

VOICES OF AMI TRAINING

Cosmic Education

Ellen Lebitz, AMI 6–12 Trainer

Cosmic Education is Montessori's plan for children in the second period or plane of development – children from 6–12 years of age. But what is Cosmic Education? Based on observation of the second plane child, Cosmic Education takes as its foundation the presentation of the whole of the universe to the child.

It is through Cosmic Education, the giving of the whole universe to the child as the basis for all of their exploration, that the children integrate and see the interrelatedness of their experiences.

When Maria Montessori began her work with three- to six-year-olds, there was an amazing transformation of the children. Formerly disorderly and unfocused – the children now chose work independently, worked with focus on their chosen tasks, were organized and moved about their environment gracefully.

Montessori later included materials for the exploration of literacy and mathematics. The children thrived and were joyful and parents were happy. The parents were so happy that they did not want to pull their children out at the age when they were supposed to go to the regular schools. They asked Montessori to develop materials for the older children.

So, at first, Montessori did just that – she observed the older children and developed materials and methods for them to explore mathematics and geometry, grammar, literature, history, music, and art.

But Montessori never stopped observing the children and she came to realize that there was great power when education works in collaboration with the characteristics during each period of development. For the second plane children, those ages 6–12 years, those characteristics include joy in working in collaboration with peers, an active and powerful imagination, a strong reasoning mind, a sensitivity to issues of justice and morality, hero worship, and a tendency toward big projects and great work.

Montessori saw Cosmic Education as the natural vehicle with which to introduce all of the elements of the universe to the children. She saw that all in the universe was related, and she also saw how the powers of the second plane children were perfectly suited to exploring these relationships.

In her book, *To Educate the Human Potential*, she says,
"... let us give [the child] a vision of the whole universe. The universe is an imposing reality, and an answer to all questions ... all things are part of the universe, and are connected to each other to form one whole unity." (5-6).

When we speak of "cosmos" we can look directly to the etymology, or history, of the word for a clue as to Montessori's intention in using that specific term. The word "cosmos" is derived from a Greek term which means "order", and which metaphorically means "world." It is the opposite of the word "chaos" in which the Greek meaning refers to "disorder." The term "Cosmic Education" can sound very ethereal or loose but is really a very basic and solid concept: to present the universe in a whole picture to a child which appeals to the imagination and awakens interest and then to present each element in such a way as their interrelatedness is clear and can be understood by the child.

Cosmic Education is offered in the form of Great Stories and Key Lessons. The Great Stories provide a narrative for the opening of exploration in the physical sciences, biological sciences, human history, and the stories of language and mathematics. The Key Lessons pick up on the narrative and provide the context for the individual lessons and presentations offered to the children.

The adult offers The Great Stories as a framework and Key Lessons, but what the child learns is not limited to what the adult presents. The adult is a starting-off place and a guide.

Cosmic Education brings the children on a journey through space and time—to see how the tilt of the axis of our earth, its rotation on this axis, along with our orbit around the sun causes the seasons. These seasonal differences in light and dark, cold and warm weather, wet and dry weather affect how plants and animals grow, how animals migrate. Plant growth and animal migration affects human lives, which are dependent upon the plants and animals. Predicting seasons was the impetus for much of early mathematics and geometry, often focused on timekeeping and calendar making. When some areas of the earth produce different resources than other areas, then we have trade between groups. Trade requires record keeping which is an impetus for writing systems and calculation.

Exploring these kinds of relationships are inherent in Cosmic Education. As Montessori expressed:

"The stars, earth, life of all kinds form a whole in relation with each other, and so close is this relationship that we cannot understand a stone without some understanding of the great sun! No matter what we touch, an atom or a cell, we cannot explain it without knowledge of the wide universe," (Maria Montessori, To Educate the Human Potential).

FURTHER READING

For further reading on Cosmic Education consider reading:

Camilla Grazzini – Maria Montessori’s Cosmic Vision, Cosmic Plan, and Cosmic Education
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1078117.pdf>

Margaret E. Stephenson – Cosmic Education
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1078016.pdf>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ellen Lebitz is an AMI elementary trainer as well as mentor and support to schools and teachers throughout the US and the world. She earned her AMI primary diploma in 1993 and elementary diploma in 1996. Ellen has 18 years of classroom experience at both the primary and elementary levels as well as 17 years administrative experience as an education director. She has served on the boards of schools, training centers, as well as several community non-profit organisations. She holds a BA in Fine Art and an MA in Studio Art from the University at Albany (NY). Ellen enjoys exploring the arts and human creativity in regard to handcrafts and cookery. She lives with her family in rural northwest Washington State.

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