

All the child's experience is sensory-motor, his/her very essence and intelligence have these characteristics. In the zero-six age group the child relates to him/herself and to the world through the aesthetic¹ approach, namely through the use of the senses that allow him/her to perceive, become acquainted with and interiorize the characteristics related to the experience with his/her own body and the environment.

The aesthetic approach characterises the child's actions, solicited by the desire to know and learn, and pushes him/her to relate with his/her surrounding environment. This relationship occurs through the body and its senses. An example of this aesthetic device can be traced back to the integration between sight and touch.

Visual exploration is the first learning mechanism: the child is a natural born observer, attentive to details and to things that the adult often considers irrelevant. Observation triggers the relationship with the objects that activate his/her curiosity and desire for knowledge: the child tries to touch everything that enters into his/her field of vision, above all unknown objects. Observation, among other things, is the priority mechanism that supports learning by imitation, active since birth and used in the relations with adults and with other children.

The visual sense puts in motion the manipulation of objects, observed in the environment, as a concrete action which sediments important knowledge regarding the qualities and characteristics of things that are touched. Manipulation allows children to become acquainted with the physical properties of objects but also their function, or rather the various applications.

Children not only spontaneously observe the environment, becoming aware of things that they did not previously distinguish, but seem to observe them comparing them with what they remember or formulating magnificent judgements [...] some children create a kind of touchstone in themselves [...] They compare external things with the images they have fixed in their mind.²

This knowledge is consolidated thanks to the sensory aspect of the manual action and to the visual perception connected to it: observing a hand touching a rough object, for example, connects what is felt by touch with what is visually registered, a first and important associative link that creates learning. Full visual knowledge of an object is not possible if we have not experienced it through the senses: sight initially stimulates manipulation of the unknown and, only after, can it synthetically recall the meaning of that object, a meaning that is acquired through the sensory-motor action and not thought. The construction of tactile memory and its integration with the visual sense, moves through concrete experiences that develop a whole series of

memory traces which are immediately recognizable and interpretable, thanks to the manipulation of the object.

Consequently, the aesthetic approach must facilitate the use of sensory-motor intelligence through the predisposition of didactic settings where sensory abilities can be solicited through movement and manipulation. The same connections can obviously be created by relating all the senses to one another, including those that are not mentioned in this short introduction.

¹Baumgarten A.G. (1992) *Estetica*. Milano: Vita e Pensiero

²Montessori M. (2014) *La scoperta del bambino*. Milano: Garzanti, p.187