

Montessori Today:
A Comprehensive Approach to Education from Birth to Adulthood
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Discussion Guide
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Chapter 1 “The Origin and Theory of Montessori Education”

“Maria Montessori concentrated upon the goal of education, rather than its methods. She defined this goal as ‘the development of a complete human being, oriented to the environment, and adapted to his or her time, place and culture.’” (p. 3)

Do you agree with this goal of education? Do you believe that your own education accomplished this goal?

“Montessori based her educational plan upon the observation of children in diverse cultures and in many countries. Therefore, her discoveries are not accurately described as Montessori principles. They are universal principles of human behavior, which belong to all peoples, societies, and cultures. These universal principles are a sound foundation for educational systems everywhere.” (p. 4)

How is an educational system that is based on observation different from an education system that is based on theory? How does observing a diverse population enhance an educational method? How do you understand the distinction between “Montessori principles” and “universal principles”? Do you agree with that claim?

“[Montessori] identified four... planes of development. There are two planes of childhood [0-6 years and 6-12 years], resulting at age twelve in a mature child and two formative stages of adulthood [12-18 years and 18-24 years], completed when a young adult reaches maturity at age twenty-four... Montessori observed that regular education takes no heed of these planes of development... Beginning at the child’s sixth year, education follows a steady ascent, becoming increasingly more difficult each year with more and more subjects added, more and more teachers introduced, more and more study and production required, based on outwardly imposed curriculum and tests.” (p. 5-6)

Does this sound like a fair assessment of the traditional education system as you know it? Was this your experience? Why might this not be an ideal way for someone to learn, given what we know about non-linear human development?

“Montessori determined that the customary school needed not mere reform; education needed a revolution. This revolution must include a recognition of the developmental stages of human formation and a realization of the goals, directions, and powers or characteristics pertinent to each. It must go further. Montessori proposed that this revolution in education be built upon the basic responses of human beings which make possible their complete development and adaptation to their environment.” (p. 9)

Do you think that the problems in education today can be solved with reform? Have you seen the traditional system evolve since Montessori set forth her method?

“Montessori recognized that human beings do not possess instincts to allow them to meet their needs and ensure their survival, as animals do. Instead, human beings have tendencies toward certain behaviors that help them fulfill their needs--primary needs for food, shelter, and clothing; and secondary ones for defense and transportation... They are: *exploration, orientation, order, imagination, manipulation, repetition, precision, control of error leading to perfection, and communication*. Montessori classrooms work well when the teacher understands the necessity of continually appealing to children’s innate behaviors that lead to their adaptation to society and, ultimately, the possibility of changing that society.” (p. 11)

Can you relate to these tendencies as they are listed? To what extent do you see them as positive operators in your own life? Are you aware of what it feels like when they are thwarted? How might a teacher appeal to these behaviors successfully in the classroom?

“Children, who must discover their environment, face a similar challenge to that of early humans. Children differ, however, in that they have, as yet, incomplete and unformed bodies for this exploration. This apparent weakness is, in fact, an advantage because it gives children the ability to adapt to the time and place in which each one is born.” (p. 12)

Have you ever considered the activity of children as similar to that of early humans? What parallels can you draw? Likewise, have you ever considered that the fact that they are “incomplete and unformed” as an advantage for adaption? What does it mean to you to consider that any child can adapt to any place or time in human history?

“Montessori’s final concept concerning education involves the child’s activity based upon a self-chosen interest... This last principle of human development reveals another fallacy in the customary approach to education. Human beings do not develop meaningful knowledge by force.” (p. 20)

When you consider the subjects you have studied over the years, what areas of information have you retained? How often does this correlate with information you had to memorize for a test? How often does this correlate with self-directed study? Have you experienced the difference between what it feels like to work on an assigned task versus one that comes from your own interest?

“Because they are beautifully executed and highly visible, many people make the mistake of equating the whole of Montessori education with [her] specially designed materials. In fact, the materials are secondary. It is the totality of the prepared environment to be explored and acted upon by the children that is primary: the other children, the teacher, the nonmanufactured Montessori materials, and the careful arrangement of the classroom.” (p. 22)

Have you ever seen a Montessori classroom in action? How much did the materials stand out to you? As an outsider, does it seem that they are central to the Montessori education? What else did you see happening in the classrooms that may be just as or more important?

“The prepared adult [teacher] acts as a link to the environment for the child. Montessori teachers do not ‘teach’ the child in the usual sense. They observe the children in order to discover their needs and interests based on their stages in self-formation and their individual personalities. Then they attempt to present just the materials or activities to the children that match their developmental needs.” (p. 22)

How is this a different way of being a teacher? In what ways might it be harder or easier than being a “usual” teacher? Can you see how an adult would need to be prepared for this role?

“In the end, it is freedom that allows the children’s self-formation. Montessori called freedom ‘the key to the process of development.’... Montessori’s idea of freedom is not always understood by parents. Freedom does not mean doing whatever we want... In reality, to be free means to be in control of self, to be able to do what one chooses to do, not what one’s feelings of illogical thoughts of the moment may dictate.” (p. 22-23)

How would you define freedom? Do you agree or disagree with this concept of freedom? How do we help or hinder our children in this development? Based on what you know about the Montessori classroom, how does it support freedom as understood in this way?

Chapter 2 “Overview of the Primary Years”

“The first plane in the child’s development is from birth to age six. Based on her observations of children, Montessori determined that the overriding goal of this period is the development of the self as an individual being... From the child’s point of view, self-centeredness is practical. The infant is born in an unfinished state. There is a monumental task of brain development and self-formation ahead: physical awareness and coordination, will, independence, and language.” (p. 24)

In what ways have you observed the young child being “self-centered”? Does this seem like an accurate description of this age? How is it a proactive state for the child in this phase of development? Why would it be necessary?

“Montessori observed two special powers that appear to aid children in their task of development as individuals in the first plane: [The first is that] children appear to go through periods of concentrating on specific capacities, and their minds seem to operate differently from ours. She referred to the time frames involved in the child’s development of a definitive ability as Sensitive Periods. These are transitory time periods in which the child appears to be working on one specific area of development to the exclusion of all others.” Examples of Sensitive Periods include: Language, Gross and Fine Motor Skills, Interest in Small Objects, Refinement of the Senses, Order, Toileting, Grace and Courtesy (Manners).

Have you observed or did you observe any of these Sensitive Periods with your own young child? How do these Sensitive Periods provide a purpose for a child’s development? How can an educational environment take advantage of (or not take advantage of) these periods?

“The second observation of Montessori regarding the infant’s powers for self-development [is] that the infant seems to possess a capacity for absorbing the surrounding environment merely by being in it. Infants stare, hear, smell, and touch; the impressions gained are seemingly incorporated within their minds. This incarnating of impressions is an indiscriminatory act... Montessori called [this] the ‘... Absorbent Mind.’” (p. 26)

What does it mean to say that a child has an “Absorbent Mind”? How does this mind serve a purpose for the young child’s development? What are the advantages and disadvantages of its indiscriminatory nature?

“In all this process, it is the hand operating with the brain that creates the child’s intellect. One of the educational tenets of Montessori education is that we should never give to the brain more than we give to the hand.” (p. 27)

How have you observed the Montessori method incorporating the hand and the brain in all aspects of education? In your own experience, can you reflect on how using your hands has helped you learn? Do you see this with your own children?

