THEORY PAPER FEEDBACK: PAPER # 1

Graduate credit requirements

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<td>Length: 6-8 pages, double-spaced</td>
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<td>Footnotes for all quotes and references</td>
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<td>Writing shows understanding of basic concepts</td>
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Lecture and reading material are related to personal observations and personal experience

Very nice job of weaving in your own observations and experiences

Explanation is clear enough for a non-Montessorian to understand

✓

Additional comments

Jane paper, Mesa. It shows that you’ve read and listened reflectively as well as thought back on your own experience. So glad you’re so excited. Keep up the good work!
Before I begin I would like to tell you about the format of my paper. I have color-coded each section depending on which source I’ve used. Each section corresponds to ideas I’ve thought of from different sources in the bibliography. This is a different format from any essay I’ve written in the past, however it seemed to be pretty Montessori friendly. However, if it’s too distracting I will change the format and resubmit my paper to you. Thanks.

In this paper I will discuss the second plane of development, as described by Maria Montessori as well as the following characteristics of 6-12 age children in a Montessori Classroom: physical, social, intellectual and emotional characteristics. After explaining what their characteristics are, I will discuss how to get their needs met on all levels. Throughout the paper I will give my own thoughts and perceptions to the theories and practices given by Maria Montessori and others. Most of this will be from my own experience as well as from experiences I’ve had or will have in my classroom. I may at times give examples of children as well, to further illustrate certain types of behavior or situations.

Students in the age range of 6-12 are in the second plane of development. Maria Montessori describes the second plane of development as an all-encompassing period. The intent on this period is to “fertilize” the field of the child’s mind with a rich array of culture. Children are naturally discovering facts at this time period but more importantly they are beginning to see the relationships between all things. Children in this plane of
development require a different pedagogy than younger children. They need to know why things are the way they are and have an insatiable thirst for knowledge. As Sanford Jones describes in his article The Second Plane of Development, this is the time when children begin to “encyclopediatize” their knowledge. I like this analogy because it illustrates the children’s ability and need to know as much about a particular topic as possible.

Children at this age are at the threshold of culture. It’s extremely important that the teacher doesn’t bore the children with too many details. It is extremely important to differentiate between too much information and just enough when presenting to the children. I have a feeling I will understand this better when I am able to start presenting lessons in the classroom. Jones further says that things aren’t supposed to be explained too abstractly or scientifically. It is necessary and best to give the overall picture and then go back and fill in the details later. For example when presenting the Universe, the whole will be presented and then the details will be described for the children later.

Teaching in this way will encourage the child’s own gifts and abilities to shine through. For example, once the student is given a broad spectrum of information he/she will be able to pick a point of interest and focus further studies in that area, rather than arbitrarily being assigned a task.

This, among many other concepts of Montessori is particularly exciting to me. I remember that as a child I was never given a choice on what to do and when. I now have the chance to teach the way I would have liked to have been taught. I think this also presents itself as a huge challenge as well. Teachers have a huge job! Our role is to “never let the children lose sight of the whole of knowledge or to forget that it is the
Cosmic View which excites the child.” (Jones, p. 22) It is also the teacher’s role to inspire gratitude within the child and a sense of order of the Universe. We are to go beyond the direct aim of any given lesson and help the children make sense of things universally. By telling students the order of things, we can spark their imagination by giving them true facts to base other experiences upon.

One idea I really appreciated in the Jones article was how to deal with confrontation by parents and people who don’t understand the Montessori method. He suggested giving students a sample of traditional test booklets once a week or so to keep the students abreast of what happens in traditional schools. I find this helpful; even if this idea is presented to parents who ask questions such as “How will my child fit into a traditional setting later on in their education?” This is a really good suggestion to have parents do such activities at home if that’s something they are worried about.

Overall the idea is to keep alive the sense of wonder and to give key presentations—meaning presentations that students will enjoy and want to do on their own later. Our ultimate goal as teachers is to help students see that life is a process, not a product. I am so excited to teach the children to be free in their hearts and in their minds. Freedom is “the condition arising when one’s discharge of energy is in accord with one’s design for living.” (Montessori for the Elementary Years, p. 7) I really love this quote because it embodies the way I try to live my life. I try to be in harmony with nature and with doing what’s right, and by teaching the children to do the same, I hope to deepen my understanding of my own life and in essence work towards awakening the human spirit and robustness innate in all of us.
Next I will describe the physical characteristics apparent in 6-12 year old children. Their bodies are changing in proportion. Their legs appear to be longer in comparison with their trunk and the whole appearance of the children become slimmer. Their skin is slightly wrinkled on their faces and their complexion appears to be thinner and darker than before. Their skin reveals deeper pigmentation and hair appears straighter. One of the most striking differences apparent in these children, according to Maria Montessori, is that they lose their first set of teeth and acquire permanent ones. I have noticed that they revel in that fact as well. They seem to embody a sort of pride in having gone through a type of rite of passage by losing and gaining their permanent teeth.

These children are no longer satisfied with the concreteness common in primary age. They need organized sports and longer walks. I know personally that my students seem to “itch” more if they haven’t had much physical activity. I started taking them on nature walks in the neighborhood and they love to observe changes from one day to the next. Their physical growth continues slowly while athletic abilities improve. They enjoy playing softball, skipping rope or balancing on a beam. Although they are able to sit for a sustained period of time, running and jumping alleviates a lot of tension and energy for them. They still have to make a conscious effort to sit still. I don’t think that this is very difficult to discern with most children at any age!

