THEORY PAPER FEEDBACK: PAPER # 2

Graduate credit requirements

Length: 6-8 pages, double-spaced      OK
Footnotes for all quotes and references
Bibliography
Discussion format
Mechanics of writing
  Spelling
  Grammar
  Typos
All points specified in the assignment are thoroughly covered
Writing shows understanding of basic concepts
Lecture and reading material are related to personal observations and personal experience
Explanation is clear enough for a non-Montessorian to understand

Additional comments

This is a lovely paper, Reena, and really talks about how C.E. resonates with who you are. I especially enjoyed your response to the Golden Beads + movable alphabet. I look forward to seeing you develop these insights in your own classroom. Thanks for your thoughtful work.
In this paper I will discuss the 5 key ideas of Cosmic Education. They are unity of all beings, evolution as a key process of life, interdependence in nature, the cosmic task of all living creatures, and the cosmic task of humanity. I will also discuss how each of the 5 key ideas relate to my own current views and understanding natural and human ecology. Finally I will explain what materials, experiences and activities I am currently learning about and what I think 3 important materials would be to incorporate in my classroom to ensure the 5 key elements are being addressed.

I believe that unity of all beings means the Universe is a whole divided up into minute parts. We all have one heart beat in essence. When you are quiet, you can imagine hearing it in nature or in a crowded room. There is just an unspoken unity we all have that that can be found only through trust. We also all have the same fundamental needs. The key ideas work together. In my life unity has meant getting out of my comfort zone so to speak, and be the one who dares to do things differently. I force myself to takes risks by getting out of my regular social and cultural setting and try to put myself in new and diverse places all the while feeling at home. I try to find the commonalities between all people and all things and try not to judge people by their differences. I think I am fortunate to work in the setting I do, a bilingual school, because unity of people is really emphasized there and a feeling of oneness and familial connection is always present in my day.
The key element of evolution as a key process in life is evident by the Universe’s evolution. Since we are a part of the Universe, we are too evolving. Nothing stays the same but constantly changes. Our needs have changed over time just as our progress on the Earth has changed. So have the needs of plants and animals. With this in mind it’s important to teach the kids that humans haven’t always been so kind to the changing needs of animals and plants and other human beings in some cases, i.e. cutting more trees than necessary and polluting water that animals have to live in and drink from. We can teach children to become model human beings by honoring the evolutionary processes of all. To me this means constantly looking for ways to improve myself to make a better overall impression on myself and therefore to others. I try to stay positive and always be in a mode of learning to handle things in a more gracious manner. This I am finding is turning out to be a life long learning process. I feel I always need to stay aware of changes and new ideas to keep myself flexible about day-to-day circumstances, because after all, nothing stays the same.

When looking at the interdependence in nature, we are all connected. We are all put together like a symphony. Every person has a place, every dust particle, insect, planet and tree. We fit together harmoniously at most times. This key idea kind of overlaps the first and second. What it means to me is that we all need each other to get through this thing called life! I am reminded of myself when I was a teenager and in my early 20’s. I wanted to do everything by myself and always found myself coming up short. I then learned that things cannot be done alone and it takes so much more than one person, or one entity to reach any depth. It takes many people, which implies unity, evolutionary thought and interdependence upon each other.
Cosmic task of all living organisms is to live life to the fullest and best possible way we can. Service is a big factor here. Everyone needs to be a part of something else; everything is a part of something bigger and smaller. In the US the wave of volunteerism that hit in the 60’s was overcome by capitalism and the attainment of wealth following that time period. It hasn’t swept over the nation again like it did then, it seems, yet it is so direly needed. I think that in many cases an appreciation for others can only be attained by wearing different shoes, even if only for a day, an hour or a second.

In my life personally it seems that my cosmic task is to always honor the good in people, even if I cannot see it at all times. I am challenging myself to love unconditionally and I am finding that concept very difficult, even though it seems fairly simple. It’s hard to think in those terms when I haven’t seen much unconditional love in the world.

