

The Application of Montessori Teaching Method in the Connection between Preschool and Primary School Aesthetic Education

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Abstract: *The unique charm of Montessori pedagogy stems from a thorough understanding and research of young children, centered around the child, creating a "prepared environment" that guides children to work independently, stimulating their autonomous awareness, developing abilities such as independence, concentration, creativity, and social skills, and promoting comprehensive growth and development. The transition from kindergarten to primary school has always been of great concern. Everything in primary school is new, and how should young children face these new challenges? Children need to be prepared, possessing the necessary abilities before entering primary school, and Montessori pedagogy can bring certain value to this end. In Montessori classrooms, children work independently in a prepared environment, developing self-discipline and a sense of order. Mixed-age class learning is established to promote social development and find self-positioning. As children grow physically and mentally, they integrate and develop the experiences acquired during kindergarten, practicing better in primary school learning and life. Montessori pedagogy brings numerous beneficial impacts to Montessori children, helping them smoothly navigate the transition phase from kindergarten to primary school.*

Keywords: Montessori Pedagogy, Kindergarten-to-Primary School Transition, Aesthetic Education, Montessori teaching method, Preschool-primary school transition, Aesthetic education.

1. Problem Statement

Beauty is the positive sensory, ethical, moral, and aesthetic judgment conveyed through verbal or non-verbal forms after perceiving external people and things. To guide students of all ages to better adapt to society, in 2015, the General Office of the State Council issued the "Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving School Aesthetic Education Work" (hereinafter referred to as "Opinions"), emphasizing that aesthetic education at all levels should achieve mutual connection, scientifically position the goals of aesthetic education at each stage, create a modern aesthetic education system with Chinese characteristics according to local conditions, and promote the development of every student's consciousness towards beauty, quality improvement, and personality perfection. However, to achieve this goal, one question should be raised - how can aesthetic education under different intellectual development goals effectively connect? Experience shows that children aged 3-6, whose thinking is in the pre-operational period, often view the growth, occurrence, and development laws of surrounding people and things from an egocentric perspective through concrete thinking, thereby acquiring direct experience related to them. To help them better adapt to collective life, kindergartens often base their education on this.

However, upon entering primary school, the shift in developmental goals forces children to change the way they acquire experience. At this stage, some children often struggle to adapt due to the inability to resolve internal conflicts, leading to generalized self-anxiety, difficulty adapting to primary school life, and subsequently finding it even harder to

develop healthy and upward aesthetic interests, styles, and ideals towards surrounding people and things. For many years, Chinese scholars have actively sought methods or paths that can effectively help children alleviate the phenomenon of poor learning adaptation, but with little success. Against this background, in 2021, the Ministry of Education issued the "Guidance on Vigorously Promoting the Scientific Connection between Kindergarten and Primary School," pointing out that both kindergarten and primary school must adhere to child-centered principles, strengthen the awareness of bidirectional connection, integrate multiple resources, and establish a long-term mechanism for the scientific connection between kindergarten and primary school based on following the laws of children's physical and mental development and educational laws, helping children acquire virtues and wisdom for lifelong development, enhancing their perception of life, broadening their horizons, and laying a good foundation for adapting to the future diverse society. From this perspective, the actual realization of the transition from kindergarten to primary school aesthetic education requires the connection of children's virtues and wisdom. It emphasizes that children need to acquire or generate a keen awareness of the surrounding world under certain conditions, enabling them to effectively perceive future changes and develop happily under the guidance of their own will. So, how to achieve the connection of virtues and wisdom from kindergarten to primary school? Does Montessori pedagogy benefit the development of children's keen awareness? This is the question this study aims to explore; as for the aesthetic education connection between junior high and middle school, and between middle school and primary school, it falls outside the scope of this study.