“[Montessori] believed in a ‘natural unfolding of the child’s intelligence.’ This natural unfolding follows a specific path. It must be aided by the adult, but always as a result of observing the child and following the path of natural development. Because she did not believe in forced learning by children, Montessori referred to her approach to education as an ‘aid to life.’ Its focus is always the development of the human personality, not the acquisition of information.” (p. 28)

What distinguishes an education as an aid to life versus forced learning? Is it hard to trust in the “natural unfolding of the child’s intelligence”? To what extent does traditional education allow for this?

“If education is to begin at birth, parents must be considered the child’s first teachers. Montessori believed that parents needed and wanted help in this regard. A major goal of Montessori schools is to be a place where parents can go to get the information necessary for understanding children in each stage of their development.” (p. 28)

Where have you gotten information about your children as they have grown? What have been the most helpful places? What have been the least helpful? Where do you wish you could have gone?

“Ideally, in the Young Children’s Community approximately ten children [ages 18 months to 3 years] are together each morning for three uninterrupted hours. There is one trained Montessori teacher and an assistant. The materials of this prepared environment are based on activities of the home: cooking, cleaning, washing, flower arranging, and so forth. There are puzzles and manipulative games and objects to aid the children in the development of their senses, hand control, balance and coordination. Stories, songs, books, and picture cards of flowers, animals, and items of the environment, often for matching with miniature objects, encourage the development of language. Most of all, being together in this specially prepared environment helps children to develop an awareness of their own rights and limits, as well as the rights and limits of others.” (p. 30)

What is your reaction to the idea of this environment for a toddler? Why is the most important reason for being in a community for the children to learn about rights and limits?

“When the children first enter the Children’s House [for three-six year olds], they are busy with the practical-life materials [consisting of activities that allow the children to care for themselves and their environment, such as hand-washing, polishing, and cutting apples to eat later]. Through them, they further develop their concentration and their ability to be independent.” (p. 34-35)

How might these Practical Life activities serve the development of a three-year-old’s concentration? Have you ever witnessed a young child absorbed in such a task?

“The sensorial materials [in the Primary classroom] are each designed to convey an abstract idea in concrete form. Sound cylinders for shaking and matching and, eventually grading their

sounds, convey the concept of loud, louder, loudest and soft, softer, softest... Sandpaper tablets give the experience of rough, rougher, roughest and smooth, smoother, smoothest... The hand and the brain act in unison making a mental connection between an abstract idea and its concrete representation.” (p. 35-36)

How do these isolated experiences of the senses help children develop and refine their sensory perception of the world? How do they create categories and labels for these kinds of experiences? In what way do the materials connect the abstract idea with the concrete representation and what does this mean for children’s intelligence?

“In language, the children [in the Primary classroom] can write their own stories in cursive and illustrate them with pictures and paintings. They read real books, rather than the customary primers for first and second graders. They have an understanding of the function and placement of words in sentences as a precursor to grammar and analyzing of sentence structure. They have studied word types... In addition, they know many language facts: facts of geography... facts of nature... facts of art and music history... facts of social history.” (p. 38)

How does this learning environment sound to you? How is it different from what you remember in your own preschool and kindergarten experience? In what ways does this environment make language feel alive?

“In mathematics, the children [in the Primary classroom] establish a solid basis for understanding the decimal system, the role of zero within it, and the hierarchy of numbers to the millions. They have a strong foundation in the four mathematical operations: addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. They have begun the memorization of the math facts and tables. They have built a strong base for geometry... They have experienced algebra in concrete form... [T]he children become familiar with skip counting... and establish a foundation for discovering square root and cube root... They have worked with fractions.” (p. 38)

Does this sound like a realistic amount of information to cover before a child turns seven? Can you remember your own experience with these mathematical concepts? Did you enjoy learning them? How old were you when you mastered each?

“Montessori always included children spanning three years of age in her primary and elementary environments... The indirect learning that occurs among children is a primary reason for placing of children of different ages in one environment. The youngest children are guaranteed models for more mature behavior than they themselves are capable of performing. The older children have opportunities to develop their potential for leadership and social responsibility. This indirect learning occurs in the intellectual area as well. Younger children observe the older children work with materials that they will use in the future. Older children spontaneously help the younger ones with materials that have already been introduced to the younger children but which they have not yet mastered.” (p. 39-40)

How is this learning environment different from one where children are divided by age? What emotional and academic advantages can you see from this grouping? Do you think there are disadvantages?

“Many people misunderstand Montessori’s approach to the children’s social development at the primary level. They think that her emphasis on the children’s formation as individuals in the first plane of development is an indication that she considers social interaction between the children to be of secondary importance. This is not true. In fact, she insisted that young children must be in a community of others to develop to their full potential... By including twenty-five or more children from ages three to six in one environment and giving them freedom to move about and talk with each other at will, Montessori created a positive ‘influence of society’ for the children within the classroom.” (p. 41)

Based on what you know about the Montessori environment (large class, mixed ages, only one of each material), how does it support social development, even while focusing on individual work for the young child? Do you have faith in this style of education? Is it hard for you to trust?

“[T]he children’s social relationship with adults is enhanced by the inclusion of children of three different ages in the classroom. The children then remain with one teacher for a total of three years before going on to the next level. The possibilities for depth of relationship, positive influence by the teacher, and modeling of behavior are greatly increased. Further, it is possible for the teacher to relax and enjoy teaching each child. There are three years in which the child can reach the goals for formation. The teacher can be patient and have faith in each child’s natural rhythm of development.” (p. 41)

Can you elaborate on the advantage of children staying with the same teacher for three consecutive years? How might this affect the children’s development academically? Do you think it realistically allows for a more natural progression of intellectual acquisition? How might the children’s relationship to school in general be different knowing that they will be with the same adult and in the same environment for three years? Does this seem like an advantage to you? Are you concerned about any disadvantages?

“‘Normalization’ invariably follows in the classroom when the children begin to ‘work’ seriously with a material or activity... [Children] become calmer and appear rested and content. They are more compassionate with each other and they exhibit increasing responsibility for their environment.” (p. 42)

Have you witnessed the phenomenon of “normalization” in children before? How does having this result as a primary daily goal of the classroom distinguish Montessori schools from traditional schools? Does traditional education allow for normalization? Do you believe in the value of normalization?

Chapter 3 “Changes at the Second Plane”

“The children’s focus shifts from individual formation to development as social beings and the direction of their explorations of the world tends to the abstract rather than the concrete. All the children’s behavioral tendencies serve these new purposes.” (p. 44)

Have you noticed that your elementary aged child is different in social interests from when they were younger? Has it affected how they play or how they talk about their peers? Likewise, what “abstract” exploration have you witnessed in your elementary child that they were not capable of when they were young?

“Montessori called this stage of the child’s formation the Intellectual Period. The children’s appetite for knowledge is immense. They are not satisfied with bits and pieces of isolated information: this part to write a report on, that part to memorize and reproduce for a test. They want to grasp the whole of knowledge.” (p. 46)

How do you remember learning information as an elementary aged child? How much of the curriculum existed in isolation? Do you remember getting a concept of the big picture?

