

# Mistakes Are Good!

A characteristic of all material in the Montessori classroom is what we refer to as the **Control of Error**. It is a quality imbedded in each material. The control of error as it is referred to is how the child performs the work without adult intervention. It helps the child to know if he is doing something correctly or needs to make a change. It's something that shows or tells the child if he's done something right or wrong.

Dr. Montessori writes,

*"The control of error through the material makes a child use his reason, critical faculty and his ever increasing capacity for drawing distinctions. In this way a child's mind is conditioned to correct his errors even when these are not material or apparent to the senses."*  
(**The Discovery of the Child**, p. 103)

The control of error is built in to each material, so that the child uses his own deductions and reasoning to 'figure out' the work. The adult does not need to correct the child if there is a mistake; the child, based on the specific control of error, will see it, if it is visual or mechanical; or hear it, if it is auditory, for example. This is a factor that aides in the development of the child, as the child learns best from his own mistakes as well as shows the child the challenge in the material.

The Control of Error is most apparent in the Sensorial area of the classroom, but it is essentially used all over the room. Some examples of this include:

- **The Pink Tower**—the control of error is visual disharmony—it lies in the child's ability to discriminate visually if the tower has been built sequentially.
- **Solid Cylinder Blocks**—the control of error is mechanical—it lies in the material itself; the child can see if all 10 cylinders fit back into its proper space.
- **Matching fabrics**—the control of error is visual—are the fabrics matched using only the tactile sense?
- **Pouring water**—can the child pour without spilling?
- **Moving a chair**—can the child move the chair without making any noise?
- **The use of glass plates, glasses, pitchers, bowls**, etc.—can the child use and carry without dropping or breaking?

## **Why is this important?**

There are several reasons why the Control of Error is so critical to the materials of the classroom:

1. Most importantly it builds upon the child's critical reasoning, judgment and logic. These are essential for the mathematical mind when verification of answers in mathematical work is key.
2. It shows the child that he can correct himself—there is no cause for alarm or embarrassment. He is able to work through the material on his own. He tries and tries until he succeeds. This repetition leads the child to self-perfection.
3. It helps to further develop the child's will. *Can I do this without making a mistake?* The child sees when the work is done incorrectly. When he chooses to continue to work with the material, it is his choice; his will that is pushing him further.

4. Allows the child to compete with himself as opposed to others. He learns at his own pace. Children are usually not comfortable truly competing with others until they are around 7 or 8 years of age.
5. It helps the child to embrace mistakes as this is how he learns. As he works through mistakes, he is able to challenge himself further. **He learns to think for himself.**

As adults it seems we are conditioned that making a mistake is a fault. On the contrary, in the Montessori classroom, we show the child that **mistakes are good!** The child learns from them and learns how to challenge himself further in his development. As a parent allowing your child to see mistakes for himself (without always correcting) is something you can do to aide in his natural development.