

MONTESSORI and WALDORF SCHOOLS

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SIMILARITIES

- Montessori and Waldorf are the fastest growing educational systems in the world today.
- Both are based on many years of experience, with all kinds of children, the world over.
- Both have great respect for the child as an individual, spiritual, creative being.
- Both believe in protecting the child from the stresses of modern life, overuse or misuse of technology such as television and computers.
- Both emphasize the education of the whole child, spiritual, mental, physical, psychological, over any particular academic curriculum.
- Both stress the importance of the natural environment, absence of plastic, keeping in touch with nature and natural materials.
- Both systems base their education on the needs of the child, believing that this will lead to meeting the needs of society as a whole. Incidentally, both Montessori and Waldorf schools were shut down by the Nazi regime during W.W.II because they refused to teach the ideology of the state.
- Both schools provide a rich variety of art, music, dance, and theater at all ages.

DIFFERENCES

Curriculum

WALDORF: Academic subjects are kept from children in Waldorf schools until a much later age than Montessori. They are thought to be, as in traditional schools, something necessary but not especially enjoyable, and best put off as long as possible. The day is filled with make-believe, fairies, art, music and generally the arts, putting off reading, writing and math until age seven or so.

MONTESSORI: Dr. Montessori on the other hand, filled her first school of 3-6-year-olds with dolls and other traditional make-believe toys but found that when children were given the opportunity to do real work such as cooking, cleaning, caring for themselves, each other, and the environment, they completely lost interest in make-believe and preferred real work.

She later, at the request of parents who were so impressed with the new cleanliness, happiness, and good manners of these slum children, invented manipulative language, math, and other academically-oriented materials and studied the children's response. Academic lessons were, and are now, never required or forced, but offered to and enjoyed by the children.

Method

WALDORF: In the early years the activities are most often taught and carried out in groups with the teacher leading. When academic subjects are studied they are taught in a more traditional way, the teacher talking, the children at desks being taught in a group. Children are kept together with a group of children their own age with the teacher ideally moving up each year with the children and so getting to know and working with the same group of children for six years. Arts are ideally always a part of the academic studies.

MONTESSORI: Social development is more like that of real life because children are not kept in a group of same-age students, but are grouped in 3-6 year age span (3-6; 6-12, 12-15). The teacher gives lessons individually to one child at a time, and often lessons are given to one child by another child. The choice of what to study or work on at any one time is left to the child, with guidance whenever necessary by the teacher.

A high level of creativity is reached because the children's experience is based on rich experience in the real world and the exact use of materials. Children learn exact techniques for many of the materials, just as they would learn the exact use of a piano or a violin, each experience considered a "key" which opens a new door of understanding and experience. This use of materials has been taught to the adults, adapted whenever necessary, through the direct and continued observation of children all over the world over the last 100 years.

Also a high academic level is the norm because of the depth of concentration the children reach while working and because children learn early to do research and to learn beyond the level of the teacher. The child's choice and concentration is respected and protected from interruption by others,

Fantasy and Imagination

WALDORF: In Waldorf philosophy, play is viewed as the work of the young child and the magic of fantasy, so alive in the young child, is an integral part of how the teacher works with the child. The teacher incorporates storytelling and fantasy into the curriculum. The child can use for the most part any of the materials in any way.

MONTESSORI: In Montessori fantasy and imagination are very much a part of the creative process. However, since the real world is seen as a wonderful creation as it is, children are introduced to the real world in all its variations in the first six years, and then use these experiences to create for the rest of their lives. The word "work" is used to describe the child's activities instead of "play" because they are respected as adult activities.

Maria Montessori (1870-1952)

Maria Montessori, a medical doctor and anthropologist, opened the first Casa dei Bambini (not "school" but "house of children") in Rome, Italy in 1907.

Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925)

Rudolf Steiner founded the Waldorf School at Stuttgart in Germany in 1919 for the children of the factory workers of the Waldorf Astoria Cigarette Company at the request of that company's director.

CERTIFICATION OF SCHOOLS

Unfortunately both are in the situation of not being able to protect and regulate the use of the words "Montessori" or "Waldorf." This means that in both cases there are schools that profess to follow the teachings of their originators but whose directors, well-meaning as they may be, have a variety of experience, some the full long-term teacher training. Others may actually have only read a book on the subject and decided to open a school with no trained teacher at all!

Having untrained teachers professing to teach Waldorf or Montessori is one of the things that has given a negative impression to the public and the educational world, and it makes it difficult for a parent to be sure of the quality of the school.

Both Rudolf Steiner and Maria Montessori are very worth reading, and have a lot to offer anyone who wants to base education on children's happiness and children's needs, rather than an adult-imposed curriculum.

For more information on Montessori theory and practice, see:

<http://www.montessori.edu>

<http://www.michaelolaf.net>

For more information on Waldorf theory and practice, see:

<http://www.waldorflibrary.org>

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF BOTH

It is not within the scope of this short paper to explain fully the philosophy of these two great educators, so I am instead sharing my own observations in the last 36 years.

During my first Montessori training course at The Maria Montessori Training Organization in London, England in 1970-71, I was introduced by fellow students to Rudolf Steiner and read many of his works. Later I visited Waldorf schools whenever possible.

I have actively been involved with Montessori schools since then, exploring many other methods of education besides Waldorf, serving as a "devil's advocate" for Montessori, but constantly coming back to Montessori as having the best chance of fully meeting the needs of children and society. Yes, I am prejudiced, but not without experience. I believe both systems have a lot to offer our children.

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