

The Elementary Program

As Montessori pre-school programs have proliferated, there has been a great demand for Montessori elementary classes for both six to nine year-olds and nine to twelve year-olds. In these classes, children who have completed the Montessori program for three to six year-olds can continue learning individually or in small groups at their own pace. Long blocks of time encourage extended spans of concentration, uninterrupted by bells indicating a sudden change of subject.

Compared to the period preceding it, and that which follows it, Montessori believes that the second stage of development (6-12) is one of great stability. Growth without major change marks this period as the children exhibit fairly constant styles of learning and relatively even emotional behavior. During these more serene years, students are capable of accomplishing a great deal of mental work. As E.M. Standing writes in *Maria Montessori, Her Life and Work*, "It is their 'years of plenty;' and, if given the right opportunity and the right means, they will lay up a great store of cultural information".

The integrated curriculum of the Montessori elementary classroom encourages children to see the critical relationship among all subjects and, indeed, among all aspects of life. The elementary teachers follow Dr. Montessori's plan for Cosmic Education – presenting the universe first and then relating subsequent learning to its place in the cosmos. For example, the history of the earth, beginning billions of years ago, is made vivid to the students when they work with a magnificent Time Line on which the era of human beings is only a tiny segment at the end.

The elementary curriculum more than covers the mathematics, language, science, history and geography taught in traditional schools. Drill in these basic subjects is accomplished in a variety of creative activities, thus avoiding boredom that often leads to withdrawal of interest or rebellion.

No two elementary classes are alike. Each reflects the interests and strengths of the teachers and students. In all these classrooms, however, you will find children working comfortably at tables or on the floor in a relaxed but mature manner. At any one time, you will see a variety of educational activities in process because each child will be working at his or her own level of interest and ability.

In their individualized work the children learn to set goals, to manage time, to organize projects and to use a variety of resources. In addition to using the advanced Montessori materials for math, grammar and science, they read and discuss children's classics and express themselves in art, music, drama and poetry. Creative writing is a daily activity. A foreign language, physical education and field trips are also included.

Montessori elementary programs give youngsters basic learning skills, confidence, self-esteem, an appreciation of other cultures and peaceful techniques for conflict resolution - - qualities that will serve them well in any future learning situations.

[Excerpt from "A Parents' Guide to the Montessori Classroom," by Aline D. Wolf]