

Supporting the Elementary Child

By Madhavi Gaddam

Support is to facilitate or give assistance to someone/something. If we give any support, what do we do? We try to facilitate in the best possible way which will benefit the receiver. It could be anything. For example, if we look around and found a ridge guard or bitter guard creepers spreading on the ground, what do we do? we try to build a canopy and help the plant to take the support of the canopy to climb and grow. This is because we want to save its yield. If we don't prepare the canopy then the creeper will spread on the ground and its fruits get spoilt. We want to support this plant to protect its yield later.

However, if we don't know about that plant, then we can't think about the damage going to happen to its fruits later. Suppose if we find this plant already spread across on the land and started blossoming and some flowers turning into fruits, can we help it by building a canopy? No, because the period for a canopy is gone. This example narrates us to understand that, in order to support we should know about that plant, how to support, and when. Imagine, if we don't know about this plant, can we notice it? Can we think about the damage that is going to happen to it, in later stages? But If we know about this plant, then we can notice the need and act accordingly in supporting it. In the same manner, we have to understand the child in order to offer him the suitable support for his growth.

Do you think we understand a child and support him? When we want to help a child, we have to help the child from the beginning, like we have to build the canopy for the plant when it is young, we have to prepare an environment for the child and prepare the child for life by proper guidance. When we want to offer help to this child, who is 6 and entering into the elementary level, we need to prepare an environment suitable for his development. We have to understand his needs and the nature of his mind.

Through her observations. Dr. Montessori advocated, that children exhibit certain growth patterns in during their development. She divided the development of a child into four stages and called it four planes of development. She emphasized that at every stage of development the child will have different needs and different characteristics. Montessori's approach was in response to the development of the child at different ages. In order to support the child, we need to understand these developmental

needs, and the characteristics of the child, so that we can support the child to unfold his/her potential by preparing a suitable environment for them. In the first plane, these characteristics are called sensitive periods and in the second plane, they are called as psychological characteristics. We must understand the developmental needs of the second plane.

Passage to the Abstraction

This is the age for the passage of the child's mind to abstraction. We want the children to abstract the underlying essence of the concept. We do it by removing any dependencies on the real-world objects with which it might originally have been connected. This helps the children to generalize and use it for wider applications that match the abstract concept.

The Birth of Moral Sense

The ability to reason allows children to form their own judgments. During this age, the children explore the idea of morality. Children need to have a lot of experiences to discriminate and judge. Working in groups and mixed-age groups provide a lot of opportunities to discriminate good, bad, fair, and unfair. The development of morality enables children to come to their own understanding of what is right and wrong.

The Birth of Social Personality

Children need to develop socially, and they have a felt need to escape from the closed environment of the classroom. Children need to go out to see how collaborative work is essential in society. When children go out, they observe and understand how people do different things in order to live and contribute to society. They need to witness the social collaboration between people, because, later each child needs to be a part of that social cohesion.

The Acquisition of Culture

The child needs to adapt to his time, place, and culture. We want to connect them to the cultural aspects of that time and place. There is a tremendous need to acquire the culture of the place, a time where they live. We know that child feels an overwhelming necessity to go out at this age. When they are exposed to nature and society, they try to make a connection with society and nature, and this helps them in their complete absorption of culture.

Psychological Characteristics

The child naturally exhibits psychological characteristics which enable him to take an active part in the universe. If everything is not planned to take

the natural characteristics of the child into consideration, then natural development may get blocked or delayed. We want the child to grow to his or her optimum level. For this, the second plane child's mind can be best reached through cosmic education, which caters to these psychological characteristics.

Imagination

"Imagination is the great power of this age."

At the age of six, the child should not be given the facts only to memorize, but so as to touch his imagination. This tendency of imagination is there in every human being, but at this stage, the child starts using the power of imagination.

His/her mind experiences a great hunger for knowledge. He/she is interested in knowing about the things in the world. Dr. Montessori says to sow as many seeds as we can during this plane of development. So, at this age, we have to sow the seeds of all the aspects of sciences through great stories and key stories that will appeal to the imagination of the child's mind. Our motive should be to inspire the child.

Reasoning Mind

The reasoning mind and imagination are like power tools for the second plane child. The child has a very strong will and an intellect, which can discriminate, reason, and calculate. With a mind that can imagine and reason, the child who started asking questions of why and how now tries to find out answers for his questions and wants to know the cause and effects by himself.

