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Montessori Education and Chinese Medicine
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In the early days, Dr. Maria Montessori worked at a Psychiatric clinic. In China, Japan, Korea and other places where Chinese medicine plays a role, what are the implications on Montessori education?

Let me first share a bit about my background in Chinese medicine. When my son was about 1 year old, that's six years ago, he had mild asthma, and all the Western medical professor did was simply prescribed some inhalers and antibiotics for my son. Another time my son had to stay in the hospital for days because his fever wouldn't go away. Thankfully my son's condition was nothing severe, but this led me to ponder on the value of Western medicine and to learn more about Chinese medicine. I decided to study classic literature on Chinese medicine and follow a few Chinese medicine masters. My masters made me realize that anyone can learn to be a doctor! I am now my family's "personal doctor" who can observe and diagnose anytime as needed.

My knowledge in Chinese medicine helps me in teaching too. I teach parents about practicing Montessori at home in the past four years. I have always been asked problems like this,

- My child wakes up every 3a.m., I help him to get back to sleep without stimulating him, but he still wakes up every night, what can I do?
- My newborn baby cries every night. This is colic that western medical doctors said and the root cause of colic is still unknown to them.
- Bad temper?

They tried to practice Montessori philosophy at home but the problems still persist. My knowledge in Chinese medicine helps me to identify the root problems.

- My child wakes up every 3a.m., I help him to get back to sleep without stimulating him, but he still wakes up every night, what can I do?
 - This is internal imbalance, if you always wake up at 1 to 3am, your liver has some problem, this happens quite frequently after a baby had an immunization injection or being drugged and the liver has to get rid of the poison; if you always wake up at 3 to 5am, you have respiratory or skin problem. Then you should consult a doctor who knows this.
- My newborn baby cries every night. This is colic that western medical doctors said and the root cause of colic is still unknown to them.

- Chinese medical doctor see Colic as a Yin-yang issue. The root cause is coolness inside babies' bodies. They might have caught a cold as early as in the very cold labour ward. You know, they were born naked. At night when Yin in the environment is dominant, and Yang, i.e., the sun has gone, the coolness inside the body and the environment will affect the babies simultaneously. They have to cry and sweat to get rid of the coolness. That's why after a hundred days of crying, when the coolness or yin has gone, they will stop crying. What we have to do is to shorten this crying, is to change the environment, such as use some hot medicine to balance the coolness or by massaging tummy with warm oil. Insights in Chinese medicine help me to deal with issues not being dealt with in Montessori education or western system. And I found that Chinese medical method is the same as Montessori Method, we change and prepare the environment, to help the children get well and grow!
- Bad temper?
 - According to Chinese medicine beliefs, many emotional problems arise from physical issues, and emotional stress can in turn cause physical illness. Therefore, when we care for children, we need to take care of both their physical and emotional needs, or what Dr. Montessori said, physical and spiritual embryo. Bad temper relates partly to the liver and I teach the parents to massage the acupuncture points of the liver channel to release the pressure.

We are using Chinese medical theories to supplement Montessori education and localize Montessori education

Chinese medical theories, as many Chinese philosophies, are based on yin-yang. Let me introduce one of our Botany/Culture lesson. Let our children learn Chinese medicine and yin-yang. One way to illustrate yin-yang is through distinguishing cool and hot herbs or Chinese medicine.

For example, if you crush mint leaves and apply it to your hand, you feel cool. And if you crush ginger and apply it to your hand, you feel hot. Children can also use their 5 senses to experience Chinese medicine, some herbs are pungent and hot, and some are refreshing and cool, and etc.

The observation of yin and yang also lead me to ponder about the issue of observation in Montessori education.

One of the most valuable lessons we can learn from Chinese medicine is how to identify problems, that is--to make keen discernment, and to come up with appropriate solutions. In order to discern, one must be very attentive and observant. This is exactly what Dr. Montessori emphasized--she spent the majority of her life closely observing children, developed hypotheses based on those observations, and continually tested and refined her theories and methods.

A traditional Chinese Medical examination involves visual Inspection, listening, questioning, and pulse-taking. The information tells us what is going on in the patients' body, and the results help us to decide what form of treatment to use, whether it is acupuncture, herbal formulas, or lifestyle changes.

Linking this to Montessori education, visual inspection, listening, and questioning are at the centre of our practices too! Learning how to observe is the biggest lesson of all

In order to make discernment, one must know what is considered “normal” first. There is the concept of “normalization” in Montessori education, and in Chinese medicine, we also know how to tell whether a person is healthy or not without the use of any special equipment, let me call it physical normalization. You can check whether you are healthy too, take this simple Health Quiz

As for the temperature of our hands, feet, and face, this is the rationale. As we know, hot air rises, but with a healthy body our heart will push the heat outwards to our hands and feet. Therefore if your pattern is reversed, i.e., you have a hot face and cool hands and feet, then there might be an underlying problem. Children's hands and feet should be warmer than adults', but nowadays children often have cool hands and feet.

