

Provided by Patrice Britz

Elementary Classroom Management

How to Implement Cosmic Education

By Phyllis Pottish-Lewis

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This is written in honor of Margaret E. Stephenson

“A constant and passionate advocate for the Montessori movement who, through her work, enlightened and inspired adults to achieve a transformed relationship with children.”

Of all the Montessori principles, one of the most elusive for people to understand and implement regarding the development of independence and responsibility in the child is the relationship between their growth and the giving of freedom. Dr. Maria Montessori realized early on that offering an individual freedom was necessary for the acquisition of these two accomplishments as well as other essential achievements in the growth of the human being. In the early years of her work people disagreed with Dr. Montessori. They believed that childhood was a time when children should be seen and not heard. Educators thought that if you gave children freedom, chaos would ensue. As a result, the children's movements and expressions were stifled since they were confined to their desks and were told to keep still and remain quiet, suppressing their ultimate and complete potential.

Today we are living in a different climate altogether - a climate of mounting liberalism. Children and young adults are granted privileges - which they are often ill-prepared to handle - simply because they desire them and their parents lack the wherewithal and good sense to say no when they ought. To compound matters, it is also a time filled with emotional liberty. We have turned into a feel-good society, asking, "How do you feel about this, how do you feel about that?"¹ and worrying relentlessly that if a child is less than happy at all times, his self-esteem and confidence will be impaired beyond salvation.

The question before us then is how to put the construction of the human person and freedom into a balanced context. Freedom must be balanced by its limits; the abilities of the children will indicate how much freedom is suitable.

The philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre says that responsibility is "simply the logical requirement of the consequences of our freedom."² If that requirement is not there, then the freedom will become license, and chaos and confusion will ensue. In *The Meaning of Man*, Jean Mouroux, who also writes about freedom and responsibility, says, "The first problem that arises is that of meaning and purpose of our freedom. It is not given for our own sake or for any end it sees, but quite definitely so we can realize ourselves."³

Dr. Montessori understood that to aid human development and allow for self construction, freedom must be granted to the individual. She recognized and realized that freedom/liberty was essential in the child's personal construction; however, we must keep in mind that she spoke of liberty in a prepared environment and that concept of liberty must carry along with it the factor of responsibility.

As we consider the children in our charge, we need to return to what Dr. Montessori said about these two great ideas for the development of the human being. She gave us a formula for that development of the human person and guidelines to realize the implementation of that formula. She showed us how to help the child in his work, and that in the construction and the formation of man, we must be aware that freedom must be given gradually and that children must be responsible to having that freedom. The task of helping the child to this realization belongs to both the parents and the teacher in the class. The child must realize what liberty is, what it entails, and identify and accept the corresponding responsibility. These are points of arrival, not points of departure.

In her book Education and Peace, Dr. Montessori says, "The human personality must be given a chance to realize every one of its capabilities."⁴

This means that if the adult is successful in assisting the child, the child must become able to recognize the reality of his freedom. This recognition comes to the child by being helped to exercise reason and will, enabling him to accept that burden. In order to fully help the children arrive at the double understanding of recognizing freedom for what it is and its corresponding responsibility, the adult must realize that while freedom enables one to choose the good, it also allows one to choose the bad. This is a compelling reason for why teachers must help the child to understand the role and importance of being responsible. The activation of the child's reasoning mind at the second plane - the ages from six-to-twelve years old - must be recognized as a significant factor in the formation of responsibility if we are truly going to be able to give aid to life, as Dr. Montessori asked.

We have, then, Dr. Montessori asking us not to impart or impose an educational method on the child impassively, but actually to aid life and its construction by offering him freedom and then leaving him free to act. However, the freedom granted must be tempered with responsibility. Herein lies the crux of the challenge that we as Montessori teachers face: to really offer the education that Dr. Montessori envisioned for the child, we must offer freedom balanced by responsibility. This requires artistry. Without balance between these two essential elements, we are in danger of creating a climate of restriction or a climate of permissiveness, both of which will obstruct the child in his natural development. This process is essential at both levels during the elementary years, beginning in the six-to-nine class and continuing in the nine-to-twelve class. As a part of executing this fundamental task of the Montessori educator, the teacher's first step is to recognize and define for herself every aspect critical for success in this great endeavor.

Freedom to Choose One's Own Work

The first task is to identify and define exactly the freedoms that must be offered in the elementary prepared environment and their correspondent responsibilities. Let us take for our first example the children's freedom to choose their own work - to explore and study any topics that pique their imaginations (without adult interference in this regard)-remembering that at the elementary level these explorations should happen both inside and outside of the class. The limit associated with this particular freedom is that the children's work must be constructive and productive. Another limit is that the children meet the requirements asked of them were they to attend a traditional public school. To arrive at the desired balance between this freedom and its limit, the children must understand clearly all of the expectations associated with their choice and the fundamental value of work. Children are given the freedom to choose their work, but they must, in fact, work. At this time in their lives, which is a period of great work and accomplishment, their time is too valuable to waste. Therefore, the prevailing expectation for all children is that they must do productive work. For a teacher to ask this of a child without qualms or doubt, she herself must appreciate the vital role of work so that she can expect it from her children.

Truly realizing, as Dr. Montessori has said, that work is the basis of civilization, and that being able to work is essential to the development of the child, helps to fortify the teacher when she is faced with difficulties that arise with children and parents in connection with the expectations of work. Another notion that underscores her fortification is fully comprehending that the elementary child is, in fact, capable of great work. She always must have faith in the child and his enormous ability, never wavering in that belief in order to ask him to work a little harder to attain his potential and to develop his work ethic.

Until a teacher gains her own experience, these notions are sometimes difficult to defend in the face of parental adversity. In today's social climate of liberalism, a less-experienced teacher might doubt herself and the work expectations she has set for the children, wondering if she is asking too much of them. But by succumbing to pressures or any kind, parental, societal or otherwise, and expecting less of the children than that which they are capable of doing, teachers unwittingly demean the child's abilities. If one does not expect the child to work, one is a hindrance to his natural development rather than a help. Margaret Stephenson said, "If we compromise this idea, we compromise the child's chances."⁵ Appreciating the importance of work sustains the teacher when she asks the child to be responsible for his choices. Thus, she should have no compunctions about expecting that the child's work is constant, productive, constructive, and even at times ambitious.

