

Article

Teaching Philosophy for Children's Learning: Inspiration from the Winnetka Plan

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Abstract: Children should be encouraged to create and learn according to their unique interests and abilities. In particular, children from disadvantaged backgrounds must have access to learning methods that are tailored to their distinct cultural, socioeconomic, and developmental environments. This necessity underscores the importance of adaptive teaching for children's learning. Through the method of theoretical analysis, this article draws inspiration from the teaching philosophy of the Winnetka Plan to enhance the quality of adaptive teaching for children's learning. The findings of this article indicate that the development of Winnetka's teaching philosophy is influenced by Carleton Wolsey Washburne's life experiences. This approach posits that every child is capable of autonomously engaging in adaptive learning, emphasizes the assessment of students' readiness to learn, and supports the examination of children's learning interests through the design of personalized record cards. These principles of the Winnetka Plan not only underpin its adaptive teaching philosophy but also offer valuable insights for teachers implementing teaching strategies for children's learning. Hence, education should be a democratically oriented teaching for children's learning.

Keywords: Adaptive learning, Carleton Wolsey Washburne, Children, Teaching philosophy, Winnetka plan

1. Introduction

Promoting a professional vision of teaching as a key component of teacher expertise is a core challenge in teacher professionalization (Oellers, Junker, & Holodynski, 2024). Professional teachers must engage in adaptive teaching practices that cater to the diverse needs of their students. Every child is a unique individual. Because children from disadvantaged backgrounds exhibit differences in terms of their cultural, socioeconomic, and developmental environments, they require learning methods tailored to their specific characteristics and requirements, which underscores the importance of adaptive education. Adaptive education seeks to provide learners with a personalized learning experience that suits their individual characteristics and requirements to facilitate the development of their personal potential and the achievement of self-realization. Because learners have extremely diverse characteristics, with different abilities, genders, interests, experiences, learning styles, and cultural backgrounds, they exhibit a wide range of learning requirements. Therefore, teachers must adapt their teaching methods to these differences to ensure the success of every student. The concept of adaptive teaching has its roots in Confucius's philosophy of teaching students in accordance with their aptitude, which dates back thousands of years. This approach involves posing questions and providing tailored teaching and feedback based on each student's aptitude and personality. In the early 20th century, education scholars in Europe and America began experimenting with adaptive teaching methods such as the Winnetka Plan and Dalton Plan in schools (Huang & Chang, 2010; Li, 1997).

To overcome the shortcomings of traditional education, Carleton Wolsey Washburne (1889–1968), an outstanding American educationist, implemented the logic of advanced reformist education and pursued the goals of the pedocentric revolution in education, which gained momentum at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, to address the challenge of creating conditions under which students can master the material prescribed by a curriculum. To accomplish this aim, he established a unique model of individualized education called the Winnetka Plan (Yakovleva, 2024). The present article draws inspiration from the teaching philosophy of adaptive education described in the Winnetka Plan to enhance the quality of adaptive teaching for children's learning.

2. Relevant Research Topics

2.1. Teaching Philosophy

A teaching philosophy is a self-reflective statement of your own beliefs about teaching and learning. A personal reflection and statement that outlines an educator's beliefs, values, and approaches to teaching and learning. It provides insight into an instructor's motivations, goals for students, and the methods they employ to achieve those goals. It is rooted in both theoretical understanding and practical experience (Center for Educational Innovation at University of Minnesota, 2024; Drew, 2023). A teaching philosophy is a way of thinking which queries the basis of teaching practices including teaching content, objectives, obstacles, limits, methods, and theory-practice relationship. It describes the beliefs, values, and justifications that influence teaching practices and thinking (Ngene, 2023). This article explores the teaching content, objectives, and methods of adaptive education described in the Winnetka Plan to enhance the quality of adaptive teaching for children's learning.