It is at this age that the children first begin to distance themselves from their families... It is not the family which the child seeks to leave behind but his or her role as a child within it... It is as if the children realize that they cannot remain with their families forever. It is time for them to strive for further independence in both action and thought.” (p. 46)

How does your elementary child express independence? Do you remember wanting to assert yourself in your elementary years? Do you understand the developmental purpose of this behavior at this age?

“The children play social games and establish groups that expand their experiences with new rules. They seek evaluation by their adherence to these new standards of conduct. By adult perceptions these new rules can be very strange... It is as if the children are exploring the group process itself and, in this way, are rehearsing for adult society.” (p. 47)

What do you remember of group or “club” activity when you were of elementary age? Have you seen this behavior in your own child? Do you agree with the concept that it might be practice for adult society?

“Now in this new period children have developed the higher brain function required for reasoning... What does the reasoning power specifically permit us to do? Reasoning allows us to keep facts and ideas in relation to each other. We can compare, deduce, and arrive at conclusions. The reasoning capacity shows itself clearly in the children’s new interest in searching out the interrelatedness of things. They explore all the facts which they have absorbed

sensorially in their earlier years. Now they begin to ask ‘why’ and ‘how’ in search of the relations between these facts.” (p. 48)

How is reasoning connected to interrelatedness? Is that how you would define reasoning? What new reasoning skills have you seen in elementary children that are different from how they thought when they were younger? How have your conversations with your elementary aged child changed and how do you try to respond to his search for reasoning?

“Elementary-school children continually question what is right and wrong. Their ultimate goal is not the facts of right and wrong as perceived by their parents. They want to use their newly developing powers of reason to come to their own conclusions about right and wrong. This is a process of discovery that initially involves questioning their parents in some detail about their responses to particular situations.” (p. 49)

How is reasoning connected to morality? Why is it important for your child to develop his own sense of inner morality? What have you seen of this questioning of right and wrong in your own child? What are ways you could respond to his budding morality that would encourage its maturity?

“The children’s interest in judging behavior extends to a new interest in justice and compassion for others... The children not only want to discern just from unjust acts. They want to fight against injustice whenever they become aware of it.” (p. 50)

Do you remember feeling a strong sense of justice as a child? Do you see that in your elementary aged child? How does it manifest itself? What are some ways to discuss ideas of justice with him?

“A companion characteristic to the children’s interest in morality and justice is their tendency to worship heroes. They have an intense interest and admiration for great men and women who have pushed to the limits of human capabilities.” (p. 50)

Who were your childhood heroes? Does your child have any? What do you think draws him to these people and how do you talk about them at home? What might be the purpose of this characteristic?

“Montessori maintains that imagination is a development of higher consciousness and is dependent upon a prior ability to distinguish fact from fantasy. This capacity to discern reality first makes it possible to discover the interrelatedness of facts, thoughts, memories, wishes, and so forth. The formation of imagination is rooted in sensorial experience. It is the ability to picture material objects or real experiences in their absence, to see in the mind what we no longer see, to hear what we no longer hear. We take these images and make new mental creations from them. However, in order to do this we need to have had previous experience of these images.” (p. 51)

How do you distinguish the difference between fantasy and imagination? How do you understand imagination? Do you think imagination is important? Do you agree with the idea that imagination is based in reality?

“The new psychological characteristics appearing in the children enable them to concentrate for the next six years on their development as social beings. All their interests and energies, their human tendencies and urges to activity, now serve this new goal. Montessori’s task was to design a new plan of education that could meet this challenge.” (p. 53)

How do you understand the concept of “social being”? Do you think Montessori was only referring to the elementary child’s interest in their peers? How do you think the traditional school system tries to meet this need? What do you understand about the Montessori method that serves the social being?

Chapter 4 “The Great Lessons and Key Lessons”

“Montessori proposed presenting the whole universe to the child in the elementary years.” (p. 54)
Does this proposition sound too ambitious? Do you think it is possible? Is there an argument for abandoning this goal? Why might it be important or even essential?

“Montessori stated that for the elementary child, ‘the power of imagination is what educates.’ It was the imagination that she chose as the avenue for her elementary plan. She designed five major stories and numerous minor ones to introduce the universe to children. The facts of these stories represent the truths of the universe as we know them, but they appeal to the child’s imagination to comprehend those facts and their meaning.” (p. 54-55)

How do you understand the connection between imagination and education? Why might imagination be the most effective way for the elementary child to learn? How does your own imagination affect the way you relate to something you are learning?

“Montessori’s five major stories dramatize the known truths of the universe and the progression of human civilization. They present in turn the creation of the earth, the beginning of life, the coming of human beings, and the tools of human communication, that is, language and mathematics. The law and order of the universe become clear to the children through each successive story” (p. 58-59).

Do you think these five stories cover the essential creation of our world and essential society? Is anything missing? How do you think it benefits a child to understand the world through this organization and perspective?

“Montessori called the five major stories the Great Lessons. In reality this term is a misnomer. These are impressionistic stories, accompanied by simple experiments, teacher-made charts, time lines, and illustrations... The lessons’ purpose is to create a picture in the children’s minds and to send them off wondering, questioning, and exploring in order to fill in the details of that picture... If the teacher is successful, this inquisitive searching to fill in specific detail will continue throughout the children’s lives” (p. 59).

How do these Great Lessons differ from your experience with lessons? Do they sound effective? How does the filling in of detail serve education? Do you trust that your child will learn enough with this as a backdrop?

“The teacher is careful not to ask his or her questions of the children. Only when children seek to answer questions which they themselves ask, do they commit themselves to the hard work of finding answers that are meaningful to them. This emphasis on the children’s questions versus our own is often difficult for adults” (p. 59-60).

Why is it important that children look for answers to their own questions? Why should adults refrain from asking their own questions? Why is it challenging for adults to do this? Do you struggle with this with your own children?

Synopsis of the third Great Lesson, The Coming of Human Beings (p. 67-69).

How did this perspective on human beings affect you? Have you ever thought of humans in this way? What might it mean for a child to be introduced to history with this perspective? How might it affect future attitudes and aspirations?

“In the days after a Great Lesson, the teacher’s goal is to get groups of children researching for the answers to their questions and doing their work together... For this purpose, Montessori devised additional stories to follow the initial telling of the Great Lessons. She called these stories which presented further detail in a particular field, the Key Lessons... The Great Lessons present the whole; the Key Lessons expand on their details with key information. There is a crucial balance in the amount of detail to be given in the Key Lessons. If the children of this age are bombarded with detail, they do not seek out information on their own” (p. 71).

How do you understand the concept of Key Lessons? Do you understand their purpose? How might a teacher be sensitive to the balance of providing some detail but not too much? Do you believe that children will not seek their own information if they are given too much detail?

“The final result of presenting the universe in the open-ended manner of the Great Lessons and the Key Lessons is freedom for both children and teachers. The children are no longer bound by the adult’s concept of what it is useful to know, a concept that, in any case, has no power to arouse their interest. The teachers are freed from the ‘teach, learn, test’ formula that represents much of regular education” (p. 74).

How do Montessori’s lessons create freedom for children and teachers? Why is this freedom important for learning? Do you have confidence in an education that is based on interest and freedom? Why or why not?

“The educational goal of Montessori elementary education is to develop within the children a global vision. Montessori calls the path whereby this goal is achieved ‘cosmic education.’... The result of cosmic education for the children is a developing gratitude for the universe and their lives within it. They form an awareness that they have received many gifts from human beings whom they will never see or know” (p. 75).