Dr. Montessori had insight in this regard as it related to the child's work. She wrote in *Education for a New World*:

"The real aim of all children was revealed as constancy in work and spontaneity in choice of work, without guidance of teachers. Following some inner guide, they occupied themselves in work different for each that gave them joy and peace, and then something else appeared that had never before been known among children, a spontaneous discipline. This struck visitors even more than the explosion into writing had done; children were walking about, seeking for work in freedom, each concentrating on a different task, yet the whole group presented the appearance of perfect discipline. So the problem was solved: to obtain discipline, give freedom."⁶

Our injunction has been given us: obtain discipline from the children and give freedom.

Another benefit of providing an environment with a balance between freedom and responsibility resulting in the child's spontaneous activity, is that a child, engaged in his own real work, seldom has the inclination to test the limits, as he is interested and satisfied with his work and his endeavors. This is the "spontaneous discipline" at work of which Dr. Montessori speaks.

Spontaneous discipline can easily be detected in those environments where the teacher is able to offer freedom balanced by responsibility. It really is no mystery. In a healthy work climate, when children are free to choose projects of their own interest, they work spontaneously. Consequently they are responsible for their choices of work. Children working of their own accord on their freely chosen activities without the presence of the teacher are a testimony to her artistry to offer freedom balanced by responsibility. It is at these times that she can leave the class without any resulting change in the children's behavior. This phenomenon is easily detected when it is working. Its antithesis is also easily observed - if work is imposed on the children or assigned by the teacher, there will be a disintegration of work and subsequent disorder will ensue when she leaves the room.

Children Who Don't Work

It is unrealistic and idealistic to believe that all children will come into the elementary class with an acceptable work ethic, ready to assume the responsibility for their free work choices. Some lack the ability to choose constructive activities and attend to them properly; those with this deficiency must be helped in that process. Help is offered when the child is consistently expected to work and when the teacher gives a variety of exciting lessons from the colorful palette of cosmic education in such a way that it appeals to the psyche of this age child, allowing him to make a personal choice. This giving of lessons is a basic step. To arouse the desire to work, the teacher must give many interesting and varied lessons and then ask the child to choose from a few of them to pursue an idea more deeply.

If the child cannot or will not choose for himself, then the teacher must choose for him until he can do it by himself. This does not mean she should give assignments to the whole class. After a discussion with the child who needs it, the teacher must give him one assignment, not a long list of things, with the understanding that that one thing must be completed. Once he accomplishes this one thing, the child should be given a chance to choose the next. If he cannot, the teacher must choose for him again and continue to do so until he can. If the child can make a choice, then he should be left free to do so, but he must do so, and he must work to completion. Gradually, with a child like this, through this process the teacher can help him develop the same work ethic that others exhibit in the class.

These children require much of the teacher's attention and energy, but it is wise to make the exertion early in the year in order to help them to choose independently and responsibly. By engaging in this course, the teacher has asked the child to meet a standard of work worthy of his ability, at the same time connecting him with the environment, so ultimately he too can work spontaneously. It is then that the teacher can recede into the background.

Children who succeed at this process, eventually working without continual guidance from the teacher, recognize their success and consequently feel good about themselves. This is actually how self-esteem is developed-not by giving children empty compliments to make them feel good. Children who work spontaneously and independently recognize their efforts as such and acquire confidence in their abilities while gaining a certain expertise. These acquisitions then, in turn, further motivate the children to engage in more work.

Freedom to Work in Groups

Children naturally gravitate towards each other at this age. Dr. Montessori has said that the elementary child, as an individual, should participate in a truly social life. Thus, at this age it is only natural that the children, who are attracted to one another, are inclined to work with each other. Accordingly, since it is the task of education to assist in the children's natural development, they should be granted the freedom to work in groups. Group work gives the individual the possibility for growth and improvement and makes the formation of society possible. Elementary children work best when given the freedom to work together according to their natural proclivities. Through this kind of approach, over time, they consciously learn the difficult skills required for successfully working with others.

This accomplishment is not always easy. For the child newly entering the elementary class from the Casa dei Bambini, where most of the work was done individually, the concept of group work and its attendant responsibilities must be taught. Consequently, all of the lessons given to the elementary children should be group lessons. Many of the early elementary presentations lend themselves naturally to exposing the children to the factors necessary for working with others, such as the creation of a group noun booklet or an experiment to reveal all of the needs of the plant. From these activities the children realize that working in groups is the expectation in the elementary class and is, in fact, legitimate conduct and work.

The children also become aware, sometimes painfully, of the components required for working in groups. Give-and-take is one such required component. Compromise is another factor. Working harmoniously with others requires that at some point, one must relinquish his personal, selfish preferences for the good of the working group. Additionally, the children learn to share responsibility for their project. No one person carries the responsibility, whether it be burden or privilege, for the entirety of the group activity; rather, each one involved has his part to play in the execution of the project. Cooperation and collaboration, both characteristics for the successful accomplishment of a group undertaking, are two more components inherent in group work, and they must be developed and refined over time. These two traits just do not just appear miraculously when the child reaches a certain age. The child has the opportunity to develop these valuable qualities when there is freedom in the class to work with others.

The Teacher's Role in Group Work

To effectively provide an environment that offers "group work" in its truest form, a teacher must understand exactly what group work is and what it is not. An examination of what group work is not will help elucidate what group work really is. For example, group work is not three children sitting at the same table, each with his own piece of material or book doing parallel work. Nor is it children, who have just received the same lesson, doing their own follow-up activity without interacting with others.

