

freedom & limits from 6-12 years old

notes from Carla Foster's lecture

- We are responsible for our freedom.
- Dr. Montessori defines freedom as an environment which is conducive to the most perfect conditions and the freedom which allows life to develop.
- If this is not obtained, then the child's adaptation is based on captivity.
- Experiment:
Teachers went to children in small group and asked the children what they thought freedom meant. The children had a primitive understanding that it is just doing what they want. We thought about what assumptions were the teachers making when they say you have freedom here as long as you take responsibility. They hadn't talked to the children about what lies beneath that freedom and responsibility concept.
- Children need activities that require effort. With every gained trained movement, you gain a freedom of movement. It's always effort even when it's easy.
- For the child of 6 years old, much of their learning has seemed effortless. They seem to have forgotten all the times they fell down when they were learning to walk.
- We often forget all the effort we went through to learn what we have. Now this current effort is tiresome, because I am conscious of this effort and it seemed effortless before. But this consciousness of their effort brings them to a new level of responsibility the ability to plan.
- Planing brings the potential of purpose.
- There's also considerations to take: people, time, constraints, resources.
- Talking to the children about effort, purpose, and consideration is perhaps more fruitful than talking to them about responsibility.
- In the second plane there are emerging characteristics that help them to answer the question, "why are we here?"
- They become aware of laws like gravity that they must adhere to.
- The child has a lot of work to do in just 6 years in order to do all the things that an adolescent can.
- Now we have a world economy and a literate society a world that demands much more than our brains were designed to handle. We can't abandon this because it is us. Now we have to teach children to read and write, but the child is in this realm of adapting to the world. WE have to be

much more creative than the institution of education has ever been to make ourselves stewards of the earth and units of humanity.

- Each of the human tendencies active on the second plane has a practical and a spiritual manifestation - not just will or obedience, but the practical application of them.
- Responsibility is not discipline. Freedom is not a reward for obedience.
- We must not have just a friendly attitude toward error but we have to embrace error.
- We must pay attention to the needs of the environment and the needs of ourselves.
- As adults we can keep on working and finding these strengths that we received from nature at around 6 years old and build on them.
- These strengths appear as fragile potential, not as full-blown skills. We must help the child develop these skills.
- You will have very few rules in your classroom and they will be organic.
- If you are constantly making more rules, you are you're on the wrong path. You need to be releasing rules and promoting effort, purpose, and consideration.

The child at 6-12 is a robust explorer. They are learning about courage and fear, they challenge, they distance themselves from family.

- This can be frustrating for the family. Trying to get away from family, having all this energy at school and struggling to be contained inside is a sign that they are being limited in their space.
- There's a thrill in going out into the unknown and experiencing fear. For the 6-12 year old it is strange to feel mixed emotions. Being courageous is not without fear.
- Curiosity can be an antidote to fear. *Let's get curious and ask questions. Let's love our environment. That helps us get up in the morning and conquer our fear of the next morning or the next year.*
- Packing, planning, organising with the peer group can be an antidote to fear. This makes it obvious to be a robust explorer.
- The world is so complex now and the guidelines are not clear. WE need to make the child's path clearer for them.
- Children need challenge. They need different kinds of challenges and they need to reflect on different kinds of challenges, talk to someone they don't know very well, take a role they haven't filled before, learn about challenges, face challenges, and discover the purpose of challenge.

- Without the absolute natural laws there is no freedom. Laws are foundational to existence. This makes a child curious: *if a snowflake needs laws to exist then what laws do I need in order to exist? That's why I'm here: to develop myself according to these laws. I must develop my body and mind to ask the why and find the answers.*
- Imagination becomes really important. We unite the how and why with imagination to talk about early humans. We say to the children: *we humans are like this because this is what humans are. You have the same creativity that the first inventors had.*
- Reason and imagination are not just there suddenly. They have been growing through the first plane out of the home.
- Time becomes important. How humans have always considered, wondered about and measured time in different ways. We have always been obsessed with time.
What does it mean to live and grow and die?
We have been making stories about this forever and ever. WE must help the children to face this so instead of taking the time away from them because we think they need endless time but put them into a flow that helps them understand what times passing means.
- We start at 6 years old by thinking, "what does time passing mean?". We write down the times and discuss what a child has done in a specific quantity of time.
- They don't have endless time; they have 6 years. A child doesn't know what their own pace is until they are challenged.

