

The Elementary Program
Sherwood Forest Montessori School

The elementary program is called Cosmic Education

“Cosmic Education helps young children discover the moral imperative by which they should live their lives. The human race and every individual within it has a cosmic task, a place in the universe, a job to accomplish for the benefit of the cosmos”

Dr. Maria Montessori divided the pathway from infancy to adulthood into four major stages or planes. When children reach their sixth birthday the brain has developed enough for the curriculum in school to be adapted to meet these new abilities of this brain.

Let’s back up a bit and review the brain of the child from birth through five years of age. This first stage or plan of life is called **The Absorbent Mind** because the child absorbs knowledge from his environment without full conscious intent. The most striking example of this is the acquisition of language – a child learns the language he hears, no one teaches him. We know when a young child is put into a stimulating educational environment, he almost learns by osmosis – his brain just soaks up knowledge through his senses. That is why a child in this stage is always asking **“What is This?”**

The question the six to twelve year old asks is **“Why is This So?”** The brain has developed so the child is able to look into the future and to imagine. We call this stage of development the time for **“Acquisition of Culture”**. Children begin to ponder why and how things came to be, what is my role in my family, and what is my responsibility in life.

Because the student is able to question, our curriculum exposes him not only to math and reading, but to cultural subjects that include **History, Geography, Zoology, Botany, and Earth Science**. There are large and small group lessons given in each of these subjects throughout the six years of this stage. Dr. Montessori called this **Cosmic Education**.

In these lessons questions are posed to the students to get them to ponder “why”. We often begin lessons with the question “What do you think came first, oral or written language” “Do you think all people round the world speak the same language?” We tell many stories to create a sense of wonder and to encourage children to think and to want to know more. And in all of the many lessons vocabulary is being introduced along with the histories or etymology, thus increasing the vocabulary of the students and tying the words we use today to languages and people that came before us.

It is through these cultural subjects that we teach the students to conduct research and record their findings in age appropriate ways: first by writing in one word answers for first level students, then phrases at second level, and then sentences that lead to paragraph writing in the third level. All through these levels are editing, both by peers and adults, guiding the students’ composition development.

The math curriculum is probably the most known. Montessori was famous for giving children concrete experiences when introducing math concepts. In the first stage of development since children learned

through their senses, it was important for the child to see and feel the difference in a unit and a thousand. This idea is continued in elementary and is carried farther, because the child's brain is developing the ability to think abstractly. After these concrete representations the student is introduced to less concrete materials that are more functional and manageable, until the student is able to calculate accurately abstractly or "in his head". We call this "**Concrete to Abstract**".

The elementary students at Sherwood Forest learn to manage their own time and become responsible for planning and completing academic tasks. Each student has a work folder that contains a planning sheet – some of the plan sheets are weekly, some are monthly. The teacher creates a menu of appropriate tasks for each individual student. From this list the student plans his daily work, each student working at his own rate; each student has a different menu. During a large block of time each day students work independently following the steps of our work cycle:

- a. Make a choice of work from the work plan
- b. Set up the work and accomplishing the task
- c. Record the work in the appropriate way
- d. Share the work with a teacher or a peer
- e. Restore the work

The school day is divided into blocks of time to include

- a. Several whole group lesson times – where "strike the imagination lessons are given"
- b. Small group lesson times when leveled curricula is delivered to specific students
- c. The independent work period when the students are working alone on their planned tasks. During this time the teachers are giving individual lessons, assessing student progress, assisting and redirecting students.

The six year old child now has the ability to consider the intellectual and moral sides of life. There is a developing sense of right and wrong; there is talk of fairness, and there is the development of conscience. To meet this development in the brain our Montessori classroom has daily class meetings that provide the platform to establish guidelines for peaceful life in the classroom. It is here that student concerns are discussed and strategies are discussed on techniques to use when two students are having a conflict. In these daily meetings resolutions are discussed for problems that arise at play time; rules for games are established. These meetings are led by students with teacher support.

Our elementary program has two classrooms. The lower elementary class has children aged 6 through eight years. The classroom is led by two Montessori credentialed teachers. The upper elementary class has children aged 6 through 11 years and is led by two Montessori credentialed teachers.