Group work is where children are working on one and the same piece of material or project; for example, the checkerboard, a grammar box, a timeline, a science experiment, or a mutually designed project; and each child is contributing - sharing both the work and the responsibility for its completion. Group work is when - in order to accomplish some activity - cooperation, collaboration, and communication with others must be employed. This implies that group work generates discussion, debate, argument, decisions, and solutions. The latter two of these must be made by the group as a whole. This is noisy work, which is why one's class will be abuzz if the teacher offers freedom scrupulously.

Some individuals do not work well together. For this reason, the children must have the freedom to choose with whom to work. If we allow them to make their own groupings, they can make a society in which they can function favorably, exercising helpful and respectful behavior, attendant with responsibility and reliability.

Freedom to Talk

Intrinsic to the freedom of working with others is the freedom to talk. Without the freedom to talk, children could accomplish very little. If this freedom is withheld from children, not only will the qualities generated by group work be impeded, but the child's ability to discuss, debate, argue his point of view, defend his position, crystallize his thoughts, and articulate his ideas would be seriously repressed. Throughout the elementary class where these freedoms are granted, a hum of conversation should be the norm. When children are planning, creating, deciding, and debating, they are rarely quiet about it. By working together, children learn to communicate effectively and to express their personal ideas that take form and shape during the whole process.

Related Responsibility to These Freedoms of Conversation and Group Work

Again, by being offered these two freedoms, group work and conversation, the child can reap bounteous results that only come from practice. However, the corresponding responsibility to these two freedoms is that the group work and conversation be pertinent, substantial, meaningful, and worthwhile. The teacher is the final arbiter and must decide if the activity and conversation is, indeed, constructive and developmental. If, in her estimation, productivity is falling short or the conversation is merely gratuitous noise, then these occupations must be interrupted, sooner than later. The freedom to work and talk together does not mean that chaos can reign and time can be wasted.

For the teacher to act deliberately sometimes requires courage. Again, let's take our lead and guidance from Dr. Montessori's actual words when we are faced with having to interfere with children's work and behavior. She says in no uncertain terms in *The Montessori Method*:

"When the teachers were weary of my observations, they began to allow the children to do whatever they pleased. I saw children with their feet on the tables, or with their fingers in their noses, and no intervention was made to correct them. I saw others push their companions, and I saw dawn in the faces of these an expression of violence; and not the slightest attention on the part of the teacher. Then I had to intervene to show, with what absolute rigour it is necessary to hinder, and little by little suppress, all those things which we must not do, so that the child may come to discern clearly between good and evil. If discipline is to be lasting, its foundations must be laid in this way and these first days are the most difficult for the directress."⁷

Likewise, she says in *Education for a New World*, "Children who persist in molesting others must be stopped, as such activity is not of the nature that needs completion of its cycle."⁸

Dr. Montessori's message is not ambiguous. It could not be more straightforward and clear. For their own sakes, children with inappropriate behavior must have it checked, and this task lies with the teacher. This is her responsibility. In most cases it is usually unsuitable behavior that impedes the constructive work of children, and it must be curtailed immediately with "absolute rigor." Children should not be free to behave unfavorably. Otherwise, license has been granted.

Defining the Expectations

The teacher has done her part to ensure the success of this kind of training in her environment when, in the first days of school with the help of the children, she clearly defines the freedoms offered and the limits and responsibilities associated with each. The limits give the child guidance in regard to his actions and behavior. Because these limits ought never to change, because they are not capricious and wavering, and because they are applied to each member of the class without prejudice, they provide the child with a sense of security and stability. The order, limits, discipline, and consequences for one's actions, established in the class for the sake of harmonious relationships, become a standard by which the child can gauge his own behavior. Being fully informed of the requisite guidelines, expectations, and consequences allows the child to determine what is right and wrong according to the measure of the class and its requirements for acceptable conduct.

As this can be a lengthier developmental process for some children, there will be times when they fail at their attempts to act and behave fittingly. During these occasions, for the sake of the child and for the sake of the class as a whole, the teacher must act. Her work was partially done when, with the help of the children in the first days of school together, they established the laws and order governing the small society of the classroom. This resulted in a communally designed structure specifying the guidelines for acceptable conduct that all people functioning within the society must respect and abide by. To complete her responsibility, the teacher must now administer the mutually and fairly established structure.

There are several ways to promote these objectives. The first strategy is to always, always be consistent in administering the structure. Remember that the clearly established laws and order of the class are the foundation of the class's society. The structure of that foundation is changed when the teacher is inconsistent in administering it. By being inconsistent she invites the children to test the structure to determine the new limits for the day. When the teacher is consistent, the child knows without a doubt what to expect when he does commit an infraction. "This happened, we agreed it wouldn't for these reasons, and since it did, this will follow." Hence, whichever logical or natural consequences are imposed, they can be done so matter-of-factly, without anger, debate, or rancor. Once the child experiences the consequences of his actions, he should be given another opportunity to succeed. Implementing the structure and limits becomes a simple matter of fact. There should be no surprises and no need for rephension. Through the teacher's persistent consistency and follow-through the children develop a confidence and security in how to operate within the class.

However, when the structure is administered whimsically, capriciously, or erratically, it creates uncertainty within the children. They cannot rely on an unstable set of acceptable expectations. Not only does inconsistency invite testing of the structure, it also undermines one's efforts to establish an environment where children are free to function independently and peacefully.

Another piece of advice is always to administer the structure firmly, but fairly, and without annoyance. This possibility exists because the expectations were clearly, completely and mutually delineated by all and agreed to early on. Nothing new should be introduced resulting in surprises, since all should have been clearly defined at the onset of the year. Also, if possible, the teacher should sometimes use mild humor when correcting a child. The development of the ability to frown with a twinkle in one's eye will serve both the teacher and the child well; however, it is essential that the child nevertheless realize that the teacher means what she says. The child must take the situation seriously, thereby taking the expectations seriously, and, in effect, sincerely recognizing his responsibility to the freedoms offered to him.

