

## **MONTESSORI SENSORIAL EDUCATION**

### **Sensitive Periods and Sensory Education**

Dr. Maria Montessori's theory of Sensitive Periods is one of her most profound contributions to education and child development. Sensitive Periods are definite periods during which children display a heightened readiness and ability to acquire specific skills or engage in particular experiences. During these periods, a child may intensely focus on certain objects or aspects of their environment relevant to that area of sensitivity and pay less attention to other objects, just like a thirsty child will seek water rather than food or a toy.

One especially important Sensitive Period is for Sensory Development. During this time, children are driven to refine their senses—such as sight, sound, touch, and smell—by engaging with their environment. To support this natural drive, Montessori designed specific Sensorial Materials to nurture this development, helping children explore concepts like color, shape, size, texture, weight, and more through tactile, repetitive experiences.

### **Materialized Abstraction: Making the Abstract Concrete**

Dr. Montessori recognized the challenge children face when learning abstract concepts. To aid their understanding, she introduced the concept of Materialized Abstraction—making abstract ideas more concrete by providing children with material examples of abstract concepts. For example, the idea of color is abstract. Although most adults have an understanding of what color is. It is difficult to describe or define verbally. What is "red"? What is "blue"? In the Montessori classroom, children grasp these concepts by working with materials like the Color Tablets. These hands-on materials present abstract ideas in a concrete, tangible form, allowing children to internalize concepts through both cognitive and physical engagement. This tactile experience solidifies their understanding, making abstract ideas more concrete and memorable.

### **Sharpness of Vision: Refining Perception**

Montessori's Sensorial Education sharpens children's perception and observational skills. For example, when children outside Montessori education see a tree, they might simply notice that the trunk is brown and the leaves are green. However, children who have grown up playing and manipulating the Montessori Color Tablets naturally recognize various shades of green in a single tree. As they play with graded shades from the lightest to the darkest, they become attuned to subtle differences in their environment.

If the teacher were to explain the direction of sunlight at that moment, the child would easily and joyfully observe the brighter leaves where the sunlight hits and the darker leaves in the shaded areas. In this way, Montessori children, who frequently engage with sensorial materials as if playing, develop exceptional sharpness in their vision.

There is a famous anecdote in Montessori education. One day, while the children were working with the materials in the classroom, a worker passed by carrying a new pane of glass to replace a broken window. A child, briefly glancing up from their work, casually remarked, "That pane is slightly too small to fit the window!" The worker, puzzled, replied, "What are you talking about? I measured it precisely just a moment ago!" But when the worker tried to install the new glass, he discovered it was indeed one centimeter too short. This story illustrates how finely attuned Montessori children's precision of vision becomes through Montessori activities.

### **Beyond Knowledge: A Framework for Understanding**

A common misconception about Montessori Sensorial Education is that children simply learn more color names, memorize more shape names, and so on. However, people may miss something very important: Montessori Sensorial Education is not simply about increasing a child's knowledge but rather about providing them with a framework for classifying, organizing, and articulating their sensory experiences. Prior to working with the Sensorial Materials, the child perceives the world through their senses, but they have no language or framework to understand it.

While the child is refining their senses, they are also developing concentration, a sense of order, and, ultimately, their intellect. Above all else, as the child learns to articulate the differences they perceive in the world, they increase observational skills, refine concepts, and gain the ability to give voice to their observations because they have learned the language needed to describe what they see, refining their perception of the outer world. This process lays the foundation for advanced thinking and problem-solving.

### **Hands-On Teaching: Following God's Way**

Throughout the Bible, God often uses hands-on lessons to make spiritual concepts tangible. A notable example is found in the book of Jeremiah, where God instructs the prophet to observe a potter shaping clay. This powerful visual lesson demonstrates how, like clay in the potter's hands, we are molded by God. Similarly, Montessori education follows a comparable approach, using hands-on learning and concrete Montessori Materials to help children internalize abstract ideas. This methodology reflects God's teaching style of making the abstract more accessible through concrete, experiential learning.