

THE MONTESSORI POTENTIAL
How to Foster Independence, Respect, and Joy in Every Child,

by Paula Lillard Preschlack

BOOK DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR MONTESSORI EDUCATORS
(You may want to read and discuss only one chapter each session to break this down!)

Introduction

1. How did learning about Montessori's approach of education change your view of children as pupils or of yourself as a teacher?
2. Have you ever witnessed some of the eight traits the author mentions? What traits do you see in your own students in your classrooms? Can you give an example/anecdote?

Chapter One

3. The author, Paula, describes a story for each of the four planes of development to show how children respond to Montessori environments; was there one in particular that inspires you to dive a little deeper into your Montessori practices with your students? Why?
4. Looking at the progression through the four planes, were there any differences between planes that you hadn't known about before? If so, how does this information inform (or change) your interactions with children?
5. On page 46, Paula writes that in Montessori schools, "...[children's] learning experiences are authentic, interest-driven, and personal." Why are these features important in the work that you do? How do you make sure these features are present in your presentations and in the children's work? (If this is hard for you, has this book helped you get ideas?)

Chapter Two

6. Of the three pillars the author describes as creating structure in Montessori's approach, which one are you most comfortable with and which is most elusive for you? Why do you think this is?
7. Paula talks about the spirit of the prepared environment on pages 61-63. What spiritual aspects of your classroom do you see the children responding to, and how does it show in their behaviors? Why do you think this aspect of your environment is important?
8. On page 64, Paula describes the Montessori training as being transformative. Was there a moment when you felt moved by what you were learning in your training? Please share with us what happened, what that was like. Why do you think this happened?

9. On p. 72, Paula claims that, “most children develop an appetite for all subjects” and explains that when you glance around a classroom, one should always expect to see a variety of work out. Does this describe your own classroom on most days? If not, did the reasons explained in the book give you incentive to aim for this goal?
10. Taking this a step further, what might you do when a student does not gravitate to a certain subject? Do you think there is a “Montessori” way to entice a child to do the work necessary? Do you think that it’s important to do so? How do you interest children in each subject and ensure that each explores every subject area?
11. Do you agree with Paula that having the complete curriculum that Maria Montessori, Mario and the AMI Pedagogical Committee designed, matters to the outcomes with children? If so, what do you think are the possible benefits? Why do you feel the way you do?

Chapter Three

12. Do you keep a journal of positive or inspiring things your students say and do to reflect on later (as Paula describes doing)? If yes, then how has this influenced your teaching?
13. What story about Forest Bluff School stood out the most for you? In what ways do you believe your school is similar, and different?
14. What goal do you share with colleagues that you think would improve your school? What actions do you think you can take as a staff to make this an eventual reality?
15. What about the author’s description of collaborating as a team to solve problems, appeals to you? Have you ever had a positive experience doing this? What was the outcome?
16. Do you offer Continuing Education events at your school for parents? If so, which have been the most positive ones, and why do you think so? Was there an idea in this book that you’d like to try in the future? Do you have another idea to try?

Chapter Four

17. Have you ever had an experience of meeting someone with a very different opinion of what “Montessori” is? What happened, and how did you react?
18. What do you think about the variety of perspectives on Montessori that the author describes?
19. Did you learn something new in this chapter? What was it?
20. Do you agree with the author’s premise that Montessori organizations can serve different, but complementary, goals? Are you convinced that this could be a positive?

Chapter Five

21. What in this chapter was new information for you?
22. Do you agree that public Montessori can be done well? Why or why not?
23. Do you have something to add to the author's list of challenges, characteristics or solutions for public Montessori programs?
24. If you are in a private Montessori school, do you think that supporting public Montessori programs to flourish your area will affect your enrollment negatively? Is there any way in which being supportive could actually help your own school by spreading the reputation of Montessori education? What actions could your school take to be supportive and yet maintain healthy enrollment at your private school (with its unique characteristics and strengths)?

Chapter Six

25. What do you think is the most important thing a parent can do for their child at home?
26. What section (or point) of this chapter do you think is *currently* the most urgent for the parents at your particular school to read and embrace?

Conclusion

27. On page 223, we learn about Maria Montessori's ideas about free thought and indoctrination in education. What did this make you think about? Can you share any place where you feel tempted to tell your students what they *should think* about something? What do you think is the best way to guide them without dictating "do's and don'ts" to them?
28. There is a quote on page 225, "Not in the service of any political or social creed should the teacher work, but in service to the complete human being, able to exercise in freedom a self-disciplined will and judgment, unperverted by prejudice and undistorted by fear." Montessori is further quoted as saying, "Man is free, therefore, of the bondage of heredity and possesses the great potential of latent spiritual energies that will develop in accordance with the possibilities offered by his environment." What do these two quotes mean to you, personally, for your work with children?
29. Paula points out on page 226 that "Even though it is unconscious, [children have a] yearning to find one's place in the grand story of life—a deep, and necessary quest to find purpose..." Why do you think it is important that we as a society—as citizens, educators and parents—respect this fundamental need for children? How do you think we can do this in little interactions and in things we say, do and model every day?