After the child has fulfilled his consequences, the teacher should give him reassuring smiles and pats of encouragement for future success. By doing this, the child will not think that the mishap has marked him as "bad." Everyone makes mistakes. The child must recognize that the teacher is working on his behalf, and that both the teacher and the structure are there to help him see the importance of functioning harmoniously and successfully within society. The child should be reminded that the teacher is committed to working indefatigably on his behalf until he ultimately succeeds. The inference the child makes will be that the expectations today will be the same as those of tomorrow and that the teacher will act when necessary. She is telling the child, "I am devoted to your success and will never waiver, but will act for your best interests."

The teacher must never, never fail to administer the structure because she is too tired or discouraged. This is especially critical if the child knows that the teacher is aware that he has committed an infraction. Ignoring recognized breaches, no matter how small, constitutes tacit condonation. This gives the child permission to behave according to his whims. This can be a destructive message for the child. Also, it will serve to undermine all of the hard work that the teacher has already invested in securing a balance between freedom and responsibility in her class. She must never ignore an infraction. To be successful in administering the structure, the teacher must somehow marshal the energy required to follow through diligently with maintaining the standard for behavior. She can never throw up her hands and say, "They just won't listen." Yes, they will listen, if they know that the teacher is serious. If she is half-hearted and unconvincing, then this too will be conveyed to the children, and again they will act accordingly. The teacher chooses. It is up to her. A small example would be if the children were asked not to run in the class. At the first instance that they run, they must be reminded of the request and the reason for not running. Depending on the child, perhaps he should be asked to go back and walk to reinforce and remind him concretely of the expectation. By acting in this way the teacher impresses upon the child that his ignoring the expectation will not be tolerated. If the children are recidivists, then something more must be done, otherwise the structure and expectations mean nothing. The children must come to understand that they are not at liberty to run. The teacher must deal with each and every situation without fail and take it to the degree that is required. No inappropriate action is too small to be ignored.

A teacher does not have to be afraid to use the word "no." Sometimes when a point is expressed in the negative, it is better taken by those children who need to hear something more forceful. Elementary children are resilient. A teacher cannot break them or their spirits by telling them not to do something. John Rosemond, family psychologist and author in North Carolina, says, "Inflicting temporary pain to a child's feelings and destroying the child psychologically are horses of two entirely different colors. In fact, a fully operational social conscience cannot develop without causing a child occasionally psychic pain, as in shame, embarrassment, and remorse."⁹

To continually forgive the infractions that a child commits does him a disservice rather than a service. The message conveyed in this regard is that he is above the law and that the expectations set for others do not apply to him; therefore, he can behave however he wishes without thought, consideration, or responsibility to others. However, when the teacher makes the effort to follow through consistently without fail with administering the structure in a fair and just way, the implicit message for the child is that the law and order established in the class is important for each member of the class, and as a member, each person must be responsible to what society asks of him, even he. The child comes to understand that he must adapt his conduct to the reasonable and protective laws of the group. As Dr. Montessori has said, if discipline is to be lasting, its foundations must be laid in this way, and these first days are the most difficult for the teacher.

Prepared Teacher

To aid the child in his journey to construct a responsible member of society is the goal of the elementary Montessori teacher. To do this she needs to create an environment in which a balance between freedom and responsibility exists. This is a daunting task, but it is possible. Again, a first step in effecting this goal is to analyze the components required for success and then to implement each of them consciously. One such component of the prepared environment is the prepared teacher. As mentioned earlier, in order to help that child having difficulty finding work to sustain his interest, and thus fulfilling his responsibility, the teacher must work to link the child to his environment. In this regard, besides the suggestions proposed here, Dr. Montessori has some definite advice to offer on the subject. In *Education for a New World*, she writes:

"The teacher needs to be seductive, and can use any device—except of course the stick—to win the children's attention. She can do what she likes more or less, because as yet she upsets by her intervention nothing very important, so a bright manner in suggesting activities is the chief necessity."
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By saying the teacher needs to be seductive, obviously Dr. Montessori is suggesting that as teachers, when necessary, one must learn to entice children into work. If we were to embellish on her ideas of a "bright manner," given the nature of the elementary child, it seems that it would be useful to be enthusiastic and have a sense of humor used judiciously with these children. However, be careful that the humor does not become entertainment. Teachers are not there to entertain, but to entice. Earlier I have said that to entice that child, who as yet is reluctant to work, one must give many and varied lessons. In order to "suggest the activities," as Montessori puts it, one must be completely familiar with the contents of her albums. These albums are the tools of a Montessori teacher's trade, and she must know them thoroughly so she will be prepared to act when she sees the child express some interest in some area. This familiarity only comes from constant work on the part of the teacher. She must read and reread her albums and, by so doing, remember lessons long forgotten, or review the accuracy and purpose of some less frequently given presentations. To facilitate this enterprise it is useful to make detailed outlines of the contents of each of the albums, and in the case of certain major presentations, it is profitable to outline the steps required for the culmination of the lesson. The point of this undertaking is to be able to find quickly the required knowledge for those activities not yet committed to memory and to be able to present them confidently.

Once the teacher is prepared by knowing completely her albums, then she must give the lessons. An elementary Montessori classroom will be very exciting if a myriad of activities is going on at any given time. This liveliness can only be generated by the teacher's giving lots and lots of lessons from which the children select their favorites to pursue.

When Lessons are Given

There are times when the intensity of lesson giving is greater and most productive. During the mornings in the beginning months of school, with a full complement of about 30 to 35 children, the teacher should keep on the move consistently.

It would not be uncommon on Monday mornings for her to give enough small group lessons so that each child in the class would receive one. Through observation of her class and the children's readiness, she can ascertain when she must give more lessons in subsequent days. Of note is that lessons should be given throughout the whole day, not just in the mornings. Lesson giving should never be relegated to certain limited times of the day. After vacations is another time of intense lesson giving, and of course, during the year lessons should be given very regularly.

