



A Beginners Look at the Role of the Teacher in a Montessori Elementary Classroom

The Elementary child has entered the Age of Reason, and is now able to learn through imagination and reason. These developments must be incorporated into the dynamics of the Elementary Montessori classroom, making the Montessori environment different in many ways from the Casa dei Bambini, which is designed for the child aged 3-6. The child at this plane of development is not going to model the teacher's actions so directly as they once had in the Casa dei Bambini. The Elementary teacher needs to acknowledge and respect the children's questions and challenges. Humour, drama, and creating scenarios are all tools incorporated by the Elementary teacher to foster the Elementary child's growing abilities to reason and imagine.

The Elementary teacher needs to appeal to the intellectual powers and psychological characteristics of the child at this point in their development in order to facilitate the growth and development of the child. The teacher must also keep track of the child's progress as it relates to international benchmark standards for grade levels. Standardised testing is also used in the Elementary classroom as both a teaching tool and an assessment guide. This will help both the teacher and child better understand where the child needs to focus and where their strengths lie.

A second side of education at this age concerns the children's exploration of the moral field and a discrimination between good and evil. They no longer are receptive, absorbing impressions with ease but want to understand for themselves, and are not content with accepting mere facts. As moral activity develops they want to use their own judgement which often will be quite different from that of their teachers. There is nothing more difficult than to teach (by direct methods) moral values to children of this age; they give an immediate retort to everything that we say. An inner change has taken place but nature is quite logical in arousing now in the children not only a hunger for knowledge and understanding, but a claim to mental independence, a desire to distinguish good from evil by their own powers and to resent limitations by arbitrary authority. In the field of morality, the child now stands in need of his (her) own inner light.

- Maria Montessori

The social life of the classroom gives a huge opportunity for the children to develop academic understanding as well as their values and sense of morality. Facilitating this process is one of the Elementary responsibilities of the Elementary teacher. This is done by arousing the children's interests, planting seeds of interests, leaving them with unanswered questions, extensive and varied follow up work to lessons. The children need to work so that the behaviour in the classroom becomes normalised. The normalised Montessori Elementary classroom in turn gives rise to the incredible development of interests and expertise in all areas of socialisation, learning and the fundamental love of learning for its own sake.