

VOICES OF AMI TRAINING

Why Stay for Montessori Elementary?

Terrence Millie, AMI 6–12 Trainer

When a child is approaching six years old, many people start asking the question, Why should our family stay for the 6–12 elementary program in the Montessori school?

It's true that some of the most foundational work has been done by the age of six and this effort is wholly supported by a Montessori education during early childhood. In the first phase of development from birth-to-six, children are deeply focused on developing their personalities and absorbing everything around them. They take in information both consciously and unconsciously through their senses and experiences in the world. Montessori wrote about the five key organs of psychic development that are built and integrated during birth-to-six and shape the human being: movement, language, emotions, intellect, and the will. These organs form interconnected systems that lay the foundation for a child's personality, continuing to shape and support their growth throughout their lifespan.

At six-years-old, developmental work is still underway and the developmental help that Montessori programs offer continues to be a necessary aid to life during later childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood until about twenty-four years old.

Building on the Foundations

As the children carry their newly constructed personalities into the second phase of development (ages six-to-twelve) the developmental focus shifts. The questions, how? and why? become of great concern to the children and they need more content and tools to explore the answers to these questions. In the elementary years children focus on the movement of ideas and information in a passage to abstraction. To accommodate this internal movement, the child must construct a framework in the mind to help hold new knowledge. To paraphrase Montessori in her book *Psychogeometry*, children need a purposeful gymnasium for the intellect.

Montessori's Cosmic Education offers a framework and indeed forms the overall plan of education for the elementary child. The child's quest for knowledge is so intense that it is only by offering the universe that we can possibly satiate their need for the exploration of knowledge and culture. Dr. Montessori referred to offering the psycho-disciplines, which are more than academic subjects, but a buffet of interconnected ideas that nourish the child's intellectual and emotional development. In the Montessori

approach to Cosmic Education, learning isn't about memorising facts, but about raising interest and engaging the child's whole psyche. The psycho-disciplines help the child develop the inner skills of logical reasoning, order, and structure, laying the Foundation for a lifetime of thoughtful, decisive contributions to society. Furthermore, Cosmic Education addresses the intellect, which has now become a ruling factor in the Child's life. The intellect is accessed in two main ways: through the reasoning mind and the imagination. These two conduits of the intellect become the powers that allow ideas and information to pass from the world of experience into the chambers of the mind and back out again in the form of purposeful activity, meaningful work, and self-expression.

The development of the reasoning mind is a dynamic process, and classification plays a crucial role in it. By engaging in classification activities—whether identifying plant species, categorizing geographical features, exploring geometric shapes, or analysing linguistic structures—children recognize patterns and relationships. These exercises help children understand not only the kinds of, and parts of, within each category but also the broader connections in the observable world and universe around them. As they interact with materials, organizational structures take root in their minds, creating a framework for clear thinking.

Guides in the Montessori elementary classroom tell stories that activate the imagination. The stories reveal the vastness of the whole universe, showing how different threads of knowledge, culture, and experience are interrelated. As they engage their imaginations,

children draw on their own experiences to navigate both academic and social challenges, envisioning new possibilities and constructing solutions to emerging problems. In this process, imagination becomes more than a tool for creativity; it becomes the key to understanding, problem-solving, and transforming the world.

The Montessori elementary years present an opportunity for the development of social belonging highlighting the human tendency for association. Children of this age feel a strong urge to connect and test their personality with their peers. Through association with each other they form friendships, collaborate in groups, explore social roles and agree on moral conventions. The Montessori elementary community is a practice society, a safe place for the children to practice being together while they build social structures in various configurations, get things right, get things wrong, and contribute to the community in a meaningful way. Montessori identified this environment as a social embryo. Work in the practice society is the indirect nourishment that is needed for the emergence of the Adolescent as a social newborn who will be ready to thrive in the third plane of education.

Why stay for the Montessori elementary program? Because the Montessori Elementary community is a dynamic environment where exploration, growth, and meaningful connections flourish. Through the lens of Cosmic Education, children are given both structure and freedom to explore the world around them, all while continuing their journey of development. In these conditions, six-to-twelve-year-olds don't just learn—they transform into confident, curious, and resourceful individuals. They are equipped to navigate the complexities of life with a sense of purpose and wonder. Montessori Elementary is more than education; it's a journey of belonging.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Terry Millie believes that together, we do more than educate; we nurture human potential. He inspires others to dive into their own lived experiences, sparking reflection and learning. He holds AMI Montessori 3-6 and 6-12 diplomas and a Master of Education from Vancouver Island University with a designation in Montessori Leadership. He thinks of himself as a lifelong learner, with a bookshelf to prove it!

Terry has Montessori classroom experience in the Young Child's Community, Children's House, Lower Elementary, Upper Elementary, Adolescent, and adult learning environments. He is an AMI Trainer, examiner, speaker, and presenter who has served a variety of education-related Boards of Directors.

His mission is to use the stories of our collective experience to help highlight the Montessori approach to human development as an aid to life – because if life's a journey, Montessori is our best GPS.

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