedly the child, seeing the floating toys, did not experience the joy that he was about to feel through conquering the obstacle with his own force. The sight of those objects could be of no advantage to him, while his intelligent efforts would have developed his inner powers.

The teacher *hindered* the child, in this case, from educating himself, without giving him any compensating good in return. The little fellow had been about to feel himself a conqueror, and he found himself held within two imprisoning arms, impotent. The expression of joy, anxiety, and hope, which had interested me so much faded from his face and left on it the stupid expression of the child who knows that others will act for him.

When the teachers were weary of my observations, they began to allow the children to do whatever they pleased. I saw children with their feet on the tables, or with their fingers in [Pg 93] their noses, and no intervention was made to correct them. I saw others push their companions, and I saw dawn in the faces of these an expression of violence; and not the slightest attention on the part of the teacher. Then I had to intervene to show with what absolute rigour it is necessary to hinder, and little by little suppress, all those things which we must not do, so that the child may come to discern clearly between good and evil.

If discipline is to be lasting, its foundations must be laid in this way and these first days are the most difficult for the directress. The first idea that the child must acquire, in order to be actively disciplined, is that of the difference between *good* and *evil*; and the task of the