It behooves a teacher to constantly monitor for herself the number and variety of lessons she gives. She will soon become aware that there seems to be a correlation between an unruly class and a paucity of lessons to entice the children. Giving lessons is the secret to evoking from the children-all of them-an interest that will in turn lead them to exhibit the characteristics of the "spontaneous discipline" of which Dr. Montessori speaks. It is then that they will really be responsible to the freedom to choose their work.

How to Give Lessons

Another matter of consideration is how to give these group lessons to the elementary child. As we take to heart Dr. Montessori's words to have a "bright manner" in suggesting activities, we must be enthusiastic in our approach. No matter how many times before we have made the same presentation to a myriad of children long grown, we must remember that this is the first time this eager, young, impressionistic mind will encounter this new idea. The teacher must do the lesson justice.

Moreover, so that the lessons will be appealing to this elementary child, the teacher must keep in mind the particular sensitivities of the age: the reason and the imagination. Thus, when presenting any concept, she must give her lessons by telling stories using imagery and allegory. If her lessons fail to appeal to the child, she will fail to excite him to work. Therefore, she must take great care that her lessons, although factual, are not pedantic and boring, but rather story-like, interesting, imaginative, and inspiring.

The lessons must be clearly presented to be effective. The teacher must avoid obscuring the intended point by talking too much and too long. If a lesson becomes tedious for the children, she will lose their attention and interest, consequently undermining her attempts to stimulate work.

Another secret to successful teaching is to always engage the children in the activities so that they become active participants of the lesson instead of mere observers. To do otherwise would be to talk at them, and this never arouses their interest, only their ennui. A goal of the lesson is to have the children assume responsibility for carrying on the work once the teacher leaves. To succeed at this, the teacher must employ the children's efforts at the outset so they claim the work for their own.

Another hint at permitting the children to embrace the work as theirs is by limiting the amount of information imparted to them in any given lesson. A teacher only needs to give the critical points of the concept that will provide understanding for the child. Beyond that she should limit her information, because then she creates opportunities for the child to further seek interesting information independently. If the teacher were to give all of the facts in one sitting, rather than leaving the children wondering about some unknown, the children would have nothing else to do, nothing to search for, and nothing to discover on their own. The work would be done, and not by them, but by the adult. The teacher would be back at square one, again trying to connect the child with a piece of work. Effectively what she has managed to do, unwittingly, is to scuttle her own attempts to motivate the children. By imparting all of the information in a lesson, leaving nothing unanswered and possibly intriguing to the child, the teacher becomes her own greatest impediment.

What to Give in Lessons

The lessons that are given throughout the day must come from all of the subjects presented in the AMI elementary training courses, the whole of cosmic education. Children's choices should not be limited by what we choose to present or not present. As one regards her class at random moments, a complete array of activities should be observable. Children should be working in the areas of biology, geography, geometry, history, mathematics, language, art, and music. One must observe her class, analyzing it to see if there is a balance in the activities in view. A teacher must ensure that as much geography, history, art, music, and biology are being given in the mornings as are math and language. Never should she create an environment where only mathematics and language are permitted in the morning with other subjects relegated to afternoons. Nor should she assign a certain subject for a certain day of the week. And, never, never should she be tempted to limit the child and his intellect by limiting his exposure to what she feels is proper and fitting through fixed curricula, such as spelling, reading, or math programs and workbooks!

If the teacher succumbs to these strategies because she wants make sure that the children systematically gain expertise in these "important" subjects, then she has become the greatest obstruction to the child's freedom to choose his own work. In doing so, she also impedes his critical development of independence and responsibility. The teacher has become the obstacle to the birth of spontaneity in the child by choosing what she thinks is important rather than allowing him to choose that which appeals to his particular needs and curiosity.

When there is a variety of activity taking place within the class at all times, it will be more dynamic and exciting. Children naturally will want to be there. When a class is exciting and unpredictable, it cannot be boring and tiresome for them, especially when they are free to pursue occupations of their own choosing rather than pursuits imposed on them.

Also remember that children learn from each other. From the immediate ambiance they seem to assimilate knowledge and information with facility. With vibrant and pertinent conversations transpiring, interesting facts and figures take flight throughout the class with the greatest of ease. Children cannot help but share with others facts and information that excite them. Thus, they talk about their discoveries and their work. When a greater variety of work is happening, the children will have greater exposure to many different subjects and ideas. This exposure to variety also can suggest possibilities of work to children as yet indifferent and unemployed.

Nature of Groups Within the Lessons

As Montessorians we know that group lessons typically are the norm in the elementary class because of the operative characteristic of this age of child to seek others with whom to work. But due consideration must be given to the makeup of the groups.

Size of the groups

Lessons are directed to small groups of two to six children. These numbers are only fixed by their efficacy. The moment that a child within the group cannot be personally engaged in the activity and loses interest because the numbers are too large, then the group is too big. If an effective teacher can hold the concentration and fascination of each child in a group of seven and eight, she should not rule out those numbers; however, it is indeed a rare teacher who can grip the attention of each child and hold it for the duration of the lesson with a group that large.

Lessons given to the whole class should be limited severely for the same reason. That is not to say that they never happen, they do for special reasons and occasions, but they are not typical and they should not be the norm. And of course, one person does not constitute a group. Unless there is a particular reason and extenuating circumstances, the teacher does not present solely to an individual child.

Composition of the groups

Variety in the composition of the groups should be the hallmark in the elementary class. Groups should never remain static, and never, ever, should these groups be labeled for ease of calling people to a lesson. By doing this you categorize the children, and they in turn evaluate themselves according to the group in which they find themselves, or in which they don't find themselves. This can be a very limiting and devastating proposition for the child. By assigning labels to groups, the teacher also can fix her own perceptions about children rather than viewing them as different and evolving individuals, ones capable of daily change and progress. To do this is a serious impediment to extending freedom.

The groups should vary in age, genders, abilities and personalities. Children who indicate an interest in a lesson that the teacher is giving should always be included. Usually the interest demonstrated is very subtle and can be missed easily. It often takes the form of loitering on the periphery of the small group assembled. Once a teacher detects an interest coming from a child, she should invite him to join if he wants. If the lesson is beyond his capabilities, that will soon become apparent and the child can leave gracefully. There will be no harm done. However, if the lesson is not beyond his ken and his interest is arrested, the teacher has succeeded at her task.

