

The Child's Need for Time

By Teenaz Reporter

We live in a fast paced life and we often think about how best to economise time. We consider time to be extremely valuable and saving time becomes something we as adults tend to work towards. If we look at our life and the gadgets and appliances we have, the microwave; the pressure cooker, the washing machine, one thing is for sure we all seem to be driven with the idea of saving time.

An Abstract Idea

Though we all want to save time and consider it precious, we find it difficult to define what time is. It is an abstract idea and often used in many diffident contexts. We understand the concept of time as we grow and mature in our understanding of abstract ideas and through our experiences in the world we live. We learn the science behind it- like an hour consists of a certain number of minutes; a day consists of 24 hours. We create clocks and calendars to be able to follow it. Yet we do not really understand it or know what exactly happens when time passes. We all seem to relate with time from the fact that something seems to happen and things seem to change.

Nature and the laws of nature is what help us understand time and its role in life. Flowers bloom at a certain time. The sun rises at a certain time. Seasons change at a certain time. Every aspect of life and time is tied up with laws of nature. Obedience to this ensures the harmony in nature

If time is such an abstract idea in itself then how can we expect the young child to understand it?

The child in many ways understands time by simply following and obeying nature's plan in his self-creation. The work of the child is Adaptation-To become and belong to his time, place and culture. Nature has a plan and a timetable for this. Nature enables the child to invest the time he needs for his self-construction.

The Plan of Nature

Development takes time. By following their own timetable as part of social life, children become able to work around the bounds and limits of time that man has created as part of human life and culture in order to

understand his world and function in it.

We cannot go against this plan-just like we can't make the earth rotate or revolve around the sun any faster than it can. All we can do is support this plan and timetable of Nature through us and the environment that we create for the child.

The child needs time to develop language, controlled movement and social skills. He needs opportunities to do things for himself in order to grow in independence. The need of the child in the first 6 years of his life is to help him do for himself. This independence is not overnight but the work of personal experiences in the environment. It is through the interaction with the environment that the child learns and grows.

The child needs a prepared environment and an adult who understands his needs. The child needs from us faith, security, patience and unconditional love. He needs order and consistency and plenty of opportunities to work. Freedom to work is what the child needs. This need to work on his self-creation is essential for the life of the child, just like to swim in the water is an essential for the life of the fish.

The child cannot do things as per our schedule, as he needs to follow his inner teacher. The child will make a few errors as he gains independence. Our approach to error becomes essential. The environment around the child needs to be error friendly. If children are to acquire a skill, apart from time, they also need to be shown how to do things. They also need available and accessible the tools and implements in their size to be able to repeat and do for themselves. This repetition will ensure over time, the child's ability to do things for himself with economy of time.

The child enjoys work and therefore does not need a reward. Doing what one ought to do is an essential part of social life. Rewards and punishments take away the intrinsic motivation of the child. The child needs the freedom to do with firm and consistent limits. The adult does not arbitrarily set the limits but instead limits that help the child understand over time the effects of his actions upon himself and others around him.

Time for Process

The child needs time to understand the process of how things work. To assist him in the understanding of the process, we need to make sure that the challenge is within his capacity to understand and do. Too much challenge, and we see the child giving up and too little, we see the child

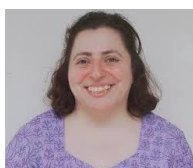
loose interest. Once we see the child engage and make a choice for himself, we need to step away and give the child uninterrupted time to engage. This uninterrupted time will allow the child to get involved in the work, and when complete will give the child a sense of joy.

We need to understand that the child's ability and capacity is not like that of us adults, but it is under construction. The child is working at building the future man. This building of MAN cannot happen overnight and will take time.

Learning takes effort and time. Perfection takes time. If we want the child to grow into a harmonious adult, in perfect harmony with himself and others, then time is what he needs. The time that is invested in the life of the child today is an investment in the future of mankind.

In our work with the children, we must remember the words of Louis Pasteur:

"When I approach a child, he inspires in me two sentiments, tenderness for what he is and respect for what he may become."



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This article is based on a webinar organised by the Indian Montessori Foundation presented by Teenaz Reporter on Saturday, July 04, 2020. Below are answers provided by the author to some of the questions raised by the participants.

Question: When the child continuously asks for something in spite of being told No, how do we help the child accept and respect the limits?

Answer: When the child continuously asks for something despite being told no, it might be a pattern that has been set up between the adult and the child. If after being told no, the repeated asking leads to a yes, then the

asking will not stop. Only consistency without anger, without explanations will help this young child understand limits.

Question: How can we get out of the culture of praising and rewarding children constantly?

Answer: To get out of practices, which have trapped the adult and child in a pattern, becoming aware of the pattern is the first step. Notice when you praise the child, if it is done impulsively. Practice the words you can use instead of praise. For example, you could say, "You made a lot of effort." Or "You have been working for a very long time." Or "Where would you like to store this" Or "Let's put away the things you have used now." If the child asks you for praise turn the question towards mundane and practical things. Ultimately you just have to stop. If you consistently watch yourself for a week or so, the child and you will get used to it. Self-awareness is the key. Also remind yourself constant praise is not good for the child. We need to help the child towards self-evaluation.

Question: When it comes to eating meals should there be any time limit, or can the child take hours to eat?

Answer: Usually this problem occurs when the adult has decided the quantity of food to be eaten and the child is reluctant to finish. It is important to study why the child takes hours to eat. The decision of how much to eat is the child's decision. Do not worry about physical hunger. Get the child to serve himself with a teaspoon, and you need to be satisfied even if he eats only that little in the beginning. The child needs to feel successful. Usually, the child feels defeated by the quantity of food you have served. Eat with the child. Have long leisure family meals so that the child gets sometime to eat at his pace. Everyone eating together offers the child spiritual food. Conversations, discussions about the food, the flavours, watching the movements by which the adults eat, how you serve yourself are experiences that will help the child with eating meals. At the end of the meal, it is important to help the child put his plate away and bring an end to the meal.

Question: Should there be a timetable for the day or a set pattern for a young child?

Answer: An orderly routine is of very great benefit to a young child. It is not a timetable set for the convenience of the family. It is a routine set around the child's needs. Eating, bathing, dressing, should always happen

around the same time for the young child and be predictable. There should be plenty of choices and open time for the child to do any work. Children need time for exploration and to follow and pursue their interest. We have to observe them to see, if the schedule needs to be adjusted or changed. We have to take care that the child finds time to do things without being constantly interrupted.