2.2. Concept of Adaptive Education

Adaptive teaching refers to a teaching style that is suitable for individual characteristics. It refers to teaching methods and strategies that are tailored to the individual characteristics and differences of learners. These teaching concepts are similar to those of an individualized education program, which is widely implemented in special education and is one of the implementation methods of adaptive teaching (Wang, 2011; Washburne, 1932, 1940). Adaptive teaching is not limited to special education. Instead, adaptive teaching involves the use of various teaching strategies and resources to meet the learning requirements of individual students. Adaptive teaching is also used by teachers to evaluate the strengths and requirements of their students constantly and to modify their teaching strategies accordingly to ensure that all students meet expectations (Wang, 2011; Washburne, 1932, 1940).

Because adaptive teaching is based on the principle of adaptation to individual differences between students, its application is regarded as an individualized teaching strategy. Adaptive teaching aims to induce a sense of active learning in students to enable them to acquire knowledge and develop their potential. A supervised study is an individualized teaching technique that encourages students to conduct a self-study under the guidance of teachers. It is also a well-known adaptive teaching method (Kao, 2006; Washburne, 1932, 1940).

Individual teaching, group teaching, and class teaching are common types of teaching. Individual teaching facilitates the implementation of adaptive education. By contrast, group teaching involves a small number of students and does not entirely facilitate the implementation of adaptive education. Similarly, class teaching involves a large number of students and does not facilitate the implementation of adaptive education. This limitation is particularly evident in the context of large-class education. Implementing compulsory education ensures that all school-age students are included in the educational process. Therefore, to account for the operating costs and efficiency of schools, class teaching is implemented as the primary form of education (Huang & Chang, 2010; Meyer, 1988; Washburne & Marland, 1963).

Class teaching involves placing students in classes, dividing the learning content into teaching subjects, and delivering these teaching subjects within a specified number of hours. Although class teaching is associated with low costs, adapting it to the individual differences between students is difficult. Therefore, in the early 20th century, education reform movements began to emerge, the most popular of which were the Winnetka Plan and Dalton Plan. The early 20th century education reform movements, including the Winnetka Plan and the Dalton Plan, emerged in response to the challenges associated with class-based teaching. Traditional class teaching, with its standardized delivery of content and emphasis on efficiency, was cost-effective but struggled to accommodate individual student differences. The Winnetka Plan, developed by Carleton Washburne in the 1920s, sought to personalize education by allowing students to progress at their own pace. It combined individual instruction for core subjects like reading and mathematics with group activities in areas such as arts and physical education, which fostered social development. The plan emphasized mastery of learning objectives and offered differentiated instruction based on students' abilities. The Dalton Plan, created by Helen Parkhurst, also aimed to move away from traditional class teaching. This plan allowed students to take responsibility for their own learning by breaking down the curriculum into monthly assignments or "contracts". Students would work independently to complete tasks, with teachers acting as mentors or advisors rather than traditional instructors. The Dalton Plan encouraged self-regulation, independence, and collaboration. These movements were part of broader educational reform trends, focusing on more individualized and student-centered approaches to learning (Huang & Chang, 2010; Meyer, 1988; Washburne & Marland, 1963).

3. Teaching Philosophy in the Winnetka Plan

3.1. Background of Winnetka's Adaptive Education

3.1.1. Progressive Education during Childhood

Washburne never intended to pursue a career in teaching, nor did he undergo formal training related to teaching. Nevertheless, his passion for education and childhood experiences qualified him for the role. During his childhood in Chicago, his education was a priority for his mother, who served as a teacher at the School of Early Childhood Education and authored books on children. His mother was also acquainted with Francis W. Parker and John Dewey, who were leading figures in progressive education. Their discussions on education, which Washburne was exposed to, provided him with a deep understanding of progressive educational theories, which influenced his perspective on adaptive education (Washburne & Marland, 1963; Meyer, 1988).

