

Family Connection

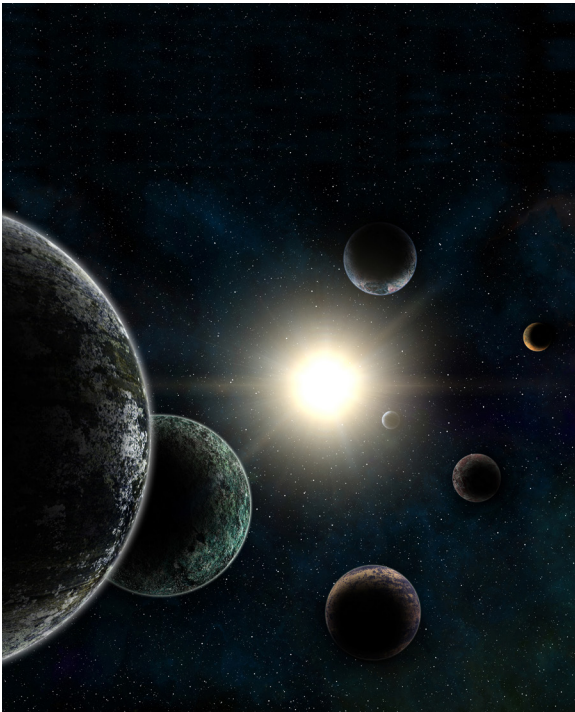
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“To have a vision of the cosmic plan, in which every form of life depends on directed movements which have effects beyond their conscious aim, is to understand the child's work and be able to guide it better.”

—Maria Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*, p. 135

Cosmic Education: Giving Children a Vision of the World

By Heather White



Cosmic Education is a cornerstone of Montessori philosophy. Originally formulated by Maria Montessori in the 1940s, it embodies her hope of “[giving] the child a vision of the whole universe... for all things are part of the universe and are connected with each other to form one whole unity.” Although it may be mistakenly interpreted to mean a simple study of astronomy or space exploration, Cosmic Education is an all-inclusive curriculum that helps children recognize and appreciate the interconnectedness of all things. It provides a framework for them to understand the universe and their place within it, empowering them to better the world for future generations.

Cosmic Education at Different Ages

Cosmic Education consists of a series of stories and experiences that help the child develop a global awareness. As the child ages, so does the approach to Cosmic Education. Montessori states, “To the young child we give guides to the world and the possibility to explore it through his own free activity; to the older child we must give not the world, but the cosmos and a clear vision of how the cosmic energies act in the creation and maintenance of our globe.” For younger children, ages birth - 6, Cosmic Education is introduced to the child through experiences in nature and use of the sensorial materials. The child is invited to explore the natural world, investigating acorns, leaves, and insects on nature

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walks and becomes enamored while building with the Pink Tower and Brown Stair. These activities allow children to refine their senses as they begin processing and understanding the world around them.

In the Elementary years, Cosmic Education introduces the child to the connectedness of all living things through the presentation of “The Great Lessons.” The Great Lessons are bold, exciting stories that start with the whole (i.e. the universe) and work toward the parts (i.e. individual cultures, life forms, etc.). These stories are designed to awaken a child’s imagination and curiosity, providing a big picture that demonstrates how the sciences, art, history, language, and geography are interrelated.

There are Five Great Lessons:

- FIRST GREAT LESSON:** The Coming of the Universe and the Earth
- SECOND GREAT LESSON:** The Coming of Life
- THIRD GREAT LESSON:** The Coming of Human Beings
- FOURTH GREAT LESSON:** Communication in Signs
- FIFTH GREAT LESSON:** The Story of Numbers



The foundation of Cosmic Education in these early years prepares children to enter adolescence as capable, confident, socially responsible individuals. They have a deep understanding of who they are and acknowledge their place in the world and the responsibilities that come along with it, including the moral duty to respond to global issues affecting the environment and humankind.

The Relevance of Cosmic Education Today and for the Future

Maria Montessori believed that Cosmic Education helped empower children to become citizens of the world. In a time plagued with war and violence, Cosmic Education harnesses the power to restore peace and harmony as students recognize and accept their global responsibility. Although the world has changed immeasurably since Dr. Montessori developed this foundational curriculum, Cosmic Education remains as vital today as when it was initially developed. It was Montessori’s vision that this type of transformative education would hold the power to truly change the world and Montessorians around the world would harness the potential to use this curriculum to positively impact the future of humanity, our planet, and the universe itself.



Register for our family course!

You and Your Child’s Montessori Education: Early Childhood

A course designed for families interested in incorporating the Montessori philosophy into their homes.

LEARN MORE AT:
amshq.org/familycourse



Asking Questions to Inspire Curiosity



Sometimes the best answer you can give your child is to ask a question. Asking for their opinion or guess to a question they have allows for a conversation about how things work. You may be surprised by the foundational knowledge they already have or the incredible imagination this inspires.

You can ask things like:

- 1- What do you think?
- 2- Where do you think we could find the answer to that question?
- 3- How do you think _____ would answer that question?
- 4- If you did know the answer, what do you think you would say? (This is a favorite rebuttal to “I don’t know” as it removes the pressure of being the “right” answer.)

The Journey of Phonemic Awareness to Literacy

By Victoria Kulikowski



The Montessori Early Childhood classroom features materials that provide children with a strong foundation in language literacy, with a phonemic foundation. Maria Montessori observed that children develop the ability to compose words before they can read them. Children only need the ability to connect a few letter sounds to their symbols to be able to begin creating words and they will experience a sense of success in writing them out. Reading, on the other hand, is a more abstract concept where words must first be deciphered and then have a meaning attached. However, both reading and writing are based on strong oral language skills.

When children from Montessori Infant & Toddler programs enter Early Childhood classrooms, they already have begun mastery of phonetic sounds through Language materials that introduced them to initial sounds. In the Early Childhood classroom, children dive further into phonetics through writing and reading. In Elementary, refinement of phonetic understanding continues and words outside of phonetics are memorized.

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PHONETIC WRITING MATERIALS INCLUDE:

- ✓ Sandpaper letters
- ✓ Sand tray
- ✓ Labeling the classroom
- ✓ Moveable alphabet
- ✓ Creative writing (with inventive spelling)

PHONETIC READING MATERIALS INCLUDE

- ✓ Moveable alphabet
- ✓ Phonetic word cards
- ✓ Phonetic activity cards
- ✓ Phonetic 3-part cards and matching cards
- ✓ Phonogram folders

Early Childhood (EC)

The language shelves in the Montessori EC classroom are stocked with materials that provide practice for phonemic awareness. Children often start by reviewing letter sounds with activities like I Spy. In the classroom, students can use the sandpaper letters to clarify sound to letter correspondence before moving on to the moveable alphabet, a box filled with multiple cut-outs of each letter that they can use to build words even before they may be able to hold a pencil to write them. Using the sandpaper letters and the sand tray gives children writing practice, which further clarifies sound to letter correspondence and begins to train the hand to physically write the letters. All of these early phonemic awareness and writing activities prepare children with the skill necessary for beginning to read.

Elementary

Some of the same Montessori language materials found on EC shelves will be seen in Elementary classrooms, as children build upon their knowledge and move to become more independent readers. Children continue their exploration of phonetics, learning different consonant and vowel blends along with their corresponding rules. Many phonetic reading card materials are found in the classroom, such as phonetic word cards and phonogram folders. They also learn about sight words and exceptions based on the many origins of words in the English language. Through practice and memorization, students combine phonetic and whole language knowledge to continue to grow as readers and writers throughout their Elementary years.



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