1923

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Recommended Citation
Mann, Bertha (1923) "Toys That Interest - What a Mother May Learn From the Montessori System," The Iowa Homemaker: Vol. 3 : No. 9 , Article 7.
Available at: http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/homemaker/vol3/iss9/7

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Toys That Interest
What a Mother May Learn From the Montessori System
By BERTHA MANN

She believed that since we get most of our impressions thru our senses, these senses should be better trained, and on this belief she worked out her set of apparatus which she herself declares is far from complete and to which any clever mother can add.

The central idea of the Montessori system is that no human being can be educated by anyone else. He must do it himself or it is never done. Consequently, every piece of the apparatus is simple enough for the child to understand without long detailed explanations and demonstrations, yet complex enough to keep him interested for some time. The pieces are graduated from the very simplest button frames to the letters and numbers for learning to read and write. Everything is self-corrective. The child finds and corrects his mistakes himself.

In the schools where this method is practiced the child finds himself in a veritable children's world. Every bit of furniture, furnishings, equipment, and apparatus is built for him. I wonder if we realize how important this is in the training of children? In the average home the child eats from a table that is higher than his head, he climbs into chairs as we would climb into a tree, he climbs steps which are as high as his legs are long. Is it any wonder he becomes bewildered at the complexity of the world? It certainly was not built for him.

Perhaps we cannot build our house to suit the children, but we can make one room over for them in which the hooks in the closet are within their reach, and everything, in so far as it is possible, is built for their convenience and not ours. In such a room we would begin our training processes.

Button frames are the first apparatus given to a tiny three-year-old. These are frames about a foot square, covered with heavy khaki cloth, which open down the center with different kinds of openings. One with buttons and button holes, one with hooks and eyes, one with lacing, one with ribbon ends to tie, and another with shoe buttons. The purpose of this lesson is to help the child learn to handle more rapidly than he otherwise would, the various devices by which his clothes and shoes are held together on his body. The child does not realize the purpose or valuable training he is getting. These frames are most fascinating games to him.

Then he is given the exercise in rough and smooth. This piece of apparatus consists of a piece of rough sandpaper on one side of a smooth piece of board. He is told briefly the names of these two abstract qualities and proceeds to brush lightly over the two surfaces with his finger tips until he has learned to distinguish them. Then he is given exercises in different gradations of rough and smooth, which consists of strips of sand paper of varying roughness to be placed in order from fine to rough. In order to concentrate better the child is blindfolded so that he must depend upon his sense of touch alone.

Then he is given the geometric insets which train both sight and touch. These consist of thin pieces of wood about eight inches square from which have been cut insets of various shapes, clover, triangle, circular, oval, and others. These insets have little handles on them and the problem is to fit the insets into the proper holes. Anyone who has watched a child try to fit things together will immediately realize the strong appeal of this game. The children are encouraged to feel around the edge of the inset and the hole and try to fit them together thru the sense of touch.

Practice in judging weights of woods is supplied by having small pieces of wood of the same size, but varying weights. Then small but heavy objects are compared with large but light ones. The difference between large and small is taught by means of blocks of varying sizes, with which the child builds a pyramid. When he has mastered this...
he is encouraged to build his pyramid across the room from his blocks and thus must remember and image the size. This makes splendid training for comparing and estimating sizes with the eye.

Long and short and thick and thin are taught by the long stairway and the broad stairs are built with blocks about ten of sticks of wood about an inch and a half in thickness and varying in length from six inches to three feet. The child builds the stairway with these. The big stairs are built with blocks about ten inches long, varying in thickness from five-tenths square inches to five square inches.

Color perception is trained by means of spools of different colored yarns and various gradations of each color. Fascinating games can be played with these color spools. To be able to judge various textiles by the sense of touch alone is a valuable asset to any one, but how many can do it? The child trained in the Montessori way is given pieces of different types of materials, wool, cotton, linen, and grades of these. He is told briefly their names and learns to distinguish them when he is blindfolded. This can be made into another interesting game and calls for the keenest competition from the children.

I could go on and on describing the whole set of apparatus, but I only wish to give an idea of the simplicity of the various articles which any clever parent can make for herself. The idea is the big thing.