3.1.2. Adaptive Teaching Experiences for First-Time Teachers

During his first year in the educational field, Washburne worked at a rural minischool, where he served as a principal and teacher for students in grades 4–8. He taught a class comprising 35 students with a wide age gap. Among these students, older boys attended school primarily to avoid farm work, and some students were recalcitrant and collaborated to expel the former principal. In addition to the challenges of misbehavior and a wide age gap, the aforementioned group of children had a considerable learning gap. In this diverse setting, Washburne realized the ineffectiveness of adhering to the traditional grade system. Therefore, he organized the students into heterogeneous groups depending on their academic levels, allowing those at the same level to study together. In this setting, the composition of these groups was subject-specific and subject to weekly adjustments based on each student's progress (Washburne & Marland, 1963; Meyer, 1988).

Despite the aforementioned academic groupings, music classes, art classes, and story and drama performances were simultaneously conducted for all grades. In addition, Washburne mandated that all students participate in discussions regarding the school's organization and norms because he believed that cultivating a self-discipline, self-management attitude among students is superior to the authoritative management style of traditional schools. This approach to teaching and school management made the majority of children love school and learning (Washburne, 1932, 1940; Washburne & Marland, 1963; Meyer, 1988).

In the following year, Washburne secured a position in the small town of Tulare, California, to teach a highly unique class of 17 students aged between 8 and 17 years. This class comprised students who faced challenges that prevented them from thriving in conventional educational settings. Among these students were deaf children and children with cleft palate and cleft lip, conditions that impeded their speech and led to their exclusion from regular classrooms. The class also comprised students grappling with mental depression and slow learning as well as those who had been expelled from regular classes because of behavioral problems (Washburne, 1932, 1940; Washburne & Marland, 1963; Meyer, 1988).

The Superintendent of Tulare granted Washburne complete authority with regard to teaching methods and classroom management, with the stipulation that Washburne must enable the aforementioned students to reintegrate into regular classes within a year and prepare older students for high school. In response to the diverse needs of his students, Washburne adopted an individualized approach to teaching. Initially, he arranged for a renowned surgeon from San Francisco to perform complimentary surgical procedures for students with cleft palate and cleft lip. Subsequently, he formed specialized groups to support slow learners to enable them to experience success and make considerable progress. He also established a football team for the older boys and encouraged them to compete against other teams, and they managed to achieve great outcomes. This initiative enabled the boys to understand the importance of academic diligence and comprehend that continued participation in the team was an essential component of their serious preparation for high school (Washburne, 1932, 1940; Washburne & Marland, 1963; Meyer, 1988).

During his mathematics classes, Washburne observed a broad spectrum of student abilities and provided additional support to slow learners (Washburne & Marland, 1963; Meyer, 1988). Drawing from his experiences in teaching at a rural minischool and his initial experience of educating a group of children with special needs, Washburne gained a profound understanding of the detrimental and ineffective nature of the traditional educational system, which requires all students to progress through a grade-based curriculum with standardized teaching materials. During his early teaching experiences, Washburne gained valuable insights that reinforced his conviction regarding the necessity of adaptive education (Washburne & Marland, 1963; Meyer, 1988).

3.1.3. Effect of Innovative Teaching at the San Francisco Normal School

Dr. Burk, the former president of the San Francisco Normal School, was known for his dynamic leadership, lofty ideals, and decisive nature. Under his guidance, the San Francisco Normal School gained a reputation for educational innovation and high-quality teacher training. In 1912, Dr. Burk's colleague, Mary Ward, conducted an informal experiment involving first-year students.

She arranged for these students to participate in elementary school educational internships. She planned the teaching activities with the students on a daily basis and allowed them to lead the learning process, which was followed by a teaching review after class (Washburne, 1932, 1940; Washburne & Marland, 1963; Meyer, 1988).

One day, the students of the San Francisco Normal School reported a major gap in the mathematics abilities of primary school students. Therefore, Ward instructed the students of the San Francisco Normal School to prepare various teaching materials to cater to primary school students with different academic levels. After a semester of this experimental approach, a wide variation was still observed in the progress of the primary school students. Therefore, Ward compiled data on the number of days that the elementary school students took to complete a textbook, transformed this information into a graph, and presented it to Dr. Burk. Impressed by the findings, Dr. Burk encouraged Ward to share the results of her self-study textbook experiment with other faculty members. Subsequently, he initiated a collaborative effort among professors from various disciplines and students from the San Francisco Normal School to create a self-instruction manual for each subject. These manuals were designed to allow primary school students to learn at their own pace. Following the compilation of the self-study manuals, elementary school children were able to engage in individualized learning depending on their unique learning speeds. Dr. Burk documented these findings in a paper titled “Remedial Methods for Fixed-Pace School Education”, which garnered widespread attention and acclaim (Washburne & Marland, 1963; Meyer 1988).