By varying the groups consistently, the teacher can orchestrate opportunities for children working with people whom they might not otherwise have chosen to work. A teacher legitimately can separate unproductive combinations and unite unlikely partnerships. This is especially effective when introducing new children into the class. Varying the groups is also an effective means for breaking up destructive cliques. In this case, since the composition of the groups is not static or determined, but always unpredictable, there should be few complaints from the members who are unhappy with the separation. Furthermore, these members will have little ammunition to sustain their objections, since variety is merely a matter of course. Many times it is a relief to children reluctant to speak out to be put with or separated from certain parties. Also, by diversifying the groups an element of excitement and surprise for the children is maintained. This element creates the exciting dynamic in the class, and this is one of the goals for which all teachers strive.

Teacher's Record Keeping System of Lesson Requirements

A main component in the success of a teacher to link the child to the environment efficiently and masterfully is her ability to determine exactly what lessons in all areas her individual children need and when. She must be well-versed in their abilities, their interests, their weaknesses, their voids, and their progress. To be responsible for 30 to 35 children, an optimal number for an elementary class, be it a six-to-nine class or a nine-to-twelve class, a teacher must be particularly mindful of all these aspects for each child and have a plan for development for each. This suggests that she must have an efficient and workable system for tracking each child carefully. This is her responsibility and one that will augment her abilities to offer the child the requisite freedoms. If she knows her plans for each child, then she can free him up to investigate topics that appeal to him while keeping in her mind those other elements for which the child has a responsibility – basic skills and requirements. The teacher can allow the child to work at his leisure and pleasure on the work of his choice, but, at the same time, help guide him towards those necessary acquisitions.

The system a teacher uses for tracking her children should be easily usable and sufficiently simple, rather than complicated and overwhelming, in order to guarantee use. Also, it should not be excessively time-consuming, otherwise she may fail to use it regularly and lose her guide in granting freedom to the child. When they do not have an effective method for monitoring individual children, teachers often resort to freedom-impeding strategies to ensure that groups of children as a whole accomplish that which would be asked of them in traditional school.

Teachers, too, are individuals, and so a method that works for one might not be effective for another. Each needs to find her own personal system that is workable, efficient and efficacious. Once found, she must use her system diligently, assiduously and regularly. This requires an act of discipline on her part and is critical to her responsibilities as an elementary Montessori teacher.

Public School Curriculum

The public school curriculum gives the teacher a means by which to prepare the child for entry into a society in which education is a factor. Her responsibility is to find and maintain a balance between offering the lessons of cosmic education and the lessons that are expected of the children by a particular age. Always cognizant of society's educational expectations for children and in her efforts to be responsible, she must not be tempted to tie the children down to an external curriculum in a static way merely to ensure that they cover every point in it. By taking this approach the teacher undermines her own efforts to offer the children cosmic education. However, when she can balance the two equably, she offers evidence of her artistry in teaching a Montessori elementary class. With cosmic education, balanced by the public school curriculum, the teacher is able to allow the children the freedom they require to go out to study where and what they wish and at the same time meet the demands of society.

The public school curriculum is one of the three metaphorical pieces of material that Dr. Montessori defined as limits to balance the freedoms offered the child in the elementary class. The children must be consciously aware of the limits, or in other words, the responsibilities asked of them in connection with the freedom granted them to select their own work. They need to know the expectations of society; those expectations are delineated in the body of the public school curriculum. Children also must recognize and accept that it is their responsibility to acquire this body of knowledge and pursue their personal preferences at the same time.

Hence, the teacher must present the curriculum to the children just as she would present a piece of material. By doing this she makes them aware of the requirements that society asks of them and for which they are accountable. The curriculum can be presented twice a year to small groups—once in September, again in January—and then to individuals at other times as needed. As the children peruse the curriculum they can apprise themselves of any voids they may have and accordingly schedule time to remedy the situation.

This responsibility is not solely that of the child. Ultimately the teacher is responsible for the child's learning all that would have been asked of him traditionally. However, she does this in partnership with the child. To do this she first must provide a public school curriculum to place in the class, without which the child would have no societal guidelines to refer to. The absence of this guide would be a serious deterrent to his efforts to meet his personal obligation and responsibility. Thus, the teacher's responsibility is twofold: she must provide a legible and usable local curriculum, and then she must present it in an effective and befitting way to the child.

Never let the public school curriculum take on a life of its own. It should never be embellished beyond what it states, otherwise the limits imposed would be that of the person embellishing rather than the limits defined by society. This in itself imposes an unnecessary impediment to the child's freedom to follow his interests. Also, never present the curriculum to the children in such a way that each child has his own copy to use as a checklist to tick off each accomplished item. When this is asked of the child it takes the joy out of learning and reduces it to a mechanism that controls what the child learns. More disastrously however, is treating the public school curriculum as a monitoring instrument for the child's learning, as it becomes a chief deterrent to the children's ever engaging in and producing great work.

Record Books or Journals

The child is helped to monitor his own freely chosen work by keeping track of what he does throughout the day. All of his work and activities are recorded in what are sometimes called daily journals or record books, the second metaphorical piece of material recommended by Dr. Montessori to balance the child's freedom. The record book is a device by which the child can both track his own work and activities and assume responsibility for them.

One of the first steps in the child's use of this valuable tool is a clear and precise presentation given him; this lesson must be given annually at the outset of each year. As with other elements in offering children freedom in the elementary class this aspect, too, must be thought out very carefully. In these books the child neatly and beautifully enters the time he begins an activity, the specific name of the activity, the amount of work he accomplishes, and the time that he ends the work. Additionally, he should record lessons when they are given him and by whom. Each of these elements is required if this device is to be effective. To a certain extent, when done correctly, the amount of work done can be quantified, giving the child a means by which he can evaluate his productivity or lack thereof. In regards to these records, the teacher should encourage the children to specify, quantify, clarify, and beautify. These four verbs can become a short mantra to remind the children of the items necessary for creating a useful tool for assessing one's work.

