

My Two Sense

I like things that make sense to me. This may seem a ridiculously simple thought; one we can all agree upon or find a personal connection with like a well-written horoscope or fortune cookie, but I really mean it. I also know the most brilliant concepts often lie in simple ideas.

Yet increasingly, to the detriment of my wife (a truly sympathetic character in this regard) and others around me, I'm finding it difficult to make sense of so many things these days. For fear of touching on issues political, religious or potentially otherwise divisive – and for purposes of brevity, as I could go on for days - I'll refrain from listing any here. But I'm confident those of you who are reading this, who remember when we were young and, by dint of age and a relative lack of responsibility, saw the world simply, and who then became adults and saw complexities begin to emerge and who now, as parents, can't help but be concerned about the complex and rapidly evolving dynamics of the world we are expected to navigate and our children are expected to thrive in, know exactly what I am talking about.

So back to simple ideas.

Our children, Ethan (5th year) and Olivia (7th year), went to a Montessori pre-school in Fairfield. At the time, several aspects of the decision to send them there made sense. First, they needed to go to pre-school SOMEWHERE, right? (Talk about sensible!). Second, my wife had grown up a Montessori kid (Whitby School in Greenwich) and I had some familiarity with the philosophy, having studied education in college, and it – get this – made a great deal of *sense* to us. To be candid, however, what Montessori represented to me then was more an incrementally compelling alternative to a variety of good programs in the area than the profoundly differentiated, highly sensible and, yes, brilliant alternative I consider it today.

So they graduated, first my daughter, then two years later my son, and moved on to public school. My daughter thrived, but principally because of the social awakening she was beginning to experience and her natural curiosity, not because the academic bar was kept high, but attainable and appealed to her interests. My son's experience was less

constructive. He entered first grade knowing what 9 and 29 and 129 were because he had seen these numbers and held them in his hands. He and Olivia liked to add 3 digit numbers in their heads on long car trips not because they were brilliant (though with parents like... well), but because they had learned in pre-school that numbers are arranged in columns and big ones are no scarier than small ones. Yet he would be asked to spend all of first grade working with numbers 1 through 10 in all their varied forms (i.e., added to and subtracted from one another).

So we started looking around and visited Whipple Road. We toured the school, sat in on classes and got the full Mary Z and Ramani treatment. I walked out the front door, turned to my wife and said, "How much sense does this make?" (It was a rhetorical question... answer - lots.) "Now that we know about this place and this approach, how do we NOT send the kids here?" (Another rhetorical question... my apologies. No need to provide the answer this time.)

So let me bring this wandering commentary home. I believe the Montessori method works because it is based on ideas and concepts that fundamentally make sense. I believe the genius of Maria Montessori flows not from some abstract plane of intellect, but from a deeply intuitive sense of what children want and need at various stages of their social and intellectual development. The idea of presenting them with experiences and challenges expressly tailored to their capabilities at these stages is, frankly, the essence of simplicity itself. She achieved enormous success with limited resources not as a result of complex innovation, but rather because in bringing education to children at the time and in a manner in which they are interested and eager to receive it and enlisting them as responsible parties in their own development she was, in fact, taking the path of least resistance toward her objective.

That makes sense to me. And I'm seeing my children develop into interested, curious and reasoned/reasonable (well, most of the time) young people. They are acquiring an understanding that other people may experience and see things differently and that it's okay to question these differences, but equally important to be respectful of them. And they are developing a confidence in what they know and, more

importantly, in their ability to learn about that which they don't that should prove a valuable tool in this increasingly chaotic world.

I'd ask if all this makes sense to you as well, but if you're among the small group of people receiving this distribution I already know the answer...

Happy Thanksgiving to All

David Pritchard