I have a major point of interest in this particular area because of my personal need for physical activity. Although I have not had much experience with organized group activities except for soccer and basketball, I will relearn with excitement with the children what I have either forgotten or discarded over time. I also would like to point out that meditation, yoga and dance, which I do have much experience with, can be very
Next I will describe the social characteristics of children in this age group. Children in this age group are extremely social and community oriented. They thrive on working together in groups and with partners. It is very rare to see a student alone all the time, although there is space for that type of student as well. They need wider contact with the outside world to enable full and harmonious development. These children need a larger frame of reference than home or school can provide, such as outside social contacts. Practical experience is necessary. Their needs on a social level can be exposure to things such as Habitat for Humanity, local radio/TV stations, factories, farms, and the list is endless. I plan on taking the students on several educational field trips to fulfill this need. I happen to be interested in a very broad spectrum of things so I will share these experiences and more with the children.

Next, to describe the intellectual characteristics of the children, they are not as concerned as they were in primary age for the love of the environment. They are directing their attention to their own inner life and life of others. They are interested in logic, and love to explore the psychic world. They are interested in morals, and want to know difference between good and bad. For this reason they analyze the behaviors of others to help reason things out. For example, in my class I have a student that tattles on his classmates. Previous to this training, I thought he was trying to complain about his friends but I now see that he was trying to compare what the rules of the class were to what the other children were doing. Essentially when someone broke the rules, he wanted to know what the consequences of their actions would be. I was unaware of the
social implications of all this but now have better insight and will be better able to clarify these issues for the children. I now see that they need to know if certain behaviors are good or bad.

Children in this age group are more judgmental, critical and talk back more frequently. This is invariably called the Age of Bad Manners and I now understand why primary teachers seem to get frustrated with their students that are approaching elementary age. Those particular students are no longer interested in the concrete, and perhaps become bored in the environment of the primary class. They are interested in things that were before unnoticed and talk about things that are secretive and private. I think part of it is due to their sensitivity to language and syntax. They may hear “mature” conversations and try to make sense of them. To see this being played out, one only needs to watch the students at recess. Recess is where truth comes out, I’ve found in my short time of being a teacher. Leaders are naturally formed, social circles are formed and dialogue takes place. Modeling is very important in the classroom because they will copy every single thing they see, especially when adults aren’t around!

They are able to learn foreign languages including all the nuances and details of languages, faster than an adult could possibly do. It is essential to introduce grammar as detailed as possible to enrich this sensitivity. We as teachers need to help the child do things themselves--reason, judge and think for themselves. Their sensitivity to acquisition of culture is extremely high. The children need to be exposed to as much culture as possible. It is essential to” teach them about the progress humans have made in response to physical and mental needs” (Gupta, p. 8). Once again the children need to see that everything is interrelated to form healthy social
interactions. To do this, the children should be introduced to as many new things as possible. Then the children can take these various items or ideas and study them at his or her leisure. Once again the goal is freedom of thought. In my classroom in particular, I believe the students need to understand life through their own actions and not through information dictated by me all the time. For example, once they know the difference between right and wrong they can make the appropriate decisions at the right time. I’ve already seen this play itself out. I will facilitate this more by providing appropriate materials and of course, patience. They are in the process of developing their psychic energy and orienting themselves in the moral field of what is good and bad. This will best be learned through practice.

Finally I will touch on the emotional characteristics of the 6-12 age children. They have their own pace of doing works. They shouldn’t be hurried or expected to do things in a certain order. Their need for understanding detail and patterns means they should be provided with the materials, freedom and time to carry these out. They want to know the origin of things. Instilling the freedom of choice is what it’s all about. “We shall walk together in the path of life, for all things are part of the universe, and are connected together to form one whole unity.” (To Educate the Human Potential, p.6) These students need to find answers to questions and solutions to problems, especially if this can help alleviate agitation caused by the unknown. In order to concentrate the child must know something so helping them bridge the gap between the unknown to known is a great place to start.

Although I have already talked about the characteristics of 6-12 age children and how their needs are met, I will conclude by talking a bit more in detail about how their
needs are met in an elementary classroom. First of all the Montessori experience provides a multi-age classrooms- older students can be teachers for younger ones. They can all work at their own pace and in their own style. There is never the pressure of keeping up, and there is always someone working at each student’s own level. If these needs are met, it provides an enriched learning environment. Providing interesting work for students is important to keep them stimulated and progressing, and finally the children have the same teacher for 3 years, so that they can develop a very deep and strong relationship.

In an academic sense the students are mastering fundamental skills and basic core knowledge. The Great Lessons – The Formation of the Earth, The Coming of Plants and Animals, the Arrival of Humans, Language and Math and Invention are 5 areas of interconnected studies taught in the form of inspiring stories and related experiences and research projects. Children will do individually chosen research, using Montessori materials and materials produced by themselves as well as myself. We will use this integrated curriculum to show how everything works together. Arts are tied into every subject. Students’ education will be further enriched through meaningful field trips, and through these experiences students will develop character, their own interests and passions, and get a sense of community service.

The teacher needs to be more like a guide or an older friend, rather than someone in an authority model who is hovering over the children. In the article Montessori for the Elementary Years, the best teachers are described as renaissance people. Their interests must be diverse and far-reaching. I truly feel I fit this profile because I have always had such diverse interests and previous to being involved with Montessori I was criticized for
not being able to pick one chosen field and settle into it. Now I feel I really don’t have to
because by staying open to all experiences I can maximize my students learning experience.

As far as relating this paper to myself as a child, the thing that stands out the most is that I have never before been introduced to anything so powerful, peaceful and all-encompassing in my whole life. I thought I had a rather large world-view before I started Montessori training but now know that I am just now opening up in a truly authentic way. I am so excited and quite overwhelmed about being able to share this time of learning with such an eager group of children. I am humbled at the thought of being in charge of someone else’s learning, however I feel I am about to enter the most meaningful phase of my life and I am so grateful to the Universe and to God.


