

THE THREE LEVELS OF ASCENT

Dr. Maria Montessori

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The First Level

In our approach to the questions concerning the child we can consider three levels. The first is of a pedagogical nature. On this level we have worked for thirty years serving the child and searching for the motives of his spontaneous activity in the truths revealed the manifestations of the child's below-conscious. We worked in isolation, separate from the rest of the pedagogical world. No voice from outside reached us and we were quite undisturbed in our work. We ourselves remained silent. We did not answer any of the attacks and criticisms leveled against our work. We did not defend our rights. We did not hinder anyone from profiting from our work. We accepted without protest all kinds of underhand insinuations, open attacks and also defections. Thus our work went on like a fire that burns underground, always growing in ardour, but being recognized above ground only by smoke. To many, this smoke was only a kind of a nuisance. Our method and developed as the result of intense activity. It grew so much that it penetrated right up to the secondary education and incorporated all branches of culture. Above all it resulted in the perfecting of a certain "technique of love" in dealing with people and with things.

The Second Level

On the second level our work revealed to us the suffering of the child in our world. Remaining in constant and close contact with the child, all our efforts were directed to the removal of those obstacles which held him prisoner and the prey of hidden torment. This we tried to do with scrupulous and delicate care. The child's suffering pierced our heart. We felt urged on not only by feelings of chivalry very similar to those which led the medieval knights to break their lances in honour of the lady to whom they had dedicated themselves. We were also urged to fight like a revolutionary who risks his life for a just cause.

At the same time were impelled by a deep and tender feeling like that which makes of a young man, in the vigour of life, the protector of his elderly father and sets him u against all those who might assail such a father in his weakness. That, then, is the second level of our activity.

We feel the suffering of the child as something sacred. We feel the need to turn the very expressions that have been used for centuries to humiliate childhood in an unfair and erring world, to a title of honour and glory. In just the same manner many Christians who shed tears over the Passion of Christ feel honoured and exalted in taking for themselves the opprobrium of the Cross. We fight for the child.

We did not come forward to promote the progress of our pedagogical work. We rose in defence of the child. We put forth that the child, man at the very beginning of his life and seedling of mankind, had never yet been taken into real consideration by adult humanity in any of its vital manifestations, not by his religious practice, not by his laws nor by this social customs. There is then a “blank page” a page on which nothing yet has been written in the book of the history of mankind. This page refers to childhood.

There is also a kind of “blind spot” in the consciousness of the adult and he is unable to see the light that shines forth from the child.

The Third Level

On this level we are not concerned with the child alone. We are concerned with mankind, with the human species which is made up of individuals and groups which are the outcome of a childhood not understood and tormented. Mankind is the result and product of ill-development. It is held together by bonds of error, enveloped by dark powers which rise up continuously from the inner struggles of sidetracked instincts. It is more anxious to destroy than to construct and create; to hate rather than to love. It is not turned towards joy and life, but slips down towards sorrow and death. With a blind spot marring their field of vision these human beings are rendered incapable of reflecting the light that comes from the child. They are, therefore, also incapable of seeing each other as they really are.

Thus they go on their erratic and erroneous course, helpless and depressed, suffering great pain and they lose themselves in a “jungle” without being able to find the way out. They are no longer able to distinguish right from wrong. The plain road has become for them an abyss. Fear has taken possession of them. What holds them together is the hope that others may fall and not they themselves. They are without discernment. They are, certainly, anxious to save themselves, but they no longer know the meaning of salvation. They are eager to reach a goal, but have lost all sight of it. These sorrowful beings are the children; the offspring of a childhood tormented by utter lack of understanding.

Let us then run in aid of them, in aid of mankind. Let us gather all men, because we have found someone who can help them all, who can indicate a road of salvation and

teach us to find and follow him: the child. The child has revealed to us what are the deepest characteristics of human nature. This he did when we offered to him an environment corresponding with his needs, containing all that was necessary and nothing that was superfluous, where he could live in freedom, without oppression on the part of the adult.

There the child revealed energies and tendencies which had remained unknown... It made us realize that these belong to the true characteristics of normal human life. It also showed us how these characteristics can be achieved. This is the marvelous lesson the child has taught us. In his life we have read the answer to our problems and the key to the hidden secret of our life. The child enables us to rediscover all that we had lost, to remember what had been forgotten and buried in the depths of time, faded away from our memory.

The child is our teacher of good work and fair love. The child is truly, as Emerson wrote, “the every re-appearing Messiah who shows to the fallen man the path that leads to the Kingdom of Heaven”.

But the child does more than that, it offers to us a powerful hope that we, too, may reach the heights of our true nature and he shows the clear and simple road along which to do so. For us, the child indicates normality.

These, then, are the three levels of ascent.