To ensure the successful use of the record books, a teacher must consider a variety of practical aspects and make accommodations for them:

I. Does the child tell time? If not, how will he be able to record the time? Where will he find the date?

- Have an analogue clock in the class to which the child can refer
- The child may require help from others telling time
- The teacher may have to give lessons on the clock
- Introduce him to the calendar that hangs in the classroom

2. What are the child's handwriting skills like? Does he need a book with wider lines than the other children?

- The teacher may have to write initially for him
- A child partner could assist him with this endeavor

3. Does he know the name of the material that he has used? Can he spell the name correctly?

- Initially, the teacher can write it down for him
- Another child can help him with the name and spelling

How these practical questions get resolved requires analysis, thought, and creativity. The solutions to questions of this nature must be found so that the teacher and the children can succeed in the use of this tool. Initially this is not an easy thing to accomplish, and its mastery requires consideration, determination, and perseverance from both teacher and child.

The children should be given the reasons for keeping these journals so they understand their importance in relation to their free use of time. These are limits to their freedom. They must see the journals as tools for tracking and assessing their work as well as standards for measuring their responsibility and accountability. These books should never be used as an assignment journal in which children write what they are going to do for the day. This defeats and distorts their purpose completely. When this is asked of children, they have been pinned down to prescribed work just as an insect is pinned in captivity.

For children coming from the primary class, the idea of tracking one's work is a new notion, and it initially requires constant monitoring. At the outset of the year, the record books of all the new children must be checked regularly as a sign of encouragement and reinforcement of the expectations. Before long it will become apparent who avoids the task (thus requiring consistent support and monitoring) and who does not. For those who do not require constant attention, the teacher can rely on random and periodic inspection. To foster the use of the journals, the teacher can encourage the children to decorate them and provide the time to do so. A convenient time for decorating these books is when the teacher reads aloud to the children. Further, if the books provided are beautiful and attractive, rather than commonplace or mundane, they call to the children to be used and valued.

Without commitment, dedication, ceaseless consistency and follow-through on the part of the teacher, the record books will not succeed. And without the use of the record books, the child is deprived of a fundamental instrument that offers him an opportunity for self-evaluation and a means to handle responsibly the free use of time granted him. For this reason the Montessori elementary teacher must be committed and dedicated to making this system work effectively.

Teacher/Child Meetings

The teacher's efforts will be rewarded eventually, because these scrupulously used record books are put to use when the teacher has her meetings with individuals, the third metaphorical piece of material suggested by Montessori. Iris at these times that the teacher and the child peruse the record books and the work of the child together to help the child evaluate not only his productivity, but also the quality of his work. It is a time for the two to see if the child has been accountable to the freedom extended to him.

These meetings can be on fixed days of the week or they can be scheduled randomly, but they should begin very early in the year. They need to be conducted fairly regularly in the six-to-nine class. An individual child should have a meeting with his teacher at least every two weeks. Children newly arrived from the primary may need short meetings as frequently as once a week until they are on track. As children display more and more responsibility, the teacher soon identifies those who need more frequent meetings and those who need fewer. Accordingly, she can alter her schedule.

In the nine-to-twelve class, one would expect the children to be very practiced at this task because of experience. Therefore, it is conceivable that formal meetings would be required less often, but even at that, each child needs to be able to count on having routine meetings with the teacher. And, of course, there will be those individuals who require and need more frequent meetings than others, because, as yet, they are still unable to handle responsibly the freedoms offered them.

To the meeting the child brings his most recent work—finished and unfinished and, of course, his record book. At this meeting both he and the teacher together refer to the record book to determine if the child is efficiently and wisely using his time. Depending on what comes to light, in some cases it will be during these meetings that the child will redesign his approach to his work and his free opportunities. The teacher should guide the child to create for himself solutions and suggestions for his improvement, rather than imposing on him a plan and a conclusion. This allows him to take the responsibility for his work and improvement. If a child does not recognize his inferior work, then the teacher must make him aware of it. This is accomplished by comparing the inferior work to a piece of his higher quality work. The child must first accept his deficiencies before he can commit himself to improvement. Whatever emerges during these meetings, the teacher must be constantly vigilant to ensure that any plans made for improvement are implemented. Thus, she needs to design for herself a system by which she can oversee that the child follows through with the agreed upon plan. Ultimately she is responsible for his progress; this is her work.

As these three ideas, the public school curriculum, the daily journals, and the regular meetings with the children are successfully implemented in tandem with each other, they serve to create a foundation in which that precious freedom can be offered effectively to the children while the balance of responsibility is maintained. Without any one of them, true cosmic education cannot be offered the child.

Ambiance of the Environment

Children develop best in an environment that meets their needs, that they feel belongs to them, and for which they are responsible. When judicious freedom is granted to them, commensurate with reasonable expectations, children are eager to be there. Again, to create such an environment is the teacher's responsibility and its creation is a testimony to her artistry as a Montessori teacher. To fulfill this obligation she must ensure that this classroom exhibits certain qualities.

One quality worthy of immediate consideration is whether the environment feels safe and secure for the children. We have already spoken about how clearly delineated guidelines for conduct provide a security for children functioning in a classroom, but there are other important elements to ensure. Children must feel that their ideas and opinions are valued and respected and are given due consideration when proposed. If an environment is adult-ruled, it cannot provide the necessary regard justly asked by children. The children must feel that the methods of management are fair and equitable, and then they will respond positively. The child between six and twelve is especially sensitive to these notions of justice.