How does a global vision impact the character and spiritual life of a child? How important is this concept to you personally? Do you see how the Montessori elementary education serves this sense of gratitude for a child? How will this affect a child throughout life? Do you believe this is important?

“[W]onder and appreciation for persons unknown but so important in their daily lives help the children to realize that they, too, can make a contribution to the world” (p. 76).

Why might this matter in the life of a child? How does it affect how a child might learn, work, and make plans for the future? Do you think this is a valid and meaningful way to affect confidence and self-esteem?

Chapter 5 “The Classroom Environment”

“In the usual form of elementary education, the teacher teaches everything. In Montessori education at every level, it is always through interaction with the environment that the child learns; the teacher is only part of the environment. To meet such a challenge, it follows that the elementary environment cannot be haphazardly designed by an individual teacher’s whim.” (p. 77-78)

How is this approach different from traditional education? In what ways is traditional education set up with the teacher at the center? What considerations would need to be made if the environment is the source of learning? Why is an organized environment especially important in this situation?

“There are special materials displayed on shelves in an organized manner by sections: mathematics, geography, science, art, music, language, and so forth. The number of items is purposefully limited. Each one is carefully thought out for its aim and use. The materials are colorful but the baskets, trays, and containers which hold them are natural so as not to detract from the materials themselves. Glass jars and bottles are used to reinforce the logic and simplicity of utilizing objects that can be recycled. Just as in the primary classroom, there are no multiple sets of materials. It is important for the children to feel that the materials of their environment are unique and special and well worth waiting one’s turn to use.” (p. 78)

Does this describe Montessori elementary classrooms you have seen? What Montessori principles are utilized in this set-up? How does this differ from traditional classrooms? What are the advantages (or disadvantages)?

“To date it appears that children six to nine years old develop best when their hands are more directly involved with manipulating materials in their work... Computers are therefore not included in the prepared environment for use in research studies and creative writing until the upper elementary level where the children are nine to twelve years old. By this time, the children’s thinking, reading, and writing abilities have a solid foundation... Even if funds and space are available, there should be only a few computers in the prepared environment. These computers can function for each type of use: [Research, writing, and producing multidimensional images (CAD/CAM)]. This minimal number of computers assures that the children become familiar with the capabilities of computers without missing the intellectual and social development that the other materials of the environment are meant to facilitate.” (p. 78-79)

How does this approach to technology fit into what you know about Montessori? How is work with hands and the senses not satisfied by work with a computer? Why does this matter? Why is it important to limit computers even for older elementary children?

“The materials in the elementary classroom reflect the same creative design and simple beauty as those of the primary environment. Again, these materials are not the subject of instruction as visual aids or learning tools in customary education. Rather, the teacher familiarizes the children with the purpose and usage of these materials; learning takes place in their subsequent use by the children.” (p. 79)

What is the difference between materials that are used for “visual aids” and “learning tools” and Montessori materials? How do children learn from the materials themselves on their own?

“In the elementary classroom, repetition is assured by representing the same principle--cubing, for example--with a number of different materials. Repetition is now assured by variety rather than by the sensorial appeal of one item, as in the Children’s House.” (p. 80)

From what you know about elementary aged children, why would variety, rather than sensorial appeal, be a better way to draw them into repetition? Why does repetition matter?

“The way in which the concepts are presented is the pertinent factor... Children at the elementary level understand chemistry because it is introduced in a manner that uses their imaginative powers and ability to visualize concrete symbols... The children’s interest is aroused by the context within which facts are explored and by their relationship to another.” (p. 81)

Why are elementary children drawn to work that appeals to their imagination? Have you seen any examples of ways that the Montessori curriculum presents standard information in imaginative ways? Why does activating the children’s imagination serve their intelligence?

“Reflection makes it obvious that to understand the discoveries behind known facts, subject areas must be used in a connected manner. Therefore, the children are encouraged to use all of the materials in any interrelated way. If the children are researching the historical development of writing, they might get out science laboratory materials to analyze the papyrus plant and the inks which the Egyptians used.” (p. 81-82)

Why must subject areas be connected in order to deeply understand facts? How does seeing the same information through different perspectives enhance comprehension? How is the Montessori environment uniquely set up to support this? Can you think of an example of how to examine the same matter through two different subject areas?

“In the upper elementary level, the children explore geometry by working with a sensorial depiction of Euclid’s theorems. The ease and enthusiasm with which the children make these discoveries comes as a surprise to adults who were exposed to the same knowledge in a much different manner--usually in the form of an abstract theorem to memorize--and at much older ages.” (p. 84)

Why would using a sensorial depiction of a theorem that a child can explore aid in the acquisition of knowledge? Why might this increase a child’s interest in the theorem? How much

more depth of understanding might someone have if they learned something through physical exploration rather than rote memorization?

“The way in which all previous knowledge comes together at the end of each plane of development and makes further discoveries possible is a unique feature of Montessori education... Toward the end of the elementary level it is readily observable in the higher order of thinking that eleven- and twelve-year-old children possess.” (p. 86)

Based on what you know about the elementary environment, how does it support the development of higher order thinking? Is this a descriptor that you normally associate with this age child? What further discoveries will be possible for the child who has reached their final year in a Montessori elementary environment?

“The children are now at a stage where their powers of reasoning make it possible for them to explore endlessly wherever their interests lead them. Because the prepared environment is designed to meet their interests at the highest level of abstract thinking, it is inexhaustible for children from ages nine to twelve, in the upper elementary level.” (p. 86)

What makes this environment inexhaustible? Can you imagine what this experience would be like for an elementary child? How is this different from traditional education? Where might a child encounter limits?

Chapter 6 “The Elementary Teacher”

“Unlike younger children, who readily copy the teacher’s actions, older children do not accept unthinkingly their teacher’s modeling of expected behavior. Their reasoning minds question and challenge. The elementary teacher uses the children’s new powers of thinking and imagining to involve them in a different approach to ‘grace and courtesy’ lessons. The teacher uses drama and humor, creating scenarios. Because the children are now interested in a wider social environment, they role-play situations outside as well as inside the classroom.” (p. 87-88)

How do elementary children’s reasoning mind affect their desire to simply model good behavior? How might using drama and humor appeal to this new kind of mind the elementary children have? Why would role play appeal to older children and how would it help them to engage in expected behavior?

“Montessori believed that lectures on morality are of little use to children and can even have a negative effect. In regard to social behavior, children need to reason through to their own moral values... It is through the realization of the human endowments, intellect and will, that children develop moral integrity. Their reasoning powers allow them to form their own judgments of good and evil; their will enables them to exercise the self-control to live by those judgments.” (p. 88-89)

What do you think of the relationship of intellect and will to morality? How does a reasoning approach differ from a lecture approach? What kind of effect might this experience with developing morality have on a person’s moral sense later in life?

“It is important to introduce the children to the heroes of their culture and the world, both past and present. They need positive examples of others who have contributed to society... Exposing children to the exemplary lives and deeds of others inspires them to plan for the day when they can take their own part in the world as adults and give to others in their turn.” (p. 90)

What are the ways that learning about heroes in their world will inspire children? Why does this matter at this age? What are the traits of elementary children that cause them to be especially drawn to this study? How might it affect their future?

