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January 21st, 2012

"If I had a Hammer" An Intervention!

"If I had a hammer, I'd hammer in the morning ..." goes the old song but what if I needed a pair of pliers? "I'd hammer in the morning..." Or if I needed a screwdriver? "I'd hammer ..." well you get the idea. Each tool has a specific purpose and optimum use. So it is in the Montessori environment.

Normally, we intervene with our children when they are abusing the material. However, as guides with all good intentions, we seem to abuse the material. Abuse here does not mean to destroy but to improperly use material for something it was not intended for.

An example of this is seen by the "extension" of matching cards for knobless cylinders, broad stairs, pink towers, color tablets etc. While it seems like a nice extension it takes away from the primary purpose of the material. We have to also make sure that by "extension" we mean another facet by which the materials purpose can be explored. Pink towers are not sensorial matching exercises. They have a specific teaching purpose and once mastered lead on to the next stage of development.

Another classic extension is using the red rods to build "The Maze." I know that thousands of teachers have been shown how to build "The Maze" but is that the purpose (or even a good extension) of the red rods?

All of these "extensions" keep our children from going deeper in their learning as we tend to lose our focus of what needs to be mastered. We visited a classroom that had four or five alphabet puzzles or matching exercises and of course the child is going to do each one (and more than once) which only encourages the child to go wide instead of deep.

The building of towers with the knobless cylinders is another common abuse (and waste of time.) It is fun but it is neither the direct or indirect aim of the material.

I can hear you saying, "You're taking all of the fun out of the environment. You're squashing their ability to discover." Allowing discovery is one thing but to present these extensions to the child wastes their effort and energy because they are a distraction from the purpose of the material. If a child discovers that the knobless cylinders do in fact build a unique tower, you smile and remark on their discovery and encourage them on to their next mastery.

Observe your environment, (even revisit and revise your training if necessary), to see what might hinder your children's development. It could certainly be an over abundance of extensions that do not lead your children deeper into learning but might be considered busy work. Observe and ponder because all extensions are not equal.

"If I had a hammer..."