

Three Stages of Learning

taken from Maria Montessori+Dorothy Sayers+Mother Church

Ages 0-6 years old

ABSORBENT MIND / Grammar Stage / Loves Knowledge /
BELOW AGE OF REASON

- The brain is still growing – very susceptible to the environment
- Good and evil are encountered SENSUALLY – not morally – in their innocence
- Teach them to love goodness by making goodness beautiful: exposing them to beautiful liturgy, songs, images
- Capable of and hungry for **knowledge, facts, and names** of everything.
- Values being loved and focused on as an individual
- Can memorize far more easily than other stages
- Goal: help them achieve independent learning

Ages 6-12 years old

2ND DEVELOPMENT PLANE / DIALECTIC STAGE / Loves
UNDERSTANDING / AGE OF REASON

- Brain fully grown but connections between synapses still growing
- Blooming of the moral sense: intense concern with fairness, right and wrong, rules
- Fascinated by and hungry for moral rules, fairness, justice, standards, principles, living ideals
- Teach them about goodness via catechism, 10 commandments, Beatitudes, lives of the saints,
- Interested in what makes a hero, a saint, a villain, a sinner: give them real-life examples
- Help them recognize black and white: contrasts
- Hunger for systems, patterns, and seeing connections: want a unified system of knowledge
- Still able to memorize easily and organize facts into interrelated systems: will do this for fun!
- Want to understand what they know and organize it: delight in seeing “how it all fits together.”
- Communal and viral learning: will learn easily from one another: cooperative projects, clubs, teams – discovering new interests and talents via working together
- Goal: communal learning: social cohesion: helping everyone find their place

Ages 12+ years old

3RD DEVELOPMENTAL PLANE / RHETORIC STAGE / LOVES WISDOM
/ CONFIRMATION & MATURITY IN CHRIST

- Brain can continue to form connections but rest of body experiencing rapid physical changes
- Memorization becomes difficult, sometimes impossible: physical changes require more sleep
- Self-centered, self-exploring in a concentrated effort to achieve **self-awareness**
- Fascinated by and hungry for **personal applicability**, personal nuances, **pragmatism AND idealism simultaneously, life goals, VOCATION**. “What does all this mean to me?”
- Will argue and explore “gray areas” to discover application of truth
- Can usually identify sin/evil easily: help them to understand goodness as manifested in the variety of the human experience – Church Tradition – Church history - spirituality
- History, literature, moral theology, vocational training, practical life and relationship skills
- Appetite for knowledge of the human person, temperaments, differences between the sexes, understanding differences
- “Output” stage – mastery – opportunities to excel – complementary skills – joint projects with matched skills and growth – overcome insecurity by offering many opportunities for public speaking – debates - artistic projects – move from followership to leadership
- “teach the class” opportunities, demonstrate what they have learned: homeschool/tutor others
- Integration of outsiders and newcomers into community – leadership – “how can I contribute?” “What is God calling me to do?” “How can I serve?”
- Goal: help them understand the need for personal and ongoing conversion, owning identity
- Important in view of relativistic & fragmenting messages of culture **to affirm the unified vision of knowledge the Church presents as still valid, still present, and still growing in our world right now** – and we can be a part of that growth and spread of the Gospel.

Especially for middle/high school students:

FLAGGING INTEREST IN YOUR LESSON? “LET ME DRAW YOUR ATTENTION TO...”

- Consequences (and complexities) of choices
- How Church Tradition (popes, saints, Catholic culture) addressed this dilemma or problem
- How this applies to a job or vocation in “real life”
- Here’s where men and women might view this differently ...
- Here’s how East/West, ancient/modern, Catholic/Protestant, Christian/secular, etc. saw this differently...
- Review constantly by asking questions, verbal testing, “First, tell me what you know about...”
- “Here’s a problem no one has yet solved...” “One thing no one has figured out so far is...”
- Pray for wisdom, acknowledge mystery, ok for teacher not know everything: always more to learn, model humility and lifelong learning.