“Social life within the classroom provides another natural opportunity for the children to discover moral values. Constantly working in a team and adhering to accepted classroom rules encourages exploration of moral attitudes. The informality of the classroom makes it possible for the children to discuss their relationship and behavior openly with each other on a daily basis.” (p. 90)

How is this structure different from that in a traditional school? How does the “informality” of the Montessori environment support social and moral development? What role might the Montessori teacher play in this aspect of the classroom?

“Work is not an option; it is a necessity for the development of what Montessori called the children’s ‘normal behavior.’ This behavior is reflected in the children’s cooperation and respect for each other and in their concentration and interest in learning about the world around them.” (p. 90)

Why is work so important in the Montessori environment? Have you seen ways in which productive and interesting work has supported your child or other children’s positive behavior?

“To avoid... misuse of materials and to serve instead as an effective link to the environment for the children, the elementary teacher (as did the primary teacher) constantly observes the children in order to know where they are in their development at any given moment. Both primary and elementary teachers keep records of the children’s activities, but the elementary teacher goes much further in this process because the older children’s advanced interests and development result in many more presentations to record.” (p. 91)

How is this method of record-keeping different from traditional schools? In what ways can it take the place of test-taking? How much time do you think Montessori teachers spend in observation and record-keeping? What are some reasons that it is important?

“Based on his daily record keeping, the teacher seeks to get two, three, or more children working together to explore an area of interest following a story or presentation of material. If a group of children appear to have come to a dead end in their search for information or process of discovery, the teacher steps in with just enough information to get them going again. He is constantly saying to himself, ‘These children were working on that last week. They got this far. How can I take them a further step in that direction?’” (p. 92)

How is this rigorous record-keeping and nuanced follow-up work different from the approach in a traditional school? How is it specific to a Montessori teacher? What kinds of abilities and activity does it require? Why does the Montessori environment require this kind of work from the teacher?

“As a general rule, the children choose their own companions for their work. The teacher’s knowledge of social life is of little value to them. They need to discover for themselves, in this practice period of their lives when the consequences of their mistakes have no lasting effect, how to make wise choices in coworkers. Allowed to choose freely, the children gradually develop the ability to choose wisely.” (p. 93)

How does freedom in children’s social lives lead to wisdom? Why does a teacher’s knowledge not have value for them? How is the Montessori environment a safe and appropriate place for this learning?

“When the children are concentrating and working independently and without teacher interference, they have achieved the goal of self-direction. The teacher leaves them alone and protects them from interruption... Montessori discovered that once children become self-directed, they do their best work when allowed a three-hour uninterrupted work cycle.” (p. 93)
Why does self-direction matter? When you work, do you enjoy having uninterrupted time to concentrate? How do you think this translates to a child’s experience? What do you know about the three-hour work cycle?

“The elementary training requires a solid foundation in the sciences, liberal arts and humanities, and covers all major subject areas. The aim is not for the teacher to become an expert in every field of study; rather, the goal is to become a ‘Renaissance person,’ sufficiently knowledgeable to arouse the children’s interest in each area and to direct them to available sources for the answers to their questions.” (p. 95-96)

Based on what you know about elementary children, why does this approach to knowledge suit an elementary teacher? How would it appeal to and serve the elementary child?

Chapter 7 “Freedom and Responsibility”

“The freedoms can be stated in a Bill of Rights for the elementary classroom: to act by oneself and for oneself[,] to act without unnecessary help or interruption[,] to work and to concentrate[,] to act within limits that are determined by the environment and the group[,] to construct one’s own potential by one’s own efforts[.]” (p. 98)

Do these seem like reasonable rights for an elementary child? How do they support development? In what ways are they similar or different from expectations in a traditional school?

“The teacher shows the children how to write the date and make time entries of their daily activities in their journals. It is important to note that the journal is a record of things that have already happened. It is not a plan for future work. As the children get older, they are encouraged to make comments about their work, and their journals become more extensive accounts of their ongoing development.” (p. 99)

How might this journal activity serve the elementary child’s work? How does it support the development unique to this age? What are some of the purposes it may serve?

“In order to guide the children in the choice and manner of their activities and provide an opportunity for individual attention, the teacher meets with each child periodically... These meetings give the teacher the security of knowing the progress of all the children. An equally important purpose is for the children to realize that the teacher knows how they are doing. The younger elementary children need the sense of security that this knowledge gives them. The goal of these meetings is for the children gradually to accept full responsibility for their own work.” (p. 100)

Why do you think these meetings are an essential part of the Montessori curriculum? How might these meetings take the place of tests? How do these meetings aid in the child’s movement toward independence? How do they support freedom and responsibility?

“Now in the elementary level, the children take on nearly complete responsibility for their room... To reach this almost total responsibility for their environment the teacher leads the children through a series of steps... It is reason that arouses the elementary children’s interest in maintaining order and cleanliness. The teacher engages the children in thinking through the straightening and cleaning process in three phases. In the first phase, the teacher and children together draw up a list of all the areas that need care... In phase two, the children draw up their own list without adult help... In phase three, the children have the full responsibility of caring for the room on their own.” (p. 101-102)

How does this method engage the elementary child's reasoning in cleaning up their environment? How does this differ from the younger child? How do these phases support freedom and responsibility?

“When individual children have shown that they are responsible in maintaining the classroom environment, choosing their work with care, and working in harmony with others, they are each given a new freedom. This freedom comes as a surprise to adults, and it is difficult for us to comprehend its full import for the children. It involves freedom beyond their classroom environment and is referred to as ‘going out.’” (p. 102)

Why do you think these are the requirements expected before this freedom is granted? Is this freedom a surprise to you? Why do you think this freedom is so meaningful to the elementary child?

“At first, ‘going out’ extends only to other parts of the school building. Because many concepts considered in the elementary classroom are introduced with sensorial materials first encountered in the primary classroom, it is helpful for the children to revisit the latter and reacquaint themselves with specific materials... When the children demonstrate that they can handle ‘going out’ within the school building, they are permitted to go outside the building to the school grounds. They may be studying leaves or rocks or insects and choose to go outside to look for specimens... After the children show that they can handle this added freedom capably, they are allowed to ‘go out’ into the community beyond the school, first within walking distance and, eventually, to any commutable distance.” (p. 102-103)

Why do you think “going out” is introduced in phases? Why is leaving the classroom important for the elementary child? How does it support them developmentally and intellectually? What are some examples of “going out” that you can imagine?

“Increasingly in the past thirty years, elementary children have been isolated from their community for the duration of the school day. Yet, it is in the second plane of development when children show their greatest interest in exploring their society. If elementary children experience the cooperative effort required for a functioning community, they develop a better understanding of the ultimate interdependence of all human beings as exemplified both in national life and international communications, commerce, and trade.” (p. 104)

How does “going out” support children's understanding of their society? How does it bring awareness to interdependence and cooperative effort? Why does this matter?

“The ‘going out’ experiences further the development of the children's independence and will. Without a continuous development of these capacities, children are easily led astray. They lack confidence and do what others tell them to do, instead of keeping their own counsel. Just as the

younger children in the primary class, the elementary children need to have lives of their own and not be overly dependent upon the adult.” (p. 105)

Why do children need continuous development of independence and will? How does “going out” serve this development? In what ways does “going out” help the children to be less dependent on adults?

