

Educational Philosophy

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Most people have probably heard of a Montessori school and may even live near one. But do you know what actually goes on inside? Assumptions typically include that the children simply teach themselves at whatever pace they want. While that is partly true, there is some science behind the techniques that are used in Montessori schools. And even if you don't fully agree with a Montessori school, I'm sure that you can find some common ground with the educational philosophy of Maria Montessori.

Maria Montessori was an educational pioneer most known for the "Montessori Method" of education. According to the American Montessori Society, in the late 1800s, Montessori graduated from medical school. Her practice focused on psychiatry. She developed an interest in education and began to observe and question the methods of teaching children, specifically those with disabilities. In 1900, she was appointed to be a co-director of a new training institute for special education teachers, where she got to improve the methods that she was creating. She experimented with methods worked best to help children to learn. In 1907, she opened a full-day childcare center which became the first Montessori school. Children ages 3-7 showed interest in working with puzzles and manipulating materials that Maria had designed. She saw how the students "absorbed knowledge from their surroundings, essentially teaching themselves" (Who is Maria Montessori, n.d.). She had designed learning materials and an environment that helped a child's natural desire to learn flourish. Not too long after the success of the first Montessori school, many were being established in Western Europe, the United States, and around the world.

Some of the philosophies of Montessori can be best seen how they appeared within Montessori schools. Montessori's philosophy of education is "based on her discovery that the child has a mind able to absorb on its own" (Murphy, 2003). This basis of her philosophy is evident in a Montessori classroom.

The AMS says that a Montessori classroom has “children working independently and in groups, often with specially designed learning materials; deeply engaged in their work; and respectful of themselves and their surroundings” (What is Montessori Education, n.d.). Education is student-led and self-paced while also being guided by teachers. Classrooms have students of multiple ages and grades, and they have the same teacher for 3 years. Each student does work at their own pace. Montessori schools are available for infants through secondary (high) school.

Similar to Montessori’s views about education, teaching, to me, is helping students to obtain knowledge. We help students to make connections, understand concepts, and grow as individuals. From a Christian perspective, education helps students to know, love, and glorify God more. We can learn about Him through the creation that is around us and through His word. We, as teachers, glorify God through teaching by leading students down a path that will honor God. In addition to glorifying God, education helps prepare students for future endeavors, whether that’s in their career or life in general. They become better problem solvers, discover their interests, and prepare for a vocation beyond school. Montessori believed that teachers solely guide students in making discoveries and connections. I partly agree with this idea. I think that we should be more of a guidance to students, however, I don’t believe that all discoveries and connections can be made without explicitly stating them. It may be necessary to demonstrate a topic to help students to make the connections necessary to avoid frustration in the student. Also, students who lack motivation in certain areas might need more help in making the connections necessary to fully understand a topic.

In a Montessori school, the teacher-student relationship seems more distant than I like. It seems like the teacher is sitting in the background most of the time while students work independently or in groups. I think that more of a teacher-student relationship should be established so that students can

gain trust in their teacher. I think teachers should be learning along with the students, not sitting more on the sidelines. However, I do like that teachers spend three years with the students. This could help students gain more stability in the teacher-student relationship, but this can also be a drawback if a teacher and student don't get along well.

I am most drawn to a pragmatic philosophy of teaching through a Christian lens. Along with pragmatism, I believe that it is important to have students interested in what we are teaching and having the students experience what they are learning about (Class Notes, March 26, 2020). I don't think that students can fully grasp a concept until they are able to grapple with it themselves or go out and experience something related to the concept. For example, I could stand and teach all day about a math concept, but that is both extremely boring and not effective for most students. They have to be able to solve a problem on their own in order to fully understand the concept I'm trying to teach. In the same way, the most effective science lessons include some sort of experiment and maybe even going outside to do such things. These ways of teaching allow students to collaborate thoughts and learn from each other as well. Some of the best learning can come from student interaction, not a teacher lecturing at the students.

