

SOME OBSERVATIONS OF A FATHER ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF HIS DAUGHTER

This father gives some brief observations of his daughter beginning at the time of her entrance into a Montessori school at the age of three years through the age of six. Through his observations and interactions with his daughter, he gains an awareness of the beauty of the work of the child and leaves the reader with a simple yet powerful conclusion regarding the relationship of the adult to the natural development of the child.

Dora went to the Montessori School at the age of 3 years and 3 months.

When she was 3 years and 6 months I find the following entry in my diary:

Dora was in bed for a fortnight and while in her cot she drew from memory the dining-room clock. All the figures, including a difficult 4 and 5, were formed correctly. When she came downstairs again we were struck by her going and standing in front of the clock for a considerable time to see if her drawing had been correct.

The Montessori School aims at teaching the children to put every object to the use for which it is intended, and that there should be a place for everything.

Dora puts these lessons into practice whenever she goes to visit her grandparents. "Where is the peg to hand my coat on?" she will ask. And if she has finished with a book or a game, she will ask her Grandmother: "Where shall I put this?"

Further the children are taught to handle objects with care. Once Dora broke the pretty cup I use at breakfast. Instead of crying, she said: "I wasn't careful enough", quite calmly and without fear of scolding, which of course she did not get.

When she reached the age of 4 years and 8 months, I find the entry in my diary: "She can write many words. When the clock was

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put an hour forward for “summer time”, she observed: “We have slept an hour less.”

Her sense of exactitude is sometimes a little trying to a parent, as for instance, when she was 5 years and 8 months, I was with her in the tram on a fine February day. “Father, have you a lot of money?” she asked in her clear voice, “I’ve got two hundred and seventy-five cents. First I had twenty cents and then I got twenty-five, that made forty-five cents, and then I got fifty cents more and that made a hundred and twenty-five cents and then I got thirty-five more and now I have altogether a hundred and seventy-five. How much have you?” The calculation was not quite right, but it was not bad for her age. As I did not care to proclaim the state of my finances in a tram full of people, I tried to get out of the difficulty by saying: “What a fine day it is. It is quite summer!” “No”, said Dora “First Spring, then Summer”.

My little daughter learned very young to deduce general rules from occurrences which repeat themselves. Thus if she is ill, she will cry only if suffering severe pain, such as ear-ache for example, but not in cases of slight illness, even if she feels unwell. In such cases she reasons to herself thus: “I am ill just now, so I must have this tiresome feeling”. She has said too: “I am not cross if I am tired, but only if I don’t know that I am tired!”

And many other splendid results of the Montessori training in the school do we see in our home, among others those of the grammar lessons with the “tasks”. If Dora is told to do something, she will never ask: “What did you say”, or require to be told several times. “Just run upstairs and fetch my book; it is lying on the window-sill at the right hand side, behind the curtain”. “Oh”, she will say. She may grumble a little bit, perhaps, about having to climb the stairs, but she will never ask: where is the book lying, but will come straight back with it.

As an example of her powers of concentration, I may mention the following instance: When Dora was 6 years old, she got a little poem of two verses of four lines each to learn by heart. She looked at it with close attention. “Can you read it?” asked her mother, “shall we write it over for you?” “I can say it already”, she replied.



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Some people think that Montessori children will become precocious and grown-up before their time, but in my opinion just the contrary is the case. Our little daughter is very intelligent, but lives entirely her own child-life. She does not listen to the conversations of older people, but is engrossed in her childish games and occupations, and goes eagerly to school. In after years she will probably recall little of her childhood except the remembrance of its having been a happy time.

And one thing has been clearly borne in upon me of recent years, namely, that the child must be allowed to develop without being expressly “educated” by the parents. The latter must forbear to do this as much as possible, must exercise self-control, and thus be examples. For the rest, they must leave the child-soul to unfold quietly and in peace, watching it the while as one watches a flower that opens, with reverence, admiration and gratitude.