“‘Going out’ experiences are always the natural outcome of the children's questions about their work and the need to research sources outside the classroom for their answers. They involve real work, not invented work camouflaging a desire for recreation or socializing with peers. Two to four children plan an outing together to continue their research on a specific topic or to purchase supplies for one of the classroom animals or to visit a local resident for a specific purpose. These are not field trips which involve the whole class and are organized by adults in order for the children to have a particular experience which the adults have chosen. ‘Going out’ activities are always arranged by the children.” (p. 106)

Why is the children’s involvement in deciding where to “go out” matter? How does this differ from a traditional field trip? What kind of an effect would this have on the children’s experience?

“Because the goal in all of this preparation is both physical and mental independence, the teacher helps the children to make all the preparations for a particular expedition by appealing to their reasoning powers. She asks them questions, ‘How will you get there? What materials do you need to take? How much money do you need? What clothes are you going to wear? Do you need good walking shoes? What if it rains? What about meals? What are you going to find out? How does that fit in the work that you are now doing?’ and more.” (p. 109)

How does answering these questions appeal to the elementary children’s reasoning powers? How is the experience different for children when they have to answer questions versus having the information given to them? What factors might the teacher consider to determine how many questions to ask, so that the children are able to problem-solve but do not become overwhelmed?

“Montessori believed that the children’s final years in the upper elementary level were the natural time for the children to realize that they do not have to wait until they are adults to help others. This is a period when children have great compassion and sympathy for others. Being aware that they can give to others in need, aids the children’s confidence and belief in their developing capacities.” (p. 111)

Why is this a good age for beginning the concept of serving those in need? And how does this work build their confidence?

“The teachers prepare for the Community Service Program by researching the community for situations in which the children can be of service: to the elderly, younger children, the

handicapped, or others in need. The children then choose whom they would like to help. The teacher monitors carefully whether the service the children are to offer matches their ages, interest, and abilities.” (p. 111)

Why would this preparatory work be so important for a successful experience in community service? How might it affect the children’s experiences and why would that matter?

“The purpose of the Montessori elementary plan goes beyond the customary educational aim of developing the child’s intelligence. Montessori believed that this is too narrow a goal for elementary schooling. There are many intelligent people in the world. Yet human beings remain far from solving the problems of survival on earth, either for ourselves or for our environment. Montessori believed that, in addition to intellectual achievement, education must help children to develop a sense of themselves and their place in the world.” (p. 112)

How does the Montessori elementary program give children a natural sense of themselves in the world? Why does this matter for solving the problems of our earth?

“The Montessori teacher’s specific responsibility is to aid human development through awareness of the children’s needs at each stage of self-formation. Through this approach to their education, the children can pass onto each successive plane of development well prepared for the challenges ahead.” (p. 114)

How is this approach different from traditional education? Have you ever considered a teacher’s role in supporting human development? Why does awareness of children’s changing needs matter? How does meeting their needs prepare them for future challenges?

Chapter 8 “Scenes From an Elementary Classroom”

A Morning Visit:

“The room has a full, busy feel to it, but I doubt that one could guess that there are over thirty children here. In fact, I have been told that there are thirty-five. I scan the classroom, searching for the teacher. After a moment, I locate her seated with the children at the end of one of the larger tables. She appears to be giving a joint presentation with two of the children, one on each side of her. I search for the assistant teacher who I know is there but I cannot immediately find her.” (p. 116)

How does a large classroom sound to you? What do you think of a classroom where the teacher is hard to find? What does that say about the classroom?

“As I settle in to observe for the morning, I begin to sense that, for these children, relating to each other and working are a unified experience. The thought occurs to me that my primary children develop concentration through their work; these elementary children are developing themselves socially through their work.” (p. 116-117)

How could “relating to each other” and “working” be united? How are they different? How do you understand the concept of social development through work? How is this unique to this age and why?

“As this child marks his graph paper, he appears to be comfortably encompassing both experiences at the same time: his individual math work and the companionship and conversation of the other three boys as they continue on their group research.” (p. 118)

What needs to be in place for this harmony of individual work and social experience to take place? What are the positive benefits for the child?

“[As the teacher asks questions during a presentation], different children are spontaneously offering suggestions. I am impressed that the children are so obviously uncompetitive with each other in their responses. No one is taking a dominant role or using this opportunity to attract attention to themselves. There is a quiet respect for each other’s ideas. Each child appears to be thinking on his or her own, interested and deeply involved.” (p. 123)

How is this different from what you might expect when a teacher is calling on students? Why do you think it is such a positive experience in a Montessori environment? What supports this?

“[After the presentation,] I am impressed by the purposeful attitude of these children and, at the same time, their unhurried, relaxed manner. They appear to be savoring this new information to which they have just been exposed and to be exploring it further with their companions, each in his or her own way. They have time to think. That is what impresses me most, I realize. These children are thinking.” (p. 125)

How does the Montessori environment uniquely allow for time for thinking after an influx of new information? How is this different from a traditional school? Do you think it matters? Why?

A Meeting with the Elementary Teacher:

“I comment on the extensiveness of these [record-keeping] charts and the amount of work involved. ‘It was a lot of work to set them up and I did not keep such detailed records of the children’s follow-up work after presentations at first,’ Lisa [the elementary teacher] replies. ‘However, when Marsilia [the AMI consultant] came for a visit in October, she told me to tighten the children’s work. It has been working well ever since.’ Lisa then shows me one of the children’s journals. ‘I write possibilities of follow-up work for any materials or presentations given to a particular child in the back of his or her journal. I tell the children that when they don’t know what to do, they can look in the back of their journals for ideas.’” (p. 129)

Does it sound as though this kind of record-keeping can take the place of testing? How does this kind of record-keeping ensure that the children get to all parts of the classroom during their three years? Does this level of guidance sound appropriate for a Montessori environment? Does this sound like an effective way to help a child develop in all subject areas?

“At the end of our discussion together, Lisa asks me, ‘Can I tell you what really excites me about Montessori? It is because it is part of life. Everything connects. Each area leads to the other both for me and for the children. Whatever we touch on in class is reflected in the outside world.’ Lisa then goes on to tell me that the day after my visit to the class, she was giving a science presentation on flower dissection with a group of children. They were discussing how the stem is like a tube through which water is carried from the roots to the leaf. Suddenly, one child said, ‘Oh, so you mean they could have blown paint through this?’ Lisa knew immediately who ‘they’ referred to, as undoubtedly the other children did who were present for the cave painting story.” (p. 135)

How does the Montessori curriculum uniquely allow for these kinds of connections? Why might experiencing these connections be a meaningful and useful experience for children?

The Beginning of a Classroom Day:

“A number of children are steadily entering the room now, doing so in a natural but unobtrusive way. They seem almost businesslike as they take off their coats and hang them on hangers in the small entranceway to the classroom that doubles as a cloakroom. Each child comes to Lisa to shake hands, then each one gets out his or her journal and writes the date, time, and work begun. I overhear several children say to each other, ‘What shall we do today?’ For the most part, however, the children seem to be continuing with work already begun in the day or days before.” (p. 142)

How is the start of this day in an elementary classroom different from what you remember as a student? How would you have liked this kind of morning? How does this kind of a day support the children's development and concentration?

