



The Sensorial Area in Montessori

Order and Understanding through Sensorial Education

by Samantha Pollington, Co-owner and Teacher at Sunflower Montessori

A young child's senses are her tools to understanding the world around her. Since her birth she has been absorbing sense impressions. **Sensorial education helps her to bring order to these random sense impressions and use them to gain a better understanding of the world around her.** Dr. Montessori understood the importance of educating the senses and thoughtfully designed specific materials with that goal in mind. These materials cater to the six senses; tactile, visual, auditory, gustatory (taste), olfactory (smell), and stereognostic (detecting form without the aid of the visual sense). In the Montessori classroom these materials are introduced in an orderly and methodical way. All of the sensorial materials are designed in a sequence, each one laying the foundation for the next. Thoughtful introduction along with careful design enables the child to have a both successful and challenging experience. All materials were designed with a "Control of Error". This feature allows the child to autonomously

correct her mistakes. For example, with the Pink Tower (the first material introduced, consisting of ten brightly colored pink cubes ranging in size from one cubic centimeter to ten cubic centimeters) the child may attempt to build the tower with the largest cube on top, she sees the tower tumble and starts anew. **She corrected herself without the intervention of a teacher.** The materials were also designed with an "Isolation of Difficulty", meaning the materials have only one variable for the child to focus on. In the case of the Pink Tower, the cubes are all identical in color and shape, only varying in size.

Sensorial education directly enhances Order, Concentration, Coordination, and Independence. Order is instilled in the child at the beginning, in the manner in which the materials are presented. The teacher handles the materials with the utmost care. She carefully lays the work out in an order which helps the child to aesthetically understand the materials use. She goes through the progression of steps in a very careful and deliberate fashion, making sure not to clutter the lesson with distracting words. Order is additionally engrained in the child many times as the direct goal of the work itself. For instance, one goal or step of the work may be arranging objects on order from tallest to shortest or darkest to lightest. The rudimentary task in Sensorial Education is determining identities through matching, later vocabulary can be added and finally arranging items in a graded fashion occurs.

Coordination is fostered through the manipulation of the objects involved in the lessons. Some of the materials are of sizes larger or smaller than the child is acquainted with in her daily routines. **She will focus intently on the task of carrying the one meter on length Red Rod to her working rug.** She will begin to utilize fine motor skills when manipulating the tiny one centimeter cylinder at the top of the Yellow Knobless Cylinders.



The materials are also designed to increase in difficulty, coinciding with the child's ability and developmental stage. Each material can be presented to the child in different ways depending on her sensorial understanding. The teacher uses a "Three Period Lesson" with the child to determine how far to proceed with the child. An example of a Three Period Lesson using the Geometric Solids would sound as follows. "This is a sphere. This is a cube. Please touch the cube. Put the sphere on your head." If the child can accomplish these tasks, the teacher moves on to the third part of the Three Period Lesson, "What is this?" The Three Period Lesson gives the teacher information on how far to proceed with the child on the specific lesson at hand. When the child has mastered the lesson, the teacher then introduces a material or idea that will challenge the child. The elation of her accomplishment drives the child to repeat the process over and over, each time making new discoveries. **This repetition and new discovery provides the child with the sensory stimuli that allows for prolonged periods of concentration.**

The Montessori classroom is a place of choices. The child does her own work, often independently. The materials are designed for her independent success. **She leaves her work with a sense of accomplishment that belongs to her and her alone.**

"All these explorations into the sphere of sensorial attributes, carried on day after day and month after month, collectively form an unusually sure and broad foundation for the child's subsequent higher mental life. It is a real inward preparation." (E.M. Standing, 1957, p. 162)

The Sensorial aspect of Montessori prepares the child for areas such as Language, Math and Science. The young child's world is a collage of random sensory impressions. The child holds an inner need to understand these impressions in order that she may move onto to more abstract ideas.



THE FIRST ESSENTIAL FOR
THE CHILD'S
DEVELOPMENT IS
CONCENTRATION. THE
CHILD WHO
CONCENTRATES IS
IMMENSELY HAPPY.

Dr. Maria Montessori