

Needs of the Adolescent

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Introduction

At the end of the day, everything we do as teachers, we do for the benefit of the students in our classroom. Whether that relate to the layout of the furniture in the classroom, the design of the decorations in the classroom, or the format of the lesson components we present to the students, they are always on our minds. In a Montessori classroom, the goal of the teacher is to ensure each and every component of each of their cycles of study meets the needs of the adolescents in their care and is also connected to Montessori philosophy. The rationale they provide to support these claims is what helps teachers learn to build excellent components.

Value of Kick-Off & Culminating Activities

Kick-off activities and culminating activities tend to be prominent components in each cycle of study that a Montessori teacher creates, but why? Each cycle of study is centered around a theme aimed at helping the students reach and move through the Seven Gateways. “The hunger of joy and delight can be satisfied through experiences of great simplicity, such as play, celebration, or gratitude.” (PassageWays Institute, 2005) These kick-off activities and culminating activities act as a fun way to introduce and close out the theme and the meaning behind it to the students each cycle.

For my cycle of Connections, I created a kick-off activity and culminating activity to promote the idea of connections within the classroom amongst the students. My kick-off activity centered around students physically writing down goals for connections they would like to make with other students in the classroom throughout the year. That process of physically writing down goals helps students grasp the idea they are actually attainable. My culminating activity focused on the idea of students bringing their individual character traits together to build a sense

of community. This helps students understand the idea that even if two things may have vastly different characteristics, there are always possibilities for those two things to be connected.

Value of Group Initiative & Games

Group initiatives and games stem from the same tree that kick-off activities and culminating activities stem from, their purpose and benefits overlapping each other. Group initiatives also serve a purpose of helping students reach and move through the Seven Gateways. “The yearning for deep connection describes a quality of relationship that is profoundly caring, is resonant with meaning, and involves feelings of belonging, or of being truly seen and known. Students may experience deep connection to themselves, to others, to nature, or to a higher power.” (PassageWays Institute, 2005) Depending on the focus of the group initiative, students can begin to build these connections.

The group initiative I planned for my students acts as more of a game than an academic activity. The purpose of this activity is for students to work on their teamwork skills and communication while trying to reach a common goal. Group initiatives assist you in getting to know the students of your classroom. “Your team (classroom) is made up of people with different needs, ambitions and personalities. Getting to know them, and helping them to get to know each other, can build a happy, trusting team (classroom).” (MindTools, n.d.)

Value of Shelf Work

In Montessori classrooms, even secondary ones, the teacher provides what is known as “shelf work” as a material to use in the classroom. Shelf work is a material that students pull off of the shelves to practice the skills and knowledge they learned from a lesson taught to them. “Hands-on learning is a form of education in which children learn by doing. Instead of simply

listening to a teacher or instructor lecture about a given subject, the student engages with the subject matter to solve a problem or create something.” (Martin, 2020) Shelf work acts as a way for students to create something concrete from abstract information they were given.

“Hands-on is by no means a ‘new’ movement in the classroom. That being said, even today, many schools find it difficult to incorporate hands-on projects and principles into student work.” (Martin, 2020) After having worked in a Montessori school for four years with a vast supply of shelf work (hands-on material), I could not imagine working in a school where those resources are so limited. The shelf work I created is designed to follow a Natural Lesson covering the introduction of the parts of plant and animal cells. This shelf work would be beneficial for the students because it allows them to take this knowledge they learned and use their hands to build something from that knowledge. Shelf work also allows the students to engage their creative side, one of the Seven Gateways, through works of art, scientific discovery, etc. (PassageWays Institute, 2005)

Value of Checklists

Checklists are used by students to help them keep track of what lessons they need to attend, what assignments they need to complete, as well as when all of these items need completed. In that respect, checklists act as planners for students to use and follow, aiding in their success in the classroom. “In addition to improving time management, there are a number of psychological reasons why planners help students with memory and focus.” (CPF, 2019)

These include:

1. Writing tasks down makes it easier to remember them
2. Having a written plan frees up working memory, which makes it easier to focus on the task at hand

3. Written plans act as an external memory ‘cue’ and enable long-term planning
4. Allows students to plan DUE dates as well as DO dates

The fourth reason resonates with many people, “DUE dates versus DO dates”. (CPF, 2019) Not only do checklists allow students to see WHEN their assignments are due, it also allows them to see WHAT items they need to complete.

The checklist I created for my students is a template that focuses on one subject over a two-week time span. Within the template, there will be a place where I, the teacher, must sign off on the student’s completed work on or before the end of the two-week period. Should a student still have work remaining, that work will become homework over the weekend (as long as it is not shelf work). The checklists will give the students the opportunity to improve organization skills, track their achievements, enhance their responsibility, and promote communication between student, teacher, and parent. (PLB, n.d.)

Conclusion

I touched base on four components of a cycle of study that help you as a teacher meet the needs of the adolescents in your classroom, while also keeping them connected to Montessori philosophy. Kick-off activities, culminating activities, group initiatives, checklists, and shelf work are all crucial components of each cycle of study you plan to create and use in your Montessori classroom. “The Seven Gateways are, in essence, strategies for reaching the hearts and minds of adolescents –a kind of roadmap for how to teach the whole child.” (Taylor, 2016) Teaching the whole child is one purpose of Montessori, so this should be reflected in all components of each cycle of study.

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