“[Two boys] are having a disagreement as to how to proceed [with their work]. One boy gets up to ask Lisa which one of them is right. He seems very convinced that he is, and somewhat irritated with his companion for not realizing this. I am impressed, however, with the mature way in which both boys handle the disagreement. When Lisa comes to explain that the boy who came to get her is in fact correct, both children continue with their work in a matter-of-fact manner as if no problem had occurred.” (p. 142-143)

How has the Montessori environment prepared and supported these children in having a civil disagreement?

“As I look at the environment, the maturity of everyone strikes me. There is nothing that might invite silly behavior. Perhaps that helps to account for the purposeful behavior of these children. They are involved, yet comfortably so. They are not paying the least attention to me [as an observer].” (p. 145)

Why do you think these Montessori elementary children are so mature? What is their relationship to purpose as it relates to their behavior? Why do you think they are not distracted by the observer?

The End of the Classroom Day:

“Everyone is busy [cleaning] but there is no pandemonium. In particular, there is none of the silliness which primary children can fall into when they have a feather duster or dust mop in their hands. These older children work rapidly to accomplish a purpose and have the look of those who control their own destiny, who know where they are going and how they are going to get there... Afterwards I realize that what is so remarkable about this whole process is that the children are so completely in charge of their own dismissal.” (p. 151)

How has the Montessori environment prepared these children for this level of responsibility? Why do the children not abuse this freedom? How does the control of one's own destiny affect purpose and behavior?

“As I turn to take a last look at this well designed classroom with its carefully laid-out shelves and beautifully constructed materials, I think to myself that it is no wonder this all works so well. The teacher has everything she needs at her fingertips: all the materials with which to teach, not facts given to the children to memorize but tools and starting points for the children's own explorations. If the teacher has the ability to organize and a sincere respect for and interest in children and knowledge, there is no limit to the possibilities for a meaningful education in a Montessori elementary classroom.” (p. 151)

Why is the Montessori education limitless? Why is traditional school different? How does the environment offer the teacher everything she needs? Why is her organization, respect for children, and interest in knowledge so essential?

Chapter 9 “The Planes of Adulthood”

“Montessori regarded adolescence as a period of great vulnerability. She likened the first three years of this period of transition to adulthood, the years from twelve to fifteen, to the first three years of life from birth to age three. The infant is in a totally vulnerable state and requires careful attention and devotion on the part of adults. A new being is in creation, a child. In this second period also, great weakness is apparent, and very special consideration must be given. Again, a new creation is taking place, this time, an adult.” (p. 153-154)

How is the age span of birth to three years the creation of the child? How could you consider the age span of 12 to 15 years as the creation of the adult? In what ways are these times similar? Why is this time of creation so vulnerable?

“As in the early stage of childhood, adolescence is a period of self-construction. During these years, the adolescent is introverted and self-conscious. At the same time, he or she is also seeking to join society as an adult member. There is, therefore, an interest in social organization and other peoples of the world... The adolescent wishes to discover both the self and society, in order to take his or her place in the adult world as a contributing member.” (p. 154)

Why is the discovery of the self so essential for finding one’s place in the adult world? How does the added introversion and self-consciousness of this stage motivate the interest in social organization, and how does it create a challenge? Do the interest in self and the interest in society juxtapose each other or can the two interests work in synchronicity?

“In the first plane of formation, children are ‘sensorial explorers’; in the second, they are ‘reasoning explorers.’ Now, in the third plane, they become ‘humanistic explorers,’ interested in the quality of society for themselves and for other peoples of the world... At the secondary level, young persons develop a respect for and commitment to a code of civility for their lives as adult citizens within society at large. According to Montessori, behavior befitting a citizen can best be accomplished through active and full participation in the society during the adolescent years.” (p. 154)

What does “humanistic explorer” mean? How is this different from sensorial and reasoning explorers? Why would participation in adult society support adolescents’ development as it relates to this kind of exploration?

“Montessori’s emphasis on the development of personality is consistent throughout the stages of human development. Montessori refers to the full development of the younger child’s personality as a process of ‘normalization.’ At this third plane of development, Montessori uses the term ‘valorization’ of the personality. Valor is a derivative of the Latin word *valere*—to be strong or worthy. It is in this sense of discovering and developing one’s own worthiness and strength that

Montessori considers the ‘valorization of personality’ as the goal of the third plane.” (p. 156-157)

How is valorization different from normalization? Why would this be an essential goal of the third plane education and experience?

“Because the adolescent seeks an understanding of civilization and working society, Montessori called her adolescent program, *Erdkinder*, or ‘children of the earth.’ This emphasis on the connection of science and human invention at the secondary level, ensures that the young person’s comprehension of the interdependence of the natural world and human life, which was established in the elementary class, continues.” (p. 159)

Why is the connection of science and human invention so important for third plane children? How does the phrase “children of the earth” reflect this element of the Montessori curriculum?

“The schedule of academic studies is to be flexible with large blocks of uninterrupted time. The vulnerability of early adolescence suggests that students do best when not pressured and given time to develop their thoughts.” (p. 161)

Do you support giving adolescents periods of uninterrupted time to do their work? Do you believe it is important for them to have time to develop their thoughts? Does this sound like a reasonable classroom schedule for this age? How is this different from traditional school?

“Montessori singled out farming activities for their benefits to adolescents. She believed that farming can help students develop a clearer understanding of the basis of human commerce and economic exchange and the complex issues which they represent for modern society. Further, they can give adolescents an experience with the scientific means whereby human beings have cooperated with nature in developing a kind of ‘supernature,’ such as hybrid plants, specialized breeding of animals, fertilizers, and farm machinery. The farm also affords the opportunity for adolescents to take part in the marketplace through a small store to sell produce.” (p. 162)

How does the farm represent commerce, exchange, and scientific inventions? How does this support adolescents’ development?

“The role of the secondary-level teacher in Montessori education is similar to that of the primary and elementary teacher; the secondary-level teacher is to serve as a link to the environment which is, in this case, the world at large. To do so effectively, the teacher’s primary qualification is knowing and understanding adolescents. Acquiring such knowledge requires patience, faith, and skills of observation. Montessori particularly felt that adults have to take special care to show confidence in adolescents. They are in a sensitive stage of transition, no longer children and yet not adults.” (p. 168)

Does understanding adolescents seem like an important qualification for being an adolescent teacher? How often do you think this is emphasized in traditional education? Why is it so

important that the adolescent teacher show confidence in the students? Why might this matter even more at this age?

“When Montessori was asked about the unusual self-discipline of her students, she replied that they were disciplined because they were free... Montessori understood that freedom cannot be given by one individual to another; freedom can only be achieved through conquering one’s self.” (p. 169-170)

How does the Montessori adolescent program support the control of one’s self? Do you believe that freedom supports discipline?

“High schools today prepare students for college studies. They allow for the development of the intellect. They do not concentrate to the same degree on guiding young persons to independence and the ability to adapt to social life. Indeed, regular education of the high-school level is geared toward egocentrism, not the good of society. Montessori provided not only a preparation for adolescents to take their place in working society as adults but she continually exposed them in their studies, from their earliest years, to those qualities in human beings which have led to the nobility of humanity.” (p. 170-171)

Did your high school experience focus on guiding you to independence and adaptation to society? Do you believe that this focus is important? Have you observed a concentration on intellect and ego in traditional education? In what ways does a Montessori education support the nobility of humanity, and how is this different from traditional education?

