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The Universe essay
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Before going into the paper I want to mention that The Universe curriculum has been so exciting to learn. I can’t even describe how captivating it has been to learn about the cosmos in a Montessori way. Everyday after class I walked away with so many big questions. Questions that sometimes get skipped over in day-to-day life, such as, “Where did we come from?” and how absolutely amazing life and everything around us is. I think for anyone who needs a shot of reality, this course will do it. In this paper I will describe the key points of teaching the Universe according to Montessori philosophy, then I will discuss how I plan to use these ideas in my own teaching practice. I will utilize the students in my class as well as myself for examples from time to time throughout this paper.

As stated by Maria Montessori students in the elementary classroom are in a sensitive period for the acquisition of culture, which is completely honored in the Universe curriculum. Children in this age group need to know the reason of things, and need a very rich display of cultural diversity presented to them. Although they are naturally discovering facts from lessons, the curriculum is designed to allow students a full range of further discovery and study. Students are in a period of discrimination between good and evil. An example of this is evident in the tattle-tales that goes on in class. For example, in my class I have a student that tattle tales 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.

It’s very important to give the right response when students display these kinds of questions otherwise it can lead to resentment. Students in this time of life don’t like arbitrary authority, and they have a need to associate themselves with others in some sort of organized activity. When presenting the universe curriculum, it’s important to keep in mind that these students like to work in groups and not to limit them, because they are also in a sensitive period for socialization. Giving them facts in the form of games or spontaneous banter is what I have in mind to stimulate the children’s curiosity and freedom. This leads to my next point.

Children in this group need to have freedom of choice. “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) I myself can hardly function without freedom of choice so I can be especially honor my students, who happen to be in a sensitive period for enrichment, variety and freedom. I have a first grader coming to class, who I have observed and I know he will thrive if given enough freedom. By giving the children a very holistic perspective of the universe first, they will be better prepared for detailed descriptions later. The children will be able to make better choices and be very well-equipped to choose research projects at their leisure and when they are ready.

Maria Montessori discusses the right use of imagination. She believes that “children show a great attachment to the abstract subjects when they arrive at them through mental activity.” (TEHP, p. 7). She says that students are able to perform highly
abstract and intellectual tasks if first they are taught these items manually, then gradually move to abstraction. Although I respect the idea behind this theory and know the children benefit highly from learning in this style, I often wonder at the absoluteness of this assertion. Because I was not brought up in a Montessori school, I have nothing to compare, except for the fact that I don’t think that imagination could ever be used in the “wrong” way.

One of the most exciting things I find in the Montessori method is the ability for students to learn at their own pace and in their own time. I think that when learning about such huge and grandiose ideas presented in the universe curriculum, some students definitely need time to ponder activities before jumping right in. I respect the gentle nature of not pushing the child unnecessarily, but rather to make the material exciting enough for them to want to jump right in themselves with both feet!

I like Maria Montessori’s comparison of an elementary child to a university student. She gives an example of a university student studying days before an exam. On the morning of the exam or minutes before it, the student seems to have all the answers. Maria asserts that the answers were always there, but that they needed time to work their way out, so to speak. I agree that students start this subconscious pondering process even in the elementary age. She explains, “children [in the classroom] are often seen walking alone while others are working, for just after learning something they feel the need of quiet; on return to the class they will show new ability, just as a child returning to school after a holiday finds himself able to understand what was obscure before.” (TEHP, p. 15)

My utmost hope is to instill love of all subjects in the students. The best way to do this of course is to make sure I love what I’m doing. That’s way I feel so fortunate—I
have a wide variety of interests and find so many things in life exciting. I hope to convey this to the students in the best way I can. I really like how Maria Montessori said, “when the sentiment of love for all subjects can be aroused in children, people in general will become more human, and brutal wars will come to an end.” (TEHP, p. 17) This quote is one of my favorites and something I will continue to strive for in myself and in my students.

The goal of the curriculum is to present the cosmic view to the children. 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.

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 looking forward to be an example to the children of how to be free in their hearts and in their minds, fair an true to themselves.

Over the last week and a half I have learned far more than I ever knew about the world and universe as I now see it. I can honestly say that before I took this course my eyes were simply not open to the minuteness of humans. I feel like I’ve been traveling down memory lane for the past several weeks and I am simply in awe of it all.
As for the breakdown of the curriculum, I aim to give an overall picture the first year, and then break down the details in the second and third years. I will be telling creation stories all year round, in the form of reading stories, acting out plays and eventually have experienced students play a role in the production of the stories. I will concentrate on the 5 Great Lessons and how they apply to the universe, especially the Formation of the Earth, The Coming of Plants and Animals and the Arrival of Humans. The lessons around these content areas will for sure be presented each year. When children are more familiar with the subject matter, then research and independent work will be meaningful.

I have two students to mention as examples. One of my students loves creation stories, and has several books about them. She also happens to be an excellent writer. So I will allow her to go as in depth as she would like into this aspect of the curriculum. I have another student who absolutely loves dinosours. I will prepare an extensive research project for him that is very interesting, and it will most likely generate a huge response from the other students.

I am very excited to teach the students about culture. I have always had a very strong fascination with other cultures and I happen to know several people from other countries whose knowledge and experiences I will utilize to do my cultural studies with the students. During the process of acquiring culture, students will be able to learn about geography and conduct their own research and map studies. I intend very much to keep culture alive at all times in the classroom. I feel overwhelmed at all that I want to do, but I have a feeling it will all work out and once I get a feel for the Montessori curriculums, I will be able to meet the needs of the children.
Bibliography

