

VOICES OF AMI TRAINING

Botany for Second Plane Children (ages 6–12)

Ellen Lebitz, AMI 6–12 Trainer

A characteristic of the Montessori classroom for children in the second plane of development, those ages 6–12, is a proliferation of plants and an abundance of botany activities. In many schools, there are also gardens in which the children can work and explore. There are so many botany activities for children of this age—much more than is typically presented in mainstream education. Often the adults coming to our training courses as well as parents of the children in our schools wonder, “**Why is there so much work exploring plants?**” There are many answers to this question.

One of the most basic reasons that we do this work with the children is that **plants are integral to life on Earth**. We all interact with plants in one way or another every day of our lives, whether it be eating them, using their products as materials for building or objects that we use, using their products as fuels, and just enjoying the aesthetics of plants. Botany activities serve not only to inform the children, but to help them look at the world in a new way. Once the children experience the diversity of plants and plant forms, they have a new relationship with them. So, the study of plants is a way to study all life on Earth, including ourselves as humans.

Another very important reason we do so much botany work is **in service to the child’s developmental needs**. Children have different characteristics in their different planes of development, and the activities and explorations we offer the children change with the different age groups we are serving. Mario Montessori, Maria Montessori’s son and partner in her work, was an enthusiastic citizen botanist. Mario Montessori recognized that **when we introduce children to the observation and study of plant life, we enable and support the expression of human tendencies and the characteristics of the children in the different planes of development**.

Humans have a mathematical mind and seek patterns. We have the human tendency to orient and order and also to explore. The study of botany is rich in opportunities to observe patterns and to order what is observed. The **botany activities satisfy so many of the characteristics of the children in the second plane of development**.

Children in the second plane want to know the “hows” and “whys” of things—they have strong reasoning minds and a deep curiosity. In this stage of development, the children appreciate big engaging work and activities, and enjoy mental exploration of extremes (the smallest, the biggest, the strangest). The children are also social and enjoy group activities.

All of **our work in botany starts with experiences**. All of our activities and presentations start with some contact with plants. Many of the presentations include demonstrations or experiments, observation, and perhaps even dissection. Presentations also include stories and discussions, collaboration and exploration.

Another reason for our botany work is that **the work is a vehicle for building, developing, and refining many personal, academic, and social skills**. Our botany work enables the children’s developmental characteristics to flourish while refining skills of observation, research, writing, drawing, organising, collaboration, as well as building a deep base of knowledge.

The study of botany is an impetus to explore the outdoors. Especially in our current time, when many children spend so much time indoors, the study of botany connects children to the natural world. Mario Montessori loved doing this work with the children. He loved helping the children see the world in a new way. He says,

“There are so many things to be seen in the world—all of them potential bricks for the intelligence he [the child] is building; but if he does not notice them it is as though they were not there and as useless as if they were unavailable.” [1]

When children have these experiences in the natural world, they begin to notice things that went unnoticed before. They recognise the patterns of nature. Mario Montessori noted,

“Gradually the time comes when the plant world no longer gives to the child a mere impression of greenery, sprinkled with the brilliancy of other colors, but as he walks around, wherever his eyes rest on a plant, on a leaf, on a flower, he recognizes a friend; “Yes, I know you...” [2]

REFERENCES

[1] Montessori, Mario M. The Botanical Cards. Booklet of an article that first appeared in AMI Communications 1966, no. 1/2. Reprinted in Around the Child (1975) and the NAMTA Journal (1988 and 1998). p11

[2] Montessori, Mario M. The Botanical Cards. Booklet of an article that first appeared in AMI Communications 1966, no. 1/2. Reprinted in Around the Child (1975) and the NAMTA Journal (1988 and 1998). p16

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ellen Lebitz is an AMI 6–12 trainer as well as mentor and support to schools and teachers throughout the US and the world. Ellen has earned AMI 3–6 and 6–12 diplomas and has worked at both levels. She has over 18 years of classroom experience as well as 17 years administrative experience as education director at two schools. Ellen has served on the boards of schools, training centers, as well as several community nonprofit organizations. She has lectured on training courses in South Africa, France, China, Taiwan, and the US and is currently Director of Training for 6–12 courses through Montessori Northwest in Spokane, Washington as well as AMI Montessori Chinese Taipei training center in Taiwan.

She holds a BA in Fine Art and an MA in Studio Art from the University at Albany (NY) and has many years experience teaching art and handwork. Ellen enjoys exploring the arts and human creativity, especially in regards to handcrafts and cookery. She lives with her family in rural northwest Washington State.