

Montessori and Sensorial Preschool and Kindergarten

We have to understand that the world can only be grasped by action, not by contemplation. The hand is more important than the eye. It is the hand that drives the subsequent evolution of the brain. I have described the hand when it uses a tool as an instrument of discovery. We see that every time a child learns – to lace his shoes, to thread a needle, to fly a kite, or to play a penny whistle. With the practical action there goes another, namely finding pleasure in action for its own sake – in the skill that one perfects by being pleased with it. This, at the bottom, is responsible for every work of art and science too; our poetic delight in what human beings do because they can do it. The hand is the cutting edge of the mind.

*--Jacob Bronowski
The Ascent of Man*

The young child is vividly aware of the world, taking in impressions through all of her senses. It is also the time of life when lifelong preferences are formed. If we want to lay the groundwork for the child's later ability to create an organized, peaceful, and calm but stimulating, life-supporting, and beautiful environment, we must provide just such an environment now.

This is the reason we take special care in providing interesting and lovely materials, rich in variety of weight, texture, and purpose, of the best quality available. We make sure this work engages the child's intelligence as well as his body.

The function of the sensorial activities is to help the child become aware of the physical properties of the environment and to refine the senses, which leads to mental order through categorizing the environment. The aims of the sensorial materials are as follows:

1. The sensorial materials are a powerful way of bringing to the consciousness of the child impressions previously absorbed.
2. The sensorial materials provide a foundation for a conscious and intelligent exploration of the environment.
3. The sensorial materials provide the basis of order for clarity and vision.
4. The sensorial materials refine motor coordination, including the large and small muscles.
5. The sensorial materials refine the senses and, as a result, bring more reliable information to the intelligence.
6. The refined senses help the child's discovery of beauty and the aesthetic sense for artistic creativeness.
7. The sensorial materials prepare for further intellectual development.
8. The sensorial materials help detect early any handicaps or abnormalities.

The criteria on which the sensorial materials were selected were spontaneous interest, spontaneous free choice, spontaneous repetition to perfection, and activated maximum efforts, involving the whole person.

The characteristics of the materials help the child achieve the aim of the sensorial materials by being:

1. Scientific in nature, this includes exact measurements within the psychic and mental limits. The materials are not too easy or too hard for the child. The material is not unfamiliar to the child because of their scientific nature.
2. The child materializes abstractions, embodying a physical property of the environment in something concrete. This helps the child to arrive at an abstraction more easily.
3. Materials isolate a property by having a property stand out while the rest of the material remains uniform. This helps the child refine his senses for the different properties in the environment.
4. Materials are not adaptable. The characteristics of the materials are universal.
5. Materials either have a built-in control of error or it is in the child's own sense.
6. There are no multiple sets, which helps the child develop his will and his patience.

The types of activities that help the child achieve the aims of the sensorial materials include:

1. **Pairing**, which means similarity amidst contrast
2. **Grading**, finding the two sound cylinders the most similar.
3. **Name lesson**, which is the three period lesson, including all areas of the environment.
4. **Matching games**, which help the child, improve his memory.
5. **Variations** and the child's own discoveries that are not presented. The child discovers these himself while working with the material.
6. **Application**, the child is able to apply what he has learned to the environment.

We help the child achieve learning through our individual presentations. The presentations are individual for two reasons:

1. They require mental analysis, knowing the purpose or the aim of the lesson.
2. The senses work at a different pace in each individual.

We must make allowances for individual differences in our presentations.

The first presentation is basic, exercises and games may follow. This additional work contains extensions of the presentation. This extends the freedom of the child. Demonstration of the materials is done with analysis of movement and mental analysis so the child understands. We must observe the child.

We never correct sensorial mistakes; we record them and encourage the child to use the material again. As the child repeats the work, he refines himself and becomes more and more confident and proficient with his work.

As the child enters the second plane of development, between 6 and 7, the impact of sensorial materials diminishes.

--- Adapted from the American Montessori International training

--- and adapted from Children of the World