2. Montessori Pedagogy and Its Feasibility for Transitionontessori Teaching Method and Its Feasibility in Connection

2.1 Montessori Pedagogy

Montessori pedagogy is a teaching method created by Montessori for mixed-age children's group development of virtues and wisdom. It emphasizes that children, after experiencing and learning in an educational environment created by teachers, can more accurately recognize themselves, gradually control their inner world, restrain their behavior, and achieve autonomous learning. Its purpose is to help children acquire a lifelong inquiry quality, so that when they leave familiar life and learning fields, they can keenly perceive the commonalities between unfamiliar fields and familiar ones, and use this as a basis to quickly adapt to new life and learning domains, laying the foundation for integrating into society and living healthily and happily. In short, Montessori pedagogy is essentially a teaching method that promotes children's self-discipline awareness and helps improve children's independent working ability for lifelong development of virtues and wisdom. Regarding the generation of children's self-discipline awareness, Montessori pedagogy emphasizes that teaching should follow the principle of free development, allowing children to choose satisfying work, explore desired possibilities within a range, limit, and condition according to their thoughts, to achieve self-education and development of children's lives. Meanwhile, Montessori pedagogy also emphasizes that discipline in children's work should be the spontaneous result of children, and any disciplinary goals from outside children are not mandatory disciplinary goals that must be followed in children's work. Of course, this does not mean that children's disciplinary behavior should not be constrained by others. What is emphasized here is that children can independently establish rules in their work and are willing to follow self-set rules. Regarding the improvement of children's independent working ability, Montessori pedagogy emphasizes that all teaching should not teach but let children freely work, actively learn, and think independently in a prepared environment. Teachers and parents play the roles of observers and guides, identifying problems timely in their learning process, providing effective assistance, guiding children to progressively carry out work, strengthening their desire for independent growth, and improving their independent working ability. As for why Montessori pedagogy is more suitable for mixed-age children's education compared to education for a single age group of children. This is because Montessori pedagogy is not a teaching method that emphasizes knowledge acquisition but one that emphasizes method acquisition. Under the guidance of this teaching method, children can continuously explore learning methods suitable for themselves and different from others in interactions with peers of the same or different ages, better create a good ecological environment suitable for their own learning and life through mutual help, and thus better realize the independence of self-thinking, gradually leading to the improvement and growth of themselves.

2.2 The Value of Montessori Pedagogy for Kindergarten-to-Primary School Transition Education

Research on children's aggressive behavior in China can be traced back to 1988. As of April 8, 2024, a search on CNKI using "preschoolers" and "aggressive behavior" as keywords retrieved 1,123 related documents. After analysis and summary, it was found that the research scope on children's aggressive behavior in China is relatively narrow, with more studies on why aggressive behavior occurs, correction methods, and influencing factors, while there are fewer studies on understanding, analysis, and prevention.

2.2.1 Self-discipline Development, Self-restraint, and Independence

In Montessori schools, freedom and discipline coexist, with discipline being based on freedom [5]. Montessori creates a "prepared environment" for young children, allowing them to choose "work" according to their wishes and actively learn in a suitable environment. Teachers act as guides and observers, paying close attention to children's dynamics and providing guidance when they encounter difficulties, fostering their independence. The environment here is not unrestricted but orderly, where children follow invisible rules in the environment, guided by teachers to form certain behavioral norms. Children's long-term "work" in the created environment subtly influences the development of their self-discipline awareness. Older Montessori children, having experienced a long period of Montessori education, already possess a certain sense of self-discipline, laying the groundwork for entering primary school. The rules in primary schools are strict, specific, and standardized; children entering primary school must comply with corresponding rules, knowing what is allowed and what is prohibited, achieving self-restraint in all aspects to adapt to new disciplinary requirements. Primary school involves systematic subject learning, which is completely different from kindergarten's activity-based approach; most primary school learning is individual-based, requiring children to complete various tasks independently, aligning perfectly with the independent abilities nurtured in Montessori children during their kindergarten stage. This indicates the importance of self-restraint and independence for children in the kindergarten-to-primary school transition phase, with Montessori education striving to stimulate children's potential in this regard, promoting self-growth and preparing them for primary school entry.