1. Warm hands and feet and a cool face?
 - As for the temperature of our hands, feet, and face, this is the rationale. As we know, hot air rises, but with a healthy body our heart will push the heat outwards to our hands and feet. Therefore if your pattern is reversed, i.e., you have a hot face and cool hands and feet, then there might be an underlying problem. Children's hands and feet should be warmer than adults', but nowadays children often have cool hands and feet.
2. Normal appetite?
3. Normal urination?
4. Normal defecation?
5. Sleep throughout the night?

6. Normal sweating?
7. Pain free?
8. Energetic?

We use this simple health quiz to help our three to six year old children to understand about their body too. I mean a living body. For example, besides using thermometer, we teach the children how to know whether one is healthy without using any special equipment. We teach our children to put their palm on their forehead. You can try now too. Put your palm on your forehead. If your palm is warmer than your forehead, you are normal. If the reverse is true, you are subnormal, and may have a fever.

So, the essential quiz on physical normalization, when combined with theories of yin-yang and wu xin, i.e. about the relationship between the five elements (wood, fire, earth, metal and water), created a few simple principles that can deal with all sorts of conditions. This led me to ponder on the issue of observation in Montessori education too.

I have been an apprentice of a Chinese medicine master for years; indeed, for an average student, it is necessary to follow a mentor at least for a few years until he can grasp the essence of observation and examination. Students should first acquire basic knowledge and logic behind Chinese medical theory by using their logical left brain, and then through their apprenticeship, come to see the connections between various things. This will then allow them to use their right brain to make fast and intuitive diagnoses. Let me highlight the importance of using both sides of the brain in learning. Focusing on either left or right brain will result in an imbalance.

In my humble opinion, I feel that our current Montessori teacher training does not spend enough time training teachers how to observe. Some programs may spend a day talking about the theories behind observation, and there are books or handouts with different forms that require teachers to assess children's motor skills, language skills and etc. These forms may be very "scientific", but because they cannot identify *WHY* certain problems arise, we will only end up with a bunch of numbers and data points. I think that we should not rely too much on checklists; some basic ones are helpful, but we should not over-depend on them. Otherwise we will risk the danger of having teachers mechanically and rigidly recording what children do. Another problem is that some instructors seldom bring their student teachers into the classroom when teaching observation.

So how long should a practicum be? It depends on how good the student-teacher and practicum supervisors are.

Another problem with our Montessori teacher training tradition is that we spend a lot of time teaching how to use the materials. We devote most of our class time how to use and introduce presentations to children. The result is that student teachers will become operational rather than observant. And even before they can tell what the fundamental causes behind certain behaviours are, they might begin to prescribe, i.e., to demonstrate materials and try to correct things.

So I think, first, we should strengthen the training of observation in our teacher training programs and arrange for student teachers to follow experienced Montessori educators more. They need to be in real classrooms and learn how to observe.

Second, we need to simplify the rules surrounding observation. When student teachers fully understand the basic theories and can flexibly apply their knowledge, then they can utilize a few core principles in any situation, without relying on long and complicated checklists.

The other commonality between Montessori education and Chinese medical theory is that they treat everybody as individual. Anything that comes from statistics deals with general trends, which means that they are useful for most but not all people. However, with personal medicine or personal education, each child's unique needs are taken into consideration before next steps are taken. (Montessori is a kind of personal education built within a community)

Good Montessorians follow the child, and good Chinese medical doctors follow the patients. After observation, we diagnose and prescribe, and then we observe, diagnose and prescribe again, until the patients get well.

The last thing I would like to share with you today is "Anyone can be a doctor and an educator." All along, we have come to believe that we are incapable of taking care of our own health and that we ought to depend on doctors. In the old days when societies were poorer, parents took care of their children by themselves when they're sick. For example, Chinese parents scraps, cups and massages when their child begin to get sick and usually the problem can be solved. They will consult doctors only when it is necessary. In the past, Chinese parents won't introduce ice drinks to children in order not to weaken them. But now, parents readily turn to "medical professionals" and



prescribe drugs whenever their children fall sick, most parents do not know how to assess their children's health anymore and don't know what is healthy.

The idea that "anyone can be a doctor" actually led me to believe that "parents should be educators" too. Since we started our Montessori school 4 years ago, we try to discourage parents from blindly relying on "professional" teachers; rather they should identify their own role as parents and cooperate with the school. In our school, parents and children are also researcher!

Whether it is Education or Medicine, we encourage participatory democracy. It is important to emphasize that participatory democracy recognizes the importance of engaging everyone in the decision-making process. Everyone should be actively involved and each person has the right to voice out their ideas. This stands in contrast to "representative democracy", where people's rights/ opinion are represented by selected professionals, and only a few authorities have the right to make decisions.