CHARACTERISTICS OF THE YOUNG CHILD

From the pages of Maria Montessori's writings we read:

"He (the young child) prefers work to play, order to disorder, science to noise, self-mastery to dependence on others, mutual aid to competition. He is a joyous, sometimes ecstatic, sometimes serious, little creature. He is capable of profound spontaneous concentration, of sublimating possessiveness, of acting from real choice rather than idle curiosity, and of obedience. And he has a strong attachment to reality while still being able to hear underground rivers and see minute blue bugs while his parents hear a bus and see only a broken sidewalk."

Parents should be aware of the "sensitive periods" in a child's development (i.e. blocks of time in a child's life when he is particularly receptive to certain stimuli to the exclusion of others.) Any given "sensitive period" lasts only until a necessary need is fulfilled and then it passes. If the child is prevented from following the interest of one of the "sensitive periods," the opportunity for a natural conquest is lost forever. The "Periods" describe the pattern the child follows in gaining knowledge of his environment.

Montessori called attention to certain characteristics in the two to six year old which are of special value:

Between 2 and 4 years the first foundations for a child's need for order should be laid. To instill the concept of order in the mind of the child calls for definite rules:

- 1. An object used by the child must be returned to its original place in its original order after the child is finished with it.
- 2. Anything begun must be finished.
- 3. Order includes good manners, based on respect for others.

Children like to work even at age two, if it is properly presented. For the very young child the thing to remember is that they are not interested in getting things done. If the parent can let the child work with joy, the skill will come later.

The **2** ½ - **3** year old is enthusiastic about minute details and is most receptive to proper names. A precise vocabulary is important to satisfy the child's sensitivity to language at this age. (eg. horned owls vs. screech owl.)

Children **3 - 6** years old have an insatiable need for new words and learn with relish scientific terms.

A small child works slowly, deliberately, joyfully. He must have time enough to complete his projects. So the adult has to learn patience and respect this lack of hurry.

Training in precise motions for all the activities of daily life is pleasing to the small child. Through practice, muscular coordination is acquired, and this mastery of his own muscles makes him happy.