2.2.2 Independent Work Facilitates Good Study Habits and Qualities

In Montessori schools, Montessori specifically designs a set of teaching aids for young children, who operate these aids independently in the classroom according to certain rules, completing "work" on their own. During the long-term operation of teaching aids, children inevitably encounter difficulties, with teachers providing guidance; meanwhile, as children grow physically and mentally in all aspects, they accumulate certain experiences, and their independent working ability is correspondingly enhanced. The development of independent working ability is reflected in the enhancement of initiative, i.e., children's spontaneous action to explore a certain thing, triggering thought about the thing, thereby promoting the development of thinking ability. Interest is the greatest teacher; exploring unknown things

requires children's interest and desire to explore. Montessori sets up various areas in the classroom to attract children's attention, allowing them to choose autonomously according to their interests, promoting the development of attention and focused learning [6]. Primary school learning and life are entirely new; facing a new stage, children need sufficient interest and desire to explore. With interest as support, children will truly want to understand and actively engage in in-depth learning. Compared to kindergarten, primary school learning is dull and rigid, requiring children to have good study habits and qualities; children's interest in new things triggers further exploration, where good study habits and qualities are better utilized. The excellent experiences passed on by Montessori kindergartens lay the groundwork for children entering primary school, better adapting to the new changes brought about by primary school.

2.2.3 Mixed-age Promotes Socialization and Self-positioning

Montessori's mixed-age education refers to children of different ages and classes interacting together under teacher guidance to play, learn, and carry out activities [7]. In the same class, children of different age groups interact, learning to coordinate with their surroundings, forming diverse communication patterns, exercising their social skills, and fostering correct social skills, promoting their social development. Meanwhile, Piaget's theory of cognitive development also points out that interactions between peers significantly contribute to young children's cognitive development [8]. When interacting with other peers, especially those of different ages and maturity levels, children may encounter peers with differing opinions, triggering cognitive conflict. When someone else's views and ideas differ from their own, children start to make choices in their thinking, either assimilating or reorganizing their existing knowledge framework to acquire new knowledge. Through assimilation and accommodation, the already imbalanced internal structure is rebalanced. In the continuous reorganization process, each child in the mixed-age class can move between levels according to their own pace of work, engaging in personalized learning. Entering primary school, in life, children must accept new people and things, actively participate in peer interactions; academically, children face new subject learning and need to quickly find a learning method suitable for themselves to avoid falling behind. Mixed-age education promotes children's social development and self-positioning, which will be sublimated in the primary school stage, with children in the kindergarten-to-primary school transition phase facing many new challenges after entering primary school. They need to be well-prepared to better cope with the transition to higher stages of education, better promoting the development of the kindergarten-to-primary school transition.

3. The Application of Montessori Pedagogy in Kindergarten-to-Primary School Transition Educationhe Real Manifestations of Aggressive Behavior in Older Preschoolers

3.1 Joint Cultivation of Children's Discipline Awareness by Multiple Partiesesearch Records of Aggressive Behavior in Older Preschoolers

From kindergarten to primary school, there are significant changes in school education models, teaching purposes, students' educational methods, learning objectives, and social environments. It is a normal social phenomenon for children to adapt poorly. However, long-term maladaptation not only causes dual pressure on children's physical and mental health but severely affects their social adaptability and the height of future education received. Based on various research discussions, to eliminate as much as possible the negative impact mentioned above, it is required that kindergartens, as an educational entity, adopt various methods to comprehensively cultivate children's self-discipline awareness, offsetting to the greatest extent the practical contradiction that cannot achieve one-on-one interaction between teachers and students. Montessori pedagogy proposes creating a "prepared environment" to help children establish a good sense of order. This requires the joint participation of children, teachers, kindergartens, and parents. Children need to cultivate autonomy and independence, through autonomous imitation, following good behavioral norms, and through positive interactions with multiple entities and social environments, consciously improving their self-regulation awareness. Teachers should reasonably control their emotions, excluding personal emotions from educational activities, avoiding rushing for quick success or attempting to solve everything with simple rule-making. In the process of emphasizing discipline and cultivating students' behavioral habits, teachers should recognize the differences in students' development levels and individual specialties, adhering to the unity of universality and specificity, subjective and objective adaptation. Real-time observation of students' execution situations and making actual adjustments for special circumstances are necessary. Strengthening the analysis of children's development levels and learning states to guide children in cultivating self-discipline awareness and improving self-education ability is essential. Outside classroom education, in other school living environments, schools should bear greater educational responsibilities for cultivating children's self-discipline awareness. By creating an orderly, harmonious, and good campus environment, students' initiative for self-regulation is subtly improved. For example: walking on the right side when going up and down stairs; reminding children to queue when drinking water or using the bathroom; not making noise during break times; not grabbing others' toys, etc.