Capable of Great work

The child's imagination and reasoning power will help the child acquire knowledge. Without any external authority or by the imposition of pressure on the child, the child will be delighted to know for himself and by himself. The desire to know more will become strong and his interest helps him to understand and generalize the concepts. This enables him to take up big work and to know more about the concepts introduced to him.

Group instinct

Children of the second plane always have an urge to follow their peers. They always want to be in a group and take an active role in it. They like to frame rules and keep their secrets. Code language. They will be generous in

the group. They are able to discriminate what is good and what is bad. They learn to share and take turns. Making rules is very important for them at this age. They form a small society with all the rules and try to follow them. This gives them a chance to understand how society works and prepares them as social beings.

Moral development

Being in groups will also help children to analyze situations and awakens their moral sense. The group instinct and moral development go hand in hand. At this age, the child will be able to express moral judgment. The child can understand what is good and what is bad, which in turn helps him to attain mental independence. Dr. Montessori talks about, how children's participation in scouts helps them to be with a group and understand living on the earth. This is the period to start building up moral relationships.

Hero worship

Children of this age are interested in the lives and deeds of great people. They admire them and try to follow their ideologies. The age of six plus is the correct age to introduce them to the great work of people. They also may follow and admire some seniors in the school and learn from them.

Power of abstraction

The reasoning mind helps the child of the second plane to orient themselves to everything. Since they are very curious and this is the period of why and how the child starts exploring. Through Cosmic education, we offer the keys to open the doors for exploration. Imagination in unison with the reasoning mind helps the child understand the reasons. They understand the cause and its effects. The power of abstraction is a new authority of this age. For this, all the ground preparations are laid through the activities which are concrete and systematically leading towards abstraction. This preparation fans the flames of abstraction. The abstraction takes him to higher levels.

"We help the child to fly, by helping while he is on the earth, aiding him to replenish himself".

Cosmic Education

Cosmic Education is an approach to education envisioned by Dr. Maria Montessori for children between 6 to 12 years. It is structured by her, so as to help the child to discover the universe, world, and everything around him. For this Dr. Montessori advises us to give the whole universe to the child. Because everything in this universe begins from one point and is

interlinked with each other. She wanted to give this idea of the cosmic theory, which is the story of evolution. This is given in such a way that it will enthuse and challenge children.

She felt that the universe is the only curriculum that has everything that is created. All the aspects of sciences are woven linking one to another in cosmic education. Dr. Montessori designed cosmic education as a web of knowledge, but, offered as per the nature of the child's mind in the second plane of development.

Cosmic Education opens up the child's mind to understand the world and about life on it. This understanding guides the child to become aware of things around him and lets him to self-realization. When a child can understand the world, he will act with responsibility towards it. This leads the child to adapt easier to that place, time and culture. This is a fundamental aim of offering cosmic education for the second plane child. It is offered through Great Stories and key lessons. The stories challenge the child's mind and kindle his interest. Stories are integrated with or followed up by the experiments and demonstrations to explain the natural laws that everything follows. Timelines, impressionistic charts, and manipulative material are used during the delivery of stories and activities. All life needs a place prepared for growth. The Elementary child needs a Dual Environment. One is the classroom, and another is the environment outside of the School. Outside the School is explored through Going Out.

In the Classroom

The classroom environment contains all the materials necessary for the activities to deliver Cosmic Education. Through Cosmic Education, we offer keys to the universe. Concepts are offered through the material, impressionistic charts, stories, demonstrations, and experiments. There should be sufficient space and freedom to move, communicate, and work in the classroom environment. The Prepared Environment should contain children of different ages. By working with mixed ages, the child learns by experience what acceptable behaviour is and what is not. This helps the child to develop the insight to look into himself and work on his own behaviour. The classroom environment is not sufficient for the second plane child. The Classroom environment is very limited, for example, when an adult wants to give a presentation on the leaves of plants, he can only bring a very limited variety of the leaves to the class. Later after the basic presentation, the children are taken outside to explore different leaves outside the environment. Children have to go out of the classroom, to

explore and gain experience about different types of leaves. Have some plants, trees, and some animals in the environment.

The Role of the Adult

An adult should be well aware of the characteristics of a second plane child to guide the child. Understanding the characteristics of the child helps the adult to support the natural growth and development of the child. She should serve as a link between the child and the environment. The elementary child explores everything with his imaginative and reasoning mind. The adult needs to act as a storyteller of truth. Storytelling has been used for generations to pass on the knowledge and the experience of people from one generation to another. It should not be done only for the sake of passing on information but to create interest in the child, by telling the stories in a dramatic way. She/he should give necessary and sufficient help. She should always try to take her lead from the child.