Similar to Montessori, I believe that students experiencing learning is important in the process of teaching students. However, unlike Montessori, I think that teachers are a critical part of the learning process for students. Now, I'm not saying that Montessori doesn't find teachers important, but I do believe that teachers need to play a bigger role in the learning process than they do in the typical Montessori school. I don't think teachers should be on the sidelines while students work independently to figure things out. I think that the teacher should be right along the students, making discoveries with them. In addition, keeping the material interesting is important to help teach the students. A great way

to do this is relating the concepts to the students' lives. Relating algebraic equations to a real-life scenario for students will help them to see the importance of understanding algebra, rather than there just being a bunch of letters and numbers. Giving the concept meaning can go a long way in helping students gain understanding.

There are so many methods for helping students learn in a pragmatic way. I envision this taking place in my classroom in several ways. A possible lesson sequence would include introducing a problem, then having the students wrestle with finding a solution based off what they have previously learned and finding creative ways to solve the problem. After that, students come back together to share their findings. Connecting the problem to a concept is essential at this point to show them what I was hoping they'd discover. The goal is for students to understand the concept, but additional explanation or examples may be needed. Another method involves initiative at the beginning of the year. Having students give information about themselves, whether that's through a questionnaire or another means, allows me to create problems, scenarios, and questions that actually pertain to the students and things that they are interested in. This helps the student to understand the importance of the specific topic, as they then have a personal connection to the concept. A third method for is another way for students to experience what they're learning. Math manipulative have become an essential means for helping students understand concepts for experiential reasons. Instead of mathematical concepts being strictly theoretical, students can actually manipulate objects to represent the math that they are doing. For example, many students struggle with understanding fractions. Fraction bars, pattern blocks, and fraction circles allow students to manipulate the fractions and experience how some shapes are a fraction of others. So many manipulative are available to assist students as they experience concepts and gain an understanding of them.

I'm slightly indecisive where I feel I'm being called to teach. I definitely want to stay in the United States, specifically in the area south of Chicago or northwest Indiana. I feel called to be in a middle school rather than a high school, even though I will be certified for both. I have had more experience in suburban school districts and have really enjoyed my time in them. As for teaching in a Christian or a public school, that is the hardest question to me to figure out where I'm being called to teach. As a Christian, I feel as though I should be teaching in a Christian school. However, as someone who went to a public grade school, I see the importance of having Christian role models in the public schools, even if we can't publicly share the gospel in our teaching. The greatest teacher that I had in grade school was my 4th grade teacher. From the first day, I knew that she was different, but I couldn't figure out what it was. As time went by, I realized that she was a Christian and that was what made her different than all the other teachers that I had. (The small Bible verse on her desk really gave it away!) She never spoke of her beliefs, but her actions spoke louder than her words ever could've. She was a true example of Christ, and I feel public schools need more phenomenal examples of Christ like she was. All of this is to say that I'm unsure of whether my calling is to teach in a public or Christian school. Whatever path God has for me is the path that I will take; His plans are much greater than mine.

As I hope can be seen throughout the paper, my philosophy education is rooted in Christian beliefs. In addition to those beliefs, I believe that every student is beautifully and wonderfully made and deserve to be treated as the children of God that they are, whether they know it or not. I believe that students explore and learn about the world that God has given to us so that they may be able to glorify Him more. All that we do as students and teachers should be glorifying and honoring God. In a Christian school, we have the ability to tie our content to the creator, and we should do so fully and frequently. In

a public school, Christian teachers can display Christ by how we teach and treat children. Treating students with compassion and grace is embodying Christ through our teaching.

In conclusion, my philosophy of education has been influenced by pragmatism through students learning by means of experience and interest. Pragmatism, and Maria Montessori, believe students learn based on their interests and have them experience what they are learning. This takes shape in my philosophy through relating concepts to students' interests and having them work with the concepts hand-on. Teachers and students working alongside each other is the greatest way for learning to take place for both the students and the teacher.

References:

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