



Everything should be kept in very good condition and well set out to make exploring differences fascinating and fun. The design must be aesthetically pleasing to help children appreciate beauty. Indoor and outdoor laboratories should blend seamlessly with play areas, classrooms, meals areas, school theatres, display areas, parent-teacher meeting rooms, and so on. These are places of learning and creativity, experimentation and discovery through play. It is here that children acquire their ability to see with their eyes and their hands to learn to observe reality; it is here that the "creative design process" begins to flourish even at a very early age.

"Toddlers love exploring new materials, testing their strength, softness, effects and the material's ability to satisfy the child's innermost needs. When older children look at things they tend to draw the shapes they observe, not always in an organised manner. But this is beside the point.

Children do not create art, but very young children in particular will draw, sketch and colour in for the sole pleasure of doing it, for their own pleasure and nobody else's." Munari believes it is essential to teach children how to observe a work of art rather than how to interpret its message. Visual art is not something that should be described using words: it should be experienced. Words are quickly forgotten, experiences are not. He would often quote an old Chinese saying: "If I listen I forget, if I see I remember, and if I do I understand".

All it takes to make a child happy is to give them materials that vibrate, that can be handled, that feel "funny", that behave differently depending on how they are held, and that are within easy reach.

The **Casa dei bambini** (Children's house) shall be:

- a suitable fit for the motor skills and mental abilities of children so that they can actively use and master the environment;
- tidy and well organised, featuring a recurring set of reference points to help children form their own personal view of reality that is also emotionally reassuring and confidence-building;
- soothing and harmonious to enable children to broaden their interests and seek new experiences, and encourage a positive psychological and affective dimension so as to more easily develop their own self-confidence and trust in others;
- kept in very good condition and well set out so that children are more apt to discover mistakes and self-correct;
- visually appealing, to bring out the child's natural love for "beauty" and all that is gentle, neat, pleasant, and well cared for.

A typical Montessori school is unique insofar as it is equipped with all the "tools" needed to stimulate the child's mental and physical capabilities; these tools are called "materials for development and inner growth". This subject will be discussed further on. For the time being it should be noted that children, like all living creatures, are driven by their mysterious vital impulses to absorb and adapt to their surroundings. When the background is confusing, unstable, incomplete, redundant and unnecessary, unattractive and uninteresting, and unable to be explored for the purposes of learning, the child will assimilate these negative traits, which will hamper the clear employment of the child's innate mental and physical powers. In a nutshell, the child will struggle if not fail altogether to form his or her personality.

This is the basic reason why the Montessori educational environment, inextricably linked to the development of an active and disciplined personality, has been defined as a "mentor of life and culture", as a learning environment. (Opera Nazionale Montessori).