Of course the ideal way of training our youngsters would be to buy a complete set of Montessori apparatus. This is expensive, costing about fifty dollars complete, although not so expensive when we consider the superior results obtained. Fifty dollars worth of groceries and clothes to care for the physical needs of our child is a small sum, but people are prone to neglect the intellectual needs of children. Who can say which is the most important?

No mother need despair even though she cannot afford a complete set of Montessori apparatus. If she catches the true spirit of the training she will find enough of the apparatus in her own home to keep her child busily amused during the long winter months and give him some valuable training besides. There is absolutely nothing new in this method—just the collection of apparatus and application is novel.

If you do not have the button frames, use a rag doll that fits some of child's own clothes and watch him dress and undress and learn to manipulate any kind of a fastening you give him. Geometric insects can be cut by any father from pieces of thin boards. Handles can be made from empty spools. The rough and smooth apparatus is very simple to make. The color spools can be made from any sawing box by wrapping cardboard spools with different colored threads. The games that can be played with these spools are innumerable. The different kinds of textiles can be collected from the scrap bag.

Ideas galore for enlarging upon this apparatus and supplying it in the home will present themselves to the clever mother who cares and thinks.

Christmas Festivities in Foreign Lands

By BARBARA DEWELL

WHILE you are busy stringing popcorn for your Christmas tree, or making your Christmas plum pudding, have you ever wondered what people in foreign lands are doing?

Mrs. Daniel Retief, a student at Iowa State College, from South Africa, told me of their Christmas holidays.

"Our Christmas," she said, "is not so different because we are practically Christianized. Instead of snow and ice, as you have, our gardens of blue salvia, red and yellow cactus and roses; our orange and apple and apricot orchards are all in full bloom.

"The Christmas program is held out of doors and of course the Christmas tree is the center of attraction.

"On Christmas morning the children arise to see what 'Father Christmas'—the name we give your 'Santa Claus'—has put in their stockings.

"The servants, native blacks, come to their masters and mistresses and smiling broadly say, 'Good morning, Christmas box.'

"These may be the only four English words they know, but they eagerly look forward to the presents in the box."

Mr. Hsu, a student at Iowa State College from the south central part of China, had an altogether different story to tell.

"You see," he said, "the largest part of my country is not Christianized. We do not celebrate Christmas as you do, except in the mission schools.

"Our religious festivities come about the time of your New Year and last for fifteen days. The first thing we try to do, on the first day, is to clear every debt. If we can do that, then we have the privilege (?) of spending a whole night without sleep. Firecrackers and fireworks, and Chinese music fill the night. Old and young are arrayed in gala dress. The children generally have new suits.

"These fifteen days, he continued, "are spent chiefly in visiting and playing games. We can play any game we wish just so we do not harm the public.

"Every day of the celebration two dragon plays are given, a day play and a night play.

"In the day play a huge dragon is made of bamboo and covered with a coarse cloth. This cloth has many Chinese characters on it that say in your language 'Merry Christmas' or 'Happy New Year,' or 'Best Wishes'. This dragon is from fifteen to thirty feet long, and is carried from house to house, followed by large groups of people. When the dragon comes to a house the people living there have food ready to serve to the group following it, and give money to help carry on the fun.

"The play during the day lasts from morning until sundown. Then the night play begins.

"This is a dragon and lion play. The dragon is lighted on the inside with many lanterns, and several people crawl into the lion to make it move. The dragon curls into a circle with the lion in the center, and they play back and forth, trying to see which one will conquer. Every person carries a lighted lantern and watches the game they play.

"On the last day of the religious festivities the farmers put lighted lanterns in all their fields. These lanterns have a sacred charm on the land and destroy all insects that might come to devour a crop."

The Armenian Christmas is different from either the South African or Chinese. Their Christmas comes at a different time from ours for they use the Greek calendar and are therefore fourteen years later in date than we are.

Mr. Sarkisian, an Iowa State College student from Armenia told of their Christmas holidays.

"For a week before Christmas," he said, "we fast. We do not eat meat or animal oils, but we eat fresh and dried fruits and candies. The fast is broken at the end of a week, when a large festival and banquet are held. Groups of boys, carrying lighted lanterns, go from house to house to tell the good news of the birth of Jesus Christ. They chant and sing and shout hallelujahs. As they leave, the family in that house gives them some kind of a gift."

"The regular Christmas celebration last three days. Most of this time is spent at home, enjoying oneself. Very few gifts are exchanged."

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