3.2 Home-School Collaboration to Stimulate Children's Autonomy

Montessori said: "I forget if I listen; I remember if I see; I understand if I do [9]." In Montessori classrooms, children independently practice with tangible teaching aids, allowing them to self-guide and self-correct, stimulating their desire to manipulate objects manually and gaining a sense of self-satisfaction after achieving the behavior, which in turn acts on improving children's autonomy. Stimulating children's autonomy is conducive to their rapid adaptation to primary school education. Kindergarten courses are characterized by comprehensiveness and enlightenment, while primary school courses focus on knowledge transmission, emphasizing textbook content learning. The drastic change in educational content and completely different learning methods require educational entities to focus on students' autonomous learning,

criticism, and education. On a micro level, stimulating children's autonomy starts with small details in life, such as allowing children to make choices and decisions autonomously; parents should avoid excessive interference, adhering to "minimum guidance, maximum patience, and most encouragement," letting children make decisions on their own in minor matters. Research shows that in "free-range" families, children's psychological age is generally higher than their peers, with behavioral patterns and thinking abilities reaching peaks far beyond those of their age group [10]. Parents should avoid directly telling children the answers, focusing on cultivating their ability to think independently, allowing them to autonomously explore the underlying logic behind things.

3.3 Implementing Mixed-age Educational Practice Goals

Montessori believes: "Mixed-age classes are beneficial for the development of children's social skills [11]." Mixed-age education is a significant feature of Montessori education, where older children often take the initiative to care for younger ones, especially when they realize their behavior is imitated by younger children; they subconsciously exhibit positive and active role model behavior, while younger ones gain inspiration through imitation. Montessori gardens adopt mixed-age class grouping, mixing children of different ages in one class, typically about 25 people per classroom, with children aged 3, 4, and 5 each accounting for about one-third. To implement mixed-age education, firstly, higher requirements are placed on teachers who need to comprehensively master the laws and characteristics of children's physical and mental development, reasonably formulate educational goals and create suitable educational environments, possessing good observational and reflective abilities. Secondly, mixed-age education faces children of different age stages, which can cause issues with learning progress; what might take one unit of time in a same-age class could take several units of time in a mixed-age class. Therefore, teachers need to be more patient in mixed-age classes, providing one-on-one guidance for children who cannot keep up with the progress. Finally, in mixed-age classes, implementing "older teaching younger," older children teach younger ones like teachers; for older children, this process cultivates confidence, reviews past knowledge, consolidates and strengthens their existing habits, and fosters leadership skills. Children learn more effectively from other children than adults teaching directly. In mixed-age classes, older children often take on the role of "big brothers and sisters," and concerns about older children bullying younger ones are just isolated incidents without research significance. In this group, we should focus on the exemplary role of older children for younger ones, younger children's imitative behavior and self-acceptance ability. Mixed-age education can effectively alleviate children's anxiety about starting school and improve their adaptability. In the kindergarten-to-primary school transition phase, we can integrate the last year of kindergarten with the first year of primary school through mixed-age education to effectively achieve the integration of kindergarten and primary school education [12]. This model emphasizes transforming traditional educational concepts, systematically adjusting curriculum plans, teaching organization forms, activity implementation and guidance, educational evaluation,

home-school co-education, and other educational elements. The implementation of mixed-age education creates a prepared state for children, allowing them to greet the upcoming primary school life with a positive and optimistic attitude.

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