

Normalization and Deviations

Submitted to:

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In a discussion of normalization and deviation, Dr. Montessori points to two streams of energy that are very important to the child's development. She states that there are:

Two streams of energy whose balanced interplay is of the utmost importance. One is the physical energy of the body-especially the muscular energy expended in *voluntary* movement; and the other is the mental energy of intelligence and *will*-which in the last analysis is an immaterial spiritual force (1998, p. 170).

Dr. Montessori is clear in her belief that these two forces must act intimately together in order for a child to develop "normally." If there is a separation of these two forces, the child will experience deviations from normality.

The process or development of normalization is at the very heart of the Montessori philosophy. Dr. Montessori refers to it as the "most important single result of our whole work" (1995, p. 204). Normalization is the goal of the Montessori environment, and the goal for each child within it. It occurs in all children, throughout the world, unless they have suffered a deviation, which will be discussed later. This process revealed to Dr. Montessori that children had rights that were in need of defense. The path to normalization lies within the prepared environment, and it is made possible by the freedoms given the children in that environment. We must remember that freedom is "a consequence of development; it is the development of latent guides, aided by education. Development is active. It is the construction of the personality, reached by effort and one's own experiences; it is the long road which every child must travel to attain maturity" (Dr. Montessori, 1995, p. 206).

How do we define what normalization is? The connotative Montessori definition of “normal” is a correspondence to or living by the laws of development as dictated by nature. Dr. Montessori lists 3 general characteristics of growth which are universally recognized:

1. Every organism develops according to a preordained pattern.
2. This development takes place at the expense of matter taken in from the environment by a process of selective activity in the organism itself.
3. This external matter, so taken in, is assimilated into the organism by another active process –digestion-in such a way that it is made one with it, in the “unity of a living organism” (1998, p. 170).

These three points essentially state that the mind grows in a similar way to the body, by absorbing impressions taken in from its surroundings, and assimilating them into the body. This unity of the living organism, balanced with the two streams of energy (voluntary movement and intellect/will) working together in balance, create the concept of the normalized child. This normalized child will be well balanced, happy, peaceful, and living life happily.

There are numerous characteristics that suggest that a child is on the “normal” path of development in accordance with the laws of nature. A normalized child will work with a heightened sense of concentration, to the point that they may be isolated from their environment. This concentration will be a result of individual work, as the child refines his skills in a quest for perfection. The child will demonstrate a love of work, take care in its details, and treat the materials with total respect and care. The child will develop inner discipline through repetition that breeds concentration, made possible by the freedoms given in the Montessori environment. The child will demonstrate the 3 levels of

obedience and positive constructive receptivity. Joy, courage, and generosity will all be apparent in the child's activities, and will maintain a social nature. These add up to a child showing "his true nature, the nature given by creation, health" (Dr. Montessori, 2003, p. 157).

Some children don't display these characteristics, and do not enjoy the "health" that normalized children enjoy. These children are suffering what are referred to as deviations, meaning that they have strayed away from the "norm" or normal path of development dictated by nature. Dr. Montessori writes that these deviations "depend largely on the vicissitudes of life: on the accidents, setbacks and regressions produced in the mental field by those obstacles the individual has had to encounter in his path" (1995, p. 193). Dr. Montessori breaks down deviated children into 2 basic categories: the *strong* child that will resist and overcome obstacles that demonstrates violence, aggression, possessiveness, shouting, and screaming, or the *weak* child, which succumbs to unfavorable conditions and demonstrates idleness, boredom, fearful, clinging to adults, lying, refusal to eat, overeating, and nervousness (1995, p. 197). Dr. Montessori also mentions the appearance of fugues which are a type of deviation that is a flight from reality, in which children whom are deviated because "above all they have lost their object and work in emptiness, vagueness and chaos. The mind that should have built itself up through experiences of movement, flees into fantasy. Such fugitive minds began by seeking and not finding" (2003, p. 160). She also mentions the deviation of barriers, which is much like a dam blocking the natural flow of a river, in this case, the river of natural energy that is repressed. These barriers are built as a defense and can actually

create a situation of diminished intelligence within the child. The subconscious mind seems to say “You speak, but I am not listening; you repeat things, but I do not hear you. I cannot build up my world because I am building up a wall of defense so that you cannot come in” (Dr. Montessori, 2003, p. 163). This happens when the child’s will is not allowed to be exercised due to the imposition of the will of adults in his world, restricting the child’s freedom, and creating barriers to his natural development.

There are many characteristics that will be displayed by a deviated child, some of which have already been mentioned. A deviated child will also be unable to concentrate, and be easily distracted from his work. He will suffer from inner disorder, and be inactive or lazy. He may be sad, scared, afraid of silence, lacking in self control of his emotions and sometimes physical control is missing as well creating clumsiness. The child will not demonstrate a love of the environment and materials, but will be rather apathetic towards them. The deviated child will be disobedient, and not interested in what the outside world has to offer him. Dr. Montessori suggests that all of these characteristics of the deviated child can be treated.

Dr. Montessori states that all these deviations come from “a single cause, which is insufficient nourishment for the life of the mind” (1995, p. 199). Now the task is to help the child come to normalization. “Normalization comes about through “concentration” on a piece of work. For this we must provide “motives for activity” so well adapted to the child’s interests that they provoke his deep attention” (Dr. Montessori, 1995, p. 206). Concentration is brought about through repetition, but the key, as Dr. Montessori points out, is to “arouse such an interest that it engages the child’s whole personality” (1995, p.

206). It is not enough, however for the work to interest them, but it must be the right work, for if it is too difficult the child will struggle, yet too easy will yield no growth. Clearly the prepared environment, working along with the adult guide are also keys to the normalization of the children.

The prepared environment is an important aspect to the normalization of children. The freedom given to the children, especially the freedom of choice, is what allows the children to construct their personalities. Exercising their ability to choose within the structure of an orderly environment (outer order) will help the child to build his inner order, will and self-discipline. The order of the environment will assist the child in creating his own sense of order. The environment must be well maintained, with a large variety of materials that will spark the interest of the child, leading to repetition and concentration.

The adult in the environment also has many responsibilities in order for normalization to happen. One of those responsibilities is that of maintaining a proper environment for the children to work in. Dr. Montessori writes of other things that the guide must do to create normalization:

If the directress has done her duty properly, if she has treated him with a mixture of firmness and respect, if she has been tireless in presenting him with occupations (however indifferent he may seem), if she has encouraged him without coercion, and left him free to wander around at will-provided he disturbs no one-and if she has let him choose his occupations (within the limits), then one day will come the great event. One day-heaven knows why-he will choose some occupation (very likely one he has trifled with many times before) and settle down seriously to work at it with the first spontaneous spell of concentration that he has ever shown. This is the beginning of his salvation. Though he knows it not, but his directress does, he is now at the beginning of a new phase of life, almost a new life. His feet are now on the path which leads to normality (1998, p. 173).

In conclusion, the path to normality is to create opportunities for the child to engage in deep concentration through work. This concentration will move the paths of movement and intellect into a state of coordination with each other. It is only in this way that child will reach normalization. Dr. Montessori states that:

Only normalized children, aided by their environment, show in their subsequent development those wonderful powers that we describe: spontaneous discipline, continuous and happy work, social sentiments of help and sympathy for others. Activity freely chosen becomes their regular way of living. The healing of their disorders is the doorway to this new kind of life (1995, p. 206-207).

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