Children must respect and feel respected by all people who inhabit the environment—adults and children alike. This quality, called grace and courtesy, must be preserved at all costs. Children flourish when they spend time in situations where they are appreciated and courteously regarded. Again, this is the real root of the development of self-esteem. Children learn the fine art of taking care of themselves and others in an environment replete with respectful actions and methods for developing and engendering this ability. By carefully introducing grace and courtesy lessons and expecting a thoughtful level of observance, we enable the children to conduct themselves with civility and grace. In the process we make them consciously aware of what is expected of them and where their responsibility lies. In effect, they have been given the means and the tools for choosing the good. When they fall short in their behavior, as they sometimes do because they are in process, they can be led to reason out for themselves where their deficiencies lie and then determine how to rectify them.

An important element related to the respect that children feel is for them to know that they have a say in the happenings of their class, when that say is within reason. This is directly related to the idea of freedom. Children should be offered every rational opportunity to conduct themselves without interference from adults. First and foremost they should be permitted opportunities to solve their own problems. A teacher needs to provide them with the time and space for doing just this and leave them to sort things out if they can. Dr. Montessori said in *Education for a New World*, "Even if two children want the same material, they should be left to settle the problem for themselves unless they call for the teacher's aid."¹¹

When children are left to their own devices to find solutions, they are usually satisfied with the outcome, but furthermore, they have a sense of importance about themselves and they develop the ability for problem-solving. These fruits have come about by the creation of an environment that allows the child to develop self-reliance, one that has left the child free to seek his own resolution.

Since the Montessori elementary environment belongs effectively to the children, they must assume responsibility for its care and maintenance. When they are in charge of devising the system and means for caring for the plants, animals, and materials, they become consciously aware of all that needs doing within their room. They become the owners of the upkeep when they are allowed to establish the system and take charge of it. Adults do not need to impose the system for maintaining the class. They only need to allow the children to do it, and then oversee that the work is being done. Ultimately the adult is responsible for all that is in the environment, and when needed, a judiciously placed reminder will secure a successful result.

Again, the teacher must give some forethought to this process and provide guidance and permission for the children to undertake all of the obligations that arise in assuming the care of the environment. First, she must make the children aware, through discussion, that this is their class, and, as such, they must assume responsibility for its care and maintenance. Next, she can ask them to observe carefully and then determine what needs doing to keep the class as clean and beautiful as possible. This is their work to do, rather than their being told what needs to be done. When they assess the needs of the classroom themselves, they are becoming conscious of what it takes to maintain an environment. Any important aspect omitted can easily be suggested for inclusion.

Once the chores and responsibilities have been carefully identified, then the question becomes, "Who is going to do what?" In the six-to-nine class the teacher will have to be more actively involved in this process, since it is she who knows both the strengths and weaknesses of the children and she who will want to ensure that any assignment of a task will have a successful end. In the nine-to-twelve class the children can manage this process with only a little guidance from the teacher, since the children are by degrees more responsible and have had more experience from previous years. Finally, the teacher is ultimately responsible for the care and maintenance of everything in the environment, including the plants and animals. Thus, she must have a system by which she oversees that all things are done, especially the feeding of the animals and the watering of the plants. Again, we have another responsibility of the teacher.

Once the jobs have been assigned, the children can create a beautiful job chart and decide on a system for changing the jobs periodically. In the six-to-nine class these jobs change regularly to give the children experience with all of the different facets of maintenance. In the nine-to-twelve class they change less often. And, if the desired goal is attained, at the end of the year in the nine-to-twelve class, no chart is required because the children merely identify tasks that need doing and just do them.

If jobs are to be done well, consideration must be given to when and how these tasks will be performed. Again, a plan can be created in consultation with the children. Options could be the last 30 minutes of the day, or the last afternoon of the week, or when a job needs doing. No matter the plan decided upon for how and when the work gets done, the important thing is that it gets done.

Dynamic Classroom

The classroom should be an exciting and alluring place to be. When the lessons of cosmic education are given regularly, this contributes to the excitement: imaginative stories, demonstrations, experiments, and explorations about the universe! What more impressive topic could launch the child into his work adventure? Nothing. These opportunities just must be offered. Once launched, the children will have ideas of their own to express in many ways, and the teacher must help them realize their reasonable ambitions. Frequently, expression of interest manifests itself in large engineering and art projects. These are particular and individual, relating to the child's work, not activities in which the whole class seasonably engages. To satisfy this need the teacher must make preparation in two ways:

1. She must prepare the environment by providing the required media and materials, showing the children how to use them
2. She must prepare herself for granting the children a large expenditure of time, as well as enduring that which might be considered a big mess

When children are working consistently and responsibly on these activities, all freedoms offered at this time are absolutely warranted. This kind of freedom lends itself to the creation of a dynamic and living environment.

A classroom that is inviting to children is one where there is an element of fun, joy, and autonomy. Fun is defined not as amusement and festivity necessarily, but an atmosphere that is light and enjoyable. A component required in the implementation of this kind of classroom is the teacher's sense of humor. Children at this age respond positively to humor. Everything need not be deadly serious. Even when a teacher must impose some consequence for an infraction, she can do this with mild, pleasant humor, not derision, at the same time imparting the seriousness of the matter. This is an art and a skill, and its development is critical. Additionally, if a teacher develops this talent, not only will the children enjoy more being in the environment, the teacher will too.

Conclusion

Dr. Montessori advises the teacher to seduce the children to win their attention, to employ any method "other than the use of the stick" to captivate their interest and thus, ultimately, evoke their involvement. When the teacher creates an attractive, lively, engaging, and exciting place to be, one replete with fairness and justice, trusting the child's immense capacities and intellectual competency, the children will respond positively to her. With each child and personality the teacher must develop a relationship and a rapport, one that encompasses mutual respect. When this is accomplished, the children will trust her, and it will be then that she can help them to engage with the environment. By giving them freedoms that they can handle responsibly, little by little in a systematic way, the teacher is providing opportunities through which the children can each make successfully their personal construction and development. This construction, when supported by Montessori principles, will encompass the realization of the human potential and all of the attendant results. Assistance in this development is no easy task for the teacher, but there is no greater or more important one to undertake. Understanding decisively and resolutely the concept of freedom balanced by responsibility as they are applied in the classroom is the key to success in "helping the child to help himself" with this grand work.

Endnotes

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