

# Montessori and sensitive periods

Last issue Barbara Isaacs explained the importance of the sensitive periods, with a special focus on the sensitive period for order. In this issue she reflects on the sensitive periods for movement, language and small detail.

There is much preparation behind the scenes which the baby undertakes during their first year of life in readiness for walking. The arms and hands play a crucial role in this process of physical maturation. Babies first learn about the world through exploration via the mouth – so grasping an object and putting it in the mouth is as natural for the baby to sit, crawl and walk.

Parents and carers can facilitate their children's need to move by making the floor of their home safe and free of obstacles for babies to practice grasping and rolling. Babies also need comfortable clothes. Once they are able to sit they can have their own low table and access to a low bed, if the parents are brave enough not to have a cot.

Once the baby starts walking the parents' and carers' lives will change dramatically. It is important to continue providing the same freedom of movement

which was available to them in their first year of life; vigilance is a key to not restricting children's movements.

Children begin to see their environment from a different perspective and begin to make choices – this is often the beginning of the first tantrums too. The richness of experiences in their environment will be important, not only at home but also outside. At home you can stimulate their interest by placing big shells, cones and other natural objects within their reach. Let them use everyday objects in the kitchen and in the bathroom. Take them for regular walks, and ensure you have enough time for the toddler to walk. Try not to go with specific agenda or take the push chair; children need to build their muscles by exercising their limbs.

The walks are likely to vary in pace and possibly end up in the opposite direction. The children will enjoy carrying bags and objects on their walks and around the house and will delight in pushing or



Discovering treasure inside a "feely bowl".

pulling trolleys, bikes and small prams.

This is also the time when parents and carers are likely to witness children's sensitive period for small objects as they pick up crumbs from the floor, notice the tiniest of flowers growing in the wall or an insect in the sandpit. They will enjoy searching for animals in books and notice tiny details which adults often overlook.

As children begin to explore their wider environment, their sensitive period for language becomes apparent. In the first year of life they had the opportunity to listen to conversations as well as adoring voices from their loved ones. This is a vital preparation for their first utterances and requires an adult who gives them the opportunities to hear language in context of everyday experiences. We must remember that children are programmed to tune into language and need to absorb it before they can reproduce it. At this stage of development picture books, rhymes and stories are wonderful tools to enrich children's emerging language skills.

By two they will be keen to participate in the daily life of the household by wishing "to help". They try to dress themselves, wash up and will be keen to help with dusting and hovering. Any activity involving water, sand or paints will be of great appeal and will offer opportunities for development of gross and fine motor movement, balance, spatial awareness as well as language. It is important to enjoy the child's achievements and celebrate their success as their independence emerges and as they are learning about what is dangerous and difficult. Sense of well being goes hand in hand with growing autonomy which later develops into positive social relationships, initiative and ability to embrace challenges. ■



Rejoicing at mastering the maze on a grand scale.