

Mepi Article

My Journey

I am a product of public education as are all of my family members. Straight group lessons from good teachers doing their best to keep the attention of 20-30 students stuck in chairs. When I was growing up this is what I thought all education was: sitting, trying to pay attention to a teacher lecturing on and on. It wasn't until the end of my college education that I discovered something different; something, to me, revolutionary.

I was looking for a place to do my student teaching in Early Education. I found a perfect fit in Dancing Moose Montessori School. I started there after a short course in how to be a Montessori Assistant teacher. I will admit that at first I was not sure if this type of school could be successful in teaching students everything that they needed to know. In my first year as an assistant I was impressed by how the Montessori classroom functioned. I loved how instead of just letting the kids play or just teaching academics, this classroom combined play with function. I loved watching new children come in, not knowing the classroom routine, and be taught step by step how to be successful. I was amazed by the precision with which the 3 year olds could pour liquids. Everything that I saw in that classroom convinced me that this was an amazing method of teaching children to be successful; not just in academics but in their whole lives.

During this beautiful discovery process I was also taking my education classes in college. It puzzled me to hear my professors talk about the Montessori Method as a chaotic, non-disciplined classroom style. I wondered if my professors had ever been inside of a well-run Montessori classroom. I knew what they didn't, that we encourage

our children to be independent, that we teach them to be self-disciplined. No, our students don't sit quietly listening to the teacher all day, our students select their own learning and work on the things that they enjoy while being nudged forward by their teachers. I love that we don't force knowledge on our students, instead we encourage them to love learning and explore it all by themselves.

During my second year teaching at Dancing Moose, I became a lead teacher and had my first, and only, child. After becoming the lead teacher in my classroom, I realized that there was so much that I didn't know and I took the first chance I had to get more training. I started working on my credential that next summer and loved every minute of it. Everything felt right; the things I was learning felt right at home with my own personal philosophy on education. However, once the school year started, everything seemed to fall apart. I experienced my first panic attack the very first day of school. I couldn't put all of this wonderful knowledge into practice. I knew how the classroom was supposed to run so why wasn't it happening? I felt like I was failing my students. I felt that if I wasn't doing everything exactly the way I was taught, then they weren't going to get everything that they should. I think that every good teacher feels this way at some point during their careers. It is overwhelming and discouraging, but it can be overcome.

I found support among the other teachers in the school. One thing that I have noticed about Montessorians is their tendency to share with each other. When they make a new material, they show it to their colleagues and help them to create it too. If they find new research that may help you, they share it with you. As a Montessori teacher I have never felt more love and connection with my co-workers. I have worked with many talented teachers. When I had my first panic attack, the teacher in the

neighboring classroom to mine found time to teach me techniques to cope with anxiety. When I was frustrated that I couldn't figure out a way to help a child be successful, other teachers would volunteer to come observe them, to stay after school to make new materials and to research things on their own time to help me. The Montessori method not only helps children to be kinder and find peace, it also helps the adults that interact with these children

After five years at Dancing Moose, I decided that in order for me to continue to grow I would need to move on. I became a teacher at Elizabeth Academy, a Montessori Inclusion school. Here I watched the method I love be adapted to students of all needs. It's amazing to watch teachers work with a neurotypical child and a neurodivergent child at the same time because they have adapted the work to meet both of their needs. I love getting to learn new techniques on how to handle different situations. At Elizabeth Academy I gained even more support: from my fellow teachers to the administration and therapists. Every time I come across a challenge, there is a full support network available to help me to help every child succeed.

Isn't that what we all want? Every child to be successful? What I love about Montessori is that success doesn't ever mean the same thing for two children, let alone an entire classroom. Success for one child looks like bringing a tray to a table, while for another it could be completing the division board. Each child gets to be unique. Each child has every opportunity to be successful, and so does every teacher.