

## **Immediate Environment - Maria Montessori, 1925**

An environment that is incorrect presents a great difficulty to the child. The harmony is lacking for him which we have created in the environment for ourselves. This lack of harmony is no doubt a great obstacle to the development of the child and we have not spoken of it so far. Almost nothing is prepared in the child's environment to enable him to exercise himself -- it is the adult who carries out all that is necessary in the way of exercise. The fact that the child has nothing prepared for him and it is the adult who works for him might seem to us at first sight as a kind of compensation to the child, but on the contrary it is a double obstacle because the child himself needs the exercise and in consequence must doubly fatigue himself by (1) seeking out in the environment the things which have not been prepared for him, and (2) the other fatigue which is imposed upon him is this opposition to the adult who is trying to act instead of him.

If we can improve the condition of life, this improvement is a much more important fact than the mere making of a school. This is a conception which regards not only the school but the whole existence of the child, the family is also interested in this, because the child in finding this harmony between himself and his environment can exercise himself and in doing so develop himself.

It must be proportionate to the child but I do not mean that it need all be of the same shape. There is no reason why furniture should be exactly alike. Why should all tables be square, or rectangular, or round? There is no reason at all why they should all be the same shape. They can be of all different shapes and sizes so long as they are proportionate to the child's strength. The same applies to the chairs, they need not all be exactly the same ugly shape, one could have pretty little arm chairs, little stools, little benches, and chairs of various shapes.

There should be nothing out of his reach. It is of course absolutely different from the view which states that everything should be hung so high up that it is out of the reach of the child so that only the teacher can reach it. In putting up clothes-pegs we must put them at such a height that the child himself can hang up or take down his own clothes. The same observation applies to the hanging of the pictures at such a height that the child can look at them, just as in our own rooms we hang our pictures at the right height for looking at them. As you know in our own homes we may have wall decorations above the level of the eye but pictures will always be hung at a more comfortable and lower level. We are not always accustomed in our own houses to look at paintings on the ceilings and yet for children we are accustomed to hanging the pictures so high that they cannot look at them without stretching their necks. They should be hung so low that the child can with his own hands take them down from the wall.

The windows must not merely be arranged for motives of health such as ventilation and light, but for the child's spiritual needs, so that he can look out of them when he wants to. We ourselves would not like to live in a house where the windows are so high up that we cannot look out, we should call that house a prison. You may say that there would be a danger of the child's falling out of the window -- always with this preoccupation with the child's body. This is quite a reasonable preoccupation for the child's safety, but at the same time is it likely for the child to throw himself out of the window if he has sufficiently interesting things to do within the room? These windows should preferably look out onto a garden or verandah, because when the children are faced with certain difficulties in their lives they may be able to get out of doors and feel free. Characteristic of a smaller classroom would be little windows at which the

child of three might sit with a chair when he wished to --windows with little curtains of various colors that the child might be able to draw back or open himself. We might have a schoolroom of a rectangular shape in which cozy corners could be enclosed, so that the room takes on an octagonal shape. In these cozy corners special things could be arranged to satisfy the children's needs, for instance when a child wishes to isolate himself, which he often wants to do, he could go into one of these cozy corners. In one corner there could be a little tap with running water at which he can get water to fill the vases for flowers.