Supporting Children at Home

We can support the child and encourage him to set a routine for everyday work, which should include all the activities like exercise, contributing to house chores, reading, playing Etc) from the beginning of the day till he goes to bed. Routine helps the child in time management, to organize his work/day. Routine gives a rhythm to the mind and body. This should be supported and nurtured from a young age. This in turn develops self-discipline.

Since we are all staying at home now, we can take the support of these children in our works. We know this is the age of social and moral development. At home, we can support this need by spending time together every day, by involving in activities such as sharing responsibilities (cooking, cleaning), eating together during lunch, dinner and sharing our experiences or childhood memories with them, etc.

If you want to support your child to be a good reader then you should start reading. You may want to play a role model. Then automatically child may also develop an interest in reading. You can share or discuss what you read; this will create an interest in reading. Don't force the child to read the books of your choice. Give him variety/a few different books, let him choose what he wants to read, and then follow his interest. If he is fixed to reading one series and is not switching to other, don't force him to switch, have patience. The only thing that you can do is to create an environment where you can provide the books he wants and give him sufficient time. Children

will follow their peers and will start reading the books that their peers are reading.

Outcomes of proper support

Through stories and other activities, we want to inspire the child in his work. We want him to build the knowledge which helps him to become aware of things around become responsible towards them. We know that Knowledge orients man towards work. Our aim is to support the child to become self-reliant, confident, and independent being. One who has developed an inner eye that can notice the world, it is the mechanism and will be able to choose a task that can serve himself, his family, and eventually humanity.



Madhavi Gaddam is an AMI 6-12 trainer. She has a bachelor's degree in commerce and in Education. She holds Association Montessori International (AMI) 3 to 6 and 6 to 12 diplomas' and has done her Orientation for 12 to 18. She has a vast experience working with children at elementary level. Madhavi initiated Medha Montessori School in Hyderabad, India, which has primary, elementary and adolescent environments with a farm setup.

This article is based on a webinar organised by the Indian Montessori Foundation presented by Madhavi Gaddam on Saturday, July 18, 2020. Below are answers provided by the author to some of the questions raised by participants.

Question: Can the stories be factual like informative videos, for example, the steps of how something is made? Or is an element of imagination or fantasy required?

Answer: Yes, at this age, between 6 to 12 years child can read both factual stories and fiction. I recommend reading than videos for young children. The internal processing that occurs while reading a book is beneficial to the child's cognitive development.

Question: Are there any books that you can recommend for us to read for this age group?

Answer: Yes I can recommend the Magic School bus, Horrible Sciences, Horrible Histories, Horrible Geography, Geronimo Stilton, Famous Five series, Secret Seven series, Dairy of Wimpy Kid, Magic tree house, Sal and Gaby, Harry Potter, all the DK books. This list will grow as your child begins to enjoy reading.

Question: How do I create WOW moments at home? Though we share lot of stories, they are not kindling my son's interests.

Answer: To understand the interests of the child you must understand his development. My article above may help you do just that. The child will create his own moments on his own. As the child's capability to read

Question: How can we use this current pandemic situation to connect children to the cosmic view and the oneness of humanity? What are the possibilities here?

Answer: As you imply in your questions COVID does present an opportunity to examine the interdependence of humans and their significant interactions with the environment. However as you discuss matters with the children, it is important to look for reliable sources of information rather than read articles which present a one sided. Also remember to let the child read and listen to them without leading them when they speak about anything that they have read. My article above may help you.

Question: At this age children start watching movies. How can their exposure to movies and television be controlled or managed?'

Answer: These controls cannot be set up only for children. Try to discuss and limit screen time for the family and try to engage children with work.

Question: My daughter is 6.5 years old. Can we subscribe to activity boxes - for example they have some called flintobox, explorabox? They have activities to facilitate learning about the earth. They have a theme every month. Also can we enroll the child in Kumon math or will it confuse the child?

Answer: Children need to develop at all dimensions – physical, intellectual, social, emotional and at moral levels. Consider on which levels these boxes are helpful and you will be able to decide whether to give them or not. Imagine if you over water a plant in a pot? What would happen to its growth? Try to connect these children to nature. It has many, many themes and this connection will teach the children about the earth.