“Montessori believed that if young persons are given adequate help in their first three planes of formation, they will reach the final plane of development, the years from eighteen to twenty-four, ready to become ‘specialized explorers,’ beginning preparation for their personal careers. A career should have potential both for individual financial reward and for making a meaningful contribution to society. The belief that one’s life work should have significance both personally and socially was grounded in Montessori’s understanding of nature. She recognized that in the natural world each form of life, while pursuing its own survival through instinctual behavior, benefits the whole of creation.” (p. 171)

How does the natural world reflect the balance between personal fulfillment and social contribution? Do you believe that a career can be both useful to the world at large and meaningful to the individual? Can our society be built upon this premise? Do you find your own work rewarding and also essential for your community?

“The psychological characteristics which Montessori identified for the fourth plane appear to support the young adult’s choice and preparation for a career. This period is, first of all, one when the young person is again strong and relatively stable... It is a stage characterized by energy and relative calm after a preceding six years of rapid change and turbulence.” (p. 172)

How is this fourth plane similar to the second plane? What have you observed about young adults aged 18-24 years? Do you think this is a good age to begin preparation for a career?

“Young persons are to live and travel where they can study the problems and experience the cultural, business, scientific, and economic life of the modern world... Montessori believed that universities should help students find work experiences in the community.” (p. 172-173)

Does this sound like an appropriate environment for young adults? Why does travel and exposure to the intricacies of the modern world matter for this age? How does having work experience support development for young adults?

“At the fourth plane, the linking process is almost entirely a mentoring experience, rather than the direct connecting to the environment of the earlier stages. The young person has already developed the capacities necessary for successful interaction with the environment: independence, discipline, motivation, and social responsibility. What are needed in this last stage are wise adult counsel, encouragement, and support.” (p. 174)

Did you have any significant mentors at this stage in your life? What do you remember about how they supported and enhanced your life? How is mentoring different from a direct connection to the environment, and why is this distinction important at this age?

“Most important of all, they, [young adults who have experienced Montessori education], will have confidence in their own abilities to learn. By this means, they will be enabled to expand and renew their knowledge throughout their lives.” (p. 176)

Why is the ability to learn so important for life? How does a Montessori education build confidence in this ability? Why is expanding and renewing knowledge an integral part of a meaningful life?

Chapter 10 “Montessori: Present and Future”

“As Montessori methods are disseminated to a larger audience, it may become rarer to find authentic Montessori schools... Several factors are necessary if this unfortunate outcome is to be avoided. Teachers of all Montessori programs must be thoroughly trained in Montessori theory and practice. To achieve this result, good training courses must be available in all areas of the country, both for new teachers and for experienced teachers who are new to Montessori education. Subsequently, these trained teachers must have the tools necessary for implementing quality Montessori education. This means that they must be given the resources to establish quality ‘prepared environments’... Additionally, parent involvement is important. Because it takes time for parents to understand Montessori concepts, which depart from older methods of education, the first step in establishing Montessori schools should be the establishment of parent education programs.” (p. 180-182)

What are some solutions you have seen to these three criteria (teacher training, classroom preparation, and parent programs)? What has worked and what has not worked? In what ways are these criteria unique to the Montessori movement? In what ways do the solutions need to be unique to the Montessori movement?

“[O]perational expenses of Montessori classrooms are significantly lower than those of customary classrooms. This is because regular school programs rely on textbooks, workbooks, and other materials limited in scope and rapidly outdated. They must be continuously replaced at enormous expense... Montessori materials, on the other hand, representing basic concepts, are applicable to children from every background and country. They have stood the test of time for almost a century on six continents and are not subject to drastic change. They are built, therefore, to last: well designed, expertly crafted, and durable. As such, they represent a capital, versus a continuing, expense.” (p. 182)

What are some examples of how a Montessori classroom differs from a traditional classroom in this particular regard? What does it say about the environment that the materials do not need to be replenished? How would this affect the experience of the children in it? How does this affect the expenditure of a Montessori school?

“Because Montessori education is not influenced by educational fads, funds are also saved in the area of in-service teacher training. Although ongoing education of teachers is always necessary to maintain the highest standards of classroom practice, future training for Montessori teachers builds upon the base established in their initial training course. This base focuses on the development of children and their universal needs, regardless of their individual situations. There is always more to learn in these areas. However, nothing must be unlearned.” (p. 182-183)

How is a system of education that resists fads unique? Why is Montessori not influenced by fads? How is this related to the way it was created? Why does focusing on universal needs mean that

the system does not need to change? Why does a training that is based on universal needs mean that “nothing must be unlearned”?

“The frontier for Montessori education is the availability of quality Montessori schools for all children, regardless of their economic background. Today’s graduates of Montessori programs will help determine whether this frontier is reached. If these students continue to make strong records in their new schools... the impetus for parents and educators to embrace Montessori education will increase. To date, studies of Montessori children, including those from a low socioeconomic status, show that graduates have benefited significantly from Montessori programs at both the preschool and elementary levels.” (p. 184)

What studies have you heard of that continue to show the advantages of a Montessori education? What anecdotal evidence have you heard? Have you heard of any drawbacks? Do you have any concerns about the adjustment of Montessori students when their years in a Montessori school are completed and they go to a more traditional environment?

“There is one more factor to consider in the final outcome of Montessori education’s future in the United States. To my mind, it is the most important one of all. It is the attitude of Montessori graduates towards their own schooling. Montessori education purports to help young persons develop a lifelong love of learning, the ability to work effectively in teams to solve problems, and individual strength of character, courage, and confidence to face life’s challenges. If Montessori graduates perceive that they have achieved these goals, they will not be satisfied with any other form of education for their own children.” (p. 184-185)

Why is a graduate’s attitude about their own education significant? How will this affect the Montessori movement specifically? What have you heard from Montessori graduates about their education?

“I asked my eleven-year-old granddaughter... ‘Did you have a good day at school today?’ ‘It was not good,’ she answered... ‘It was *great!*’ I believe that there is one fundamental reason for a young person of any age having this positive reaction to a day in school. He or she is being given, on a daily basis, the help and support needed in each stage of development, year after year, from the beginning of his or her schooling to its ending.” (p. 185)

Have you witnessed this kind of enthusiasm from a Montessori student? Why is the specific help and support for each stage of development so impactful for children? How is Montessori different from traditional school in this regard?

“Educators can serve as mentors to stimulate the learning process for the student, but only an intensive, individually initiated pursuit of knowledge over the entire span of life will gain each one of us the education necessary for the twenty-first century.” (p. 186)

How does Montessori support this kind of pursuit of knowledge? How are Montessori teachers uniquely prepared to be mentors who “stimulate the learning process”? Is it possible to be prepared for the twenty-first century in any other way?

“Montessori did not consider the child as a blank to be written upon... For her, the child is a distinct, unique being with an infinite capacity and enthusiasm for learning. Montessori’s overriding goal for the young adult was the development of a passion and capacity for lifelong learning. No purpose for education could be more pertinent to our world today and tomorrow.”
(p. 186)

How does traditional education treat children as blank slates? What are some ways that Montessori is different? What are some ways that Montessori honors and encourages “an infinite capacity and enthusiasm for learning”? Do you believe the goal of education should be the “passion and capacity for lifelong learning”? Why might this be relevant for our world today?