We don't talk about children working at their own pace because that is a synonym for having endless time, which is an escape.

We talk about effort, purpose and consideration.

- We talk to the child: *What steps have you taken? Are you ready for the next step?*
- We don't tie them down to a particular thing. *Okay, you're interested in planets, you go look at planets and we'll come back in a couple days and discuss what you can do with this. Now you want to do a play. Okay.*
- For 6 year olds, things just grow and at some point they just stop. The child writes "...the end" if they just get tired of writing. In this case, don't tell the child to go back and revise. The skill of revision comes later. Let them be done. When they are ready to revise things, then you can encourage them to revise.
- They will emerge their desired project but it will not come out immediately. WE have to help them with their own process.

- We have to talk with the child about all the work they did, how they divided the labor, how they made a problem to find the solution, what happens when we kept our materials in order and were able to cooperate and reflect..... If we don't do this then the child doesn't see the efforts they have made. This is the **Big Work** - this is them owning their own efforts, purpose, and consideration. Then the child can mobilise their will for the next challenge.

Monotonous repetition kills will.

- Repetition is important, but monotony makes the child avoid work, initiative, and challenge.
- We need to minimise control of error and become our own controls of error. *That went really wrong lets figure out why.*
- The child is exploring awe and wonder. They have complex emotions about feeling small, yet significant. *Plants do amazing things and adapt to the environment. Plants are amazing, and humans are also amazing. Music is amazing...*
- Enjoy the freedom to act independently and to feel awe and wonder.

Justice:

- We all know a child who thinks that if they lost a game then the game was unfair.
- **Distributive justice** is good for mathematical division but not great for social cohesion. A 9 or 10 year old, thinking like this is not prepared for society.
- Children can understand if you explain the different ideas of fairness to them, the distribution of equity to help some correct a disadvantage/ to make the playing field more equal.
- **Restorative justice** is when a child sees that if they make a mistake or wrong someone, they can make it right again. Most society believe that if someone wrongs us than an external party will make it right. But we must help the children keep the idea of interpersonal experiences. Give the child time to cool off, mobilise the reasoning mind, and consider what needs to be done in order for the relationship to build back stronger.
- These discussions increase children's freedom and responsibility.
- Discuss what communities they are a part of, what does being a part of that community does for them and what do they do for their community. When you discuss the classroom community it becomes apparent that there are a lot of things they can do to be a part of their communities.
- We must create opportunities for a child to find new parts to play and contributions to make to their community.

- When a child's behaviour shows limited experience, it makes it apparent to the adult that they are in a cage.
- Sometimes we have this idea that a child should never be evaluated or self-evaluate negatively. But the child is always evaluating and comparing themselves to others, so we must help them to do it honestly.
- Help a child recognise their issue or stuck point and then inquire if they need help with it.
- Help the child understand that whenever you know something, it is your responsibility to share that with the community. *I know how to draw a lizard does anyone need a lizard. I know these math facts, I can help with those.*
- When you form groups, keep in mind how each individual's strength will be revealed and interplay.

Fear is the enemy of freedom and responsibility.

Conflict must not be banished from the classroom because it helps the children understand themselves and others.

Bring the child to a consciousness of his own dignity and he will feel free.

Have a collective goal. Math facts are not just for each individual child. Literacy is not just for each individual child. It is a group effort to propel ourselves forward in unity.



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Bio source: <https://tot.montessori-ami.org/people/carla-foster>