

# Family Connection

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## The Reasoning Mind of the Elementary Student

BY HEATHER WHITE



At the age of around 6, the child—who has been absorbing vocabulary and information about the world and people around them at an alarming speed—will go through an evolution in the way they think. They will transition from what Maria Montessori referred to as the absorbent mind, to the reasoning mind.

### What is the reasoning mind?

The reasoning mind refers to the brain development of an elementary child, aged 6 to 12. The elementary child uses their developing mind to acquire knowledge and facts and to find order in the world. They take things in through conscious work and memory and make decisions based on logic and patterns already established by the brain.

While Maria Montessori described the absorbent mind like a camera, she noted that the reasoning mind was like a painter. Where the camera takes a photograph, capturing every detail of a moment in time, a painter chooses what to capture in the scene, carefully interpreting the situation and adding or omitting details.

During the previous period of the absorbent mind, young children appreciated life for what it is, soaking in each new experience. Now, the elementary-aged child wants to know how and why things work as they do. The reasoning mind seeks to organize and make sense of all of the knowledge and experience acquired during the previous period.

The child moves from sensorial exploration to mental exploration with increasing capabilities of thinking abstractly. There is a transition from the need for concrete materials to being able to visualize and think through mental processes logically.

This time in a child's life is marked by an interest in right and wrong. The concept of justice is prevalent. Elementary students often hold class meetings that they run themselves where they discuss what is and is not working well in the classroom and come together to develop solutions.

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### Supporting the child with a reasoning mind

There is never another time in the life of a child when conscious learning will be so intriguing and important. Maria Montessori recommends that the child's interest and enthusiasm for learning during this period be fully harnessed. She suggests that we give the child as many opportunities for learning as possible, planting the seeds of knowledge in fields like botany, zoology, history, geography, and culture that the child can tend to and harvest at their desire.

At this age, the teacher now strives to appeal to the child's imagination, abstraction, and reasoning abilities by presenting a vision of the universe. The Montessori Elementary curriculum is referred to as "the Cosmic Plan." It is an integration of subject matter from all fields that allow children opportunities for meaningful exploration.

The multi-age classroom structure also supports the child with a reasoning mind as it allows opportunities for students to develop socially by working together and mentoring one another.

Perhaps most importantly, Elementary children should be allowed and encouraged to think for themselves, to explore and discover the answers to all of the questions circling in their brains (the whys, the hows, the whats, and the wherefores), allowing them to develop their critical thinking skills for the future and to reveal who they are, what the world is, and their place within it.

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# Music Education in a Montessori Early Childhood Classroom

By Heather White

Music is a universal language, loved by people throughout the world. Children have a fascination with music; they love to move their bodies, dance, and make music.

Musical activities are a part of the child's daily activities in a Montessori Early Childhood classroom. Teachers integrate music into everyday activities through song, movement, instruments, music appreciation, and the Montessori Bells.



## SONG

Young children love to sing! Cleanup and circle time provide the perfect opportunities to engage children in song. There are songs to greet children, to help them learn the colors or the days of the week, to describe the weather, to remind them of practical life activities like brushing their teeth and washing their hands, and to demonstrate peace and kindness.

Exposure to song also happens organically in the classroom. Classical and world music might be played during the work period to create a calm, peaceful atmosphere in the classroom.

A listening station might be available in the classroom where children can wear headphones and listen to music or look at books with accompanying music.

## MOVEMENT

Children also love to move their bodies! Hand and finger movements can be added to many songs and scarves are often introduced as another way for children to move their bodies to music. There are even popular songs such as “Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes” and “The Hokey Pokey” that guide children’s movements through song.

Walking on a Line is a hallmark Montessori activity that also allows children to express their need for movement. After a teacher demonstrates how to walk on the line, children begin imitating these actions, helping them develop coordination, balance, muscular control, and body awareness. After the children are able to stay on the line, heel-to-toe walking and, later, additional challenges can be introduced as children can choose items to carry as they walk such as a small flag (held at arm’s length), a bell held so that it does not ring, a glass of water held so that it does not spill (first, partially full, then filled to the brim or balanced on a tray), two different objects (one in each hand, held at different heights), a

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beanbag or a basket balanced on the head, or a spoon holding an egg or a ping pong ball.

## INSTRUMENTS

Young children love to explore percussion instruments such as shakers, drums, and tambourines. A shelf might be set up in the classroom with musical instruments that children can explore including things like a rainstick, a kalimba thumb piano, or a wooden frog guiro.

Children also love to hear various instruments being played. Teachers might also bring a basket of instruments covered with a cloth to a group lesson. After asking the children to close their eyes, they play each instrument, hidden under the cloth and ask the students to guess which instrument was played. Parents, caregivers, and community members may also be invited to the classroom to share their musical talents with the children.

In the Montessori Early Childhood classroom, children can also enjoy experimenting with sound using sensorial materials such as the Sound Cylinders and the Montessori Bells.

## MONTESSORI BELLS

One of the most beautiful sensorial materials in



a Montessori Early Childhood environment is the Montessori Bells. The Montessori Bells material consists of two sets of thirteen bells, a control set and a working set. The bells start at middle C and travel up the chromatic scale a full octave.

This material is intended to help children develop the ability to recognize the differences in sounds.

Children learn how to play a musical scale, how to pair sounds, and how to grade by sound. The bells are also helpful for learning other musical concepts and developing an appreciation for music.

## MUSIC APPRECIATION

Children develop a love and appreciation for music through exposure to various genres. Reading books about the lives of musicians and composers helps children connect to the makers of

music. Nomenclature cards are often available on the shelf for children to explore as well.

## THE GIFT OF MUSIC

Music is an important part of the life of a Montessori Early Childhood classroom. By allowing children to sing, dance, and play instruments, teachers are giving children an incredible gift, the opportunity to participate in one of the great joys of life—listening to and making music.



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