The cosmic task of humanity is that everything and everyone has a purpose. Perhaps that purpose is to reach peace through cooperation. Cooperation leads to higher self awareness and awareness of others. This then leads to the ability to serve others as well as ourselves. I often times find myself pondering this question and I think many people do. This reminds me of the theorist Lawrence Kohlberg’s theory on moral development. He said that there were different stages of moral development and I believe the cosmic task of humanity is to help each other reach level 6. Level 6 is concerned with higher ethical principles, which are even higher than legal authority.

In other words it is our task to evolve our hearts and minds to the point where rules and laws are unnecessary. This will come about with more compassion. As Maria
Montessori says, “Peace is what every human being is craving for, and it can be brought about by humanity through the child.” (Wikramaratne, p. 31) I have come to the conclusion that there may not just be one purpose for humanity. As teachers, our task is to teach higher principles to children through our actions. I trust what Maria Montessori said about children, that when people are left to their own faculties in a correct state of mind or environment, spontaneous learning occurs and people naturally end up where they are supposed to be. Of course the argument can be made that not everyone is doing something that is noble or according to his or her ultimate best, but that’s not really for anyone of us to decide.

I am currently learning about geometry and how to teach it to lower elementary students. When I started writing this paper I was in the middle of the math curriculum. I have also had a bit of art, materials making and child development. Out of all that I have learned this summer, I have learned that no matter what material is in the classroom, it has been developed for a reason and it’s track record has been proven. In other words, to me it’s more about the way I am presenting it. I want to make sure that I am interested enough in the material to make it interesting for the children I am teaching.

For the purposes of this assignment however, one important material would have to be the golden bead set. With that so many formations can be made. It is the basic math material that is visible both in primary and in lower elementary. Children like the term “golden beads” because it’s fascinating. You can lay them all out and do the 45-bead layout to introduce the children to decimals, and also use it in the bank game to show them the importance of adding, sharing and eventually money. It has a great deal of versatility and can be used in art and geometry to represent shapes and ideas.
I also really like the moveable alphabet. I think that to be able to take something as concrete as a letter and move it around to form words is utterly fun for children. I like how the sets come in either cursive or print and how the vowels are a different color than the rest of the set. It is a beautiful method to teach children the importance of words and spelling. The most important thing is that they are constructing it themselves.

My last favorite material is from the Universe curriculum. I think that material for the 5 Great Lessons is imperative in any Montessori lower elementary classroom. Even if it is a set of colorful pictures, or experiments demonstrating the lessons, it is integral to the curriculum. The most important thing about this is that it gets the children out of their environment and thinking of things far away and in a different context. It maximizes thought power and the children are forced to think about things in a way that they never have before. I was completely excited after I read Brian Swimme’s article, The Resurgence of Cosmic Storytellers, because during our Universe curriculum, we broke into groups and had to come up with flowcharts. I wanted to do creation myths/stories all year round to my class, in various styles and settings like through poems, plays and dramatic readings. I think that he would probably agree for the very same reasons as I do! He sums it up very clearly in the following passage. “The telling of stories is understood as that which both initiates the young and regenerates the Universe. This ritual of telling the story is understood as a cosmic event. For unless the story is sung and danced the Universe suffers from decay and fatigue. Everything depends on telling the story—the health of the people, the health of the soil, the health of the sun, the health of the soul, the health of the sky” (p. 149). I also think that it gives children a sense that there isn’t just
one right way and that we’re not here to judge others for thinking of different ideas of how we came to be.

I think it’s difficult to come up with what my favorite materials are without having used them in class. Since I am a huge proponent of dance, movement and culture, it goes without saying that movement will be incorporated into my classroom. I plan on doing World Dance for my yearlong project. It would be interesting to see if my original ideas change within a year’s time!
Bibliography


4. Class notes and handouts.