After reading Dr. Burk’s report, Washburne felt a profound connection to his ideas. He recognized that Dr. Burk shared the same ideas but possessed greater experience and knowledge. Motivated by this realization, Washburne reached out to Dr. Burk, expressing a desire to learn from him. After many interviews, Washburne joined the San Francisco Normal School in 1914. Initially, he apprenticed under Mary Ward for 3 months to understand her approach to developing self-study teaching materials for primary school mathematics courses and how to supervise tutors and students in such courses. After his apprenticeship, with his background in science, Washburne used scientific survey and interview techniques to identify the scientific knowledge required by normal school students and the scientific interests of school-aged children, and he used these data to compile self-study textbooks of primary school science courses. In addition, he developed diagnostic tests for each textbook unit of these courses. The aforementioned innovative educational efforts contributed to the formation of Winnetka’s adaptive education (Washburne & Marland, 1963; Meyer, 1988).

3.1.4. Educational Expectations of Residents in Winnetka

Winnetka, which is located 20 miles (~32 km) outside of Chicago, is a small suburban city in the Lake Michigan region and is surrounded by oak trees, which makes it a picturesque place. The majority of its residents are businesspeople with high socioeconomic status or professionals commuting to Chicago, who have the desire to establish private schools near their homes for their children’s education. In 1912, during a meeting convened by the residents of Winnetka to discuss the establishment of a school, Edwin Fetcher proposed the idea of reforming the existing public schools instead. He sought the support of the residents, asked everyone to help, and pledged to enhance the quality of public schools. After running for president of the local school board, William Wirt was solicited for recommendations on school improvement. In 1914, E. N. Rhodes was also recruited to manage the Winnetka School (Washburne, 1932, 1940; Washburne & Marland, 1963; Meyer, 1988).

The Winnetka School System included primary school education for grades 1–5 and middle school education for grades 6–8, with graduating students eligible to attend the nearby New Trier Township High School. By 1918, the committee and residents were in search of another superintendent. Edward Yeomans, a committee member, who was acquainted with Dr. Burk’s work, reached out to Dr. Burk for advice and a recommendation for a suitable candidate to fill the superintendent’s role (Washburne & Marland, 1963; Meyer, 1988).

Upon hearing about the aforementioned role from Dr. Burk, Washburne was surprised and delighted because he recognized it as a great opportunity to expand his concept of adaptive education into the public school system. Previously, many visitors to the personalized learning classrooms of the San Francisco Normal School had raised the following concern. With only 20 students per class and two normal school students as assistants, individualized teaching can be effective. However, in public school classes with up to 35–40 students and only one teacher, individualized instruction might be unfeasible (Washburne, 1932, 1940; Washburne & Marland, 1963; Meyer, 1988).

Washburne was convinced that his appointment as superintendent in the Winnetka area could demonstrate to the world that, given suitable teaching materials and guidance, effective education can be achieved in large-class settings within public schools. Thus, starting in 1919, Washburne spearheaded the development of the renowned Winnetka Plan. Over the next 24 years, students in Winnetka public schools were able to learn and grow in a manner that met their requirements and aligned with the educational expectations of Winnetka’s residents (Washburne, 1932, 1940; Washburne & Marland, 1963; Meyer, 1988).

3.2. *Teaching Philosophy for Children's Learning in the Winnetka Plan*

3.2.1. Every Child has the Right to Attain Proficiency in the Knowledge and Skills Necessary for Life

As a result of variations in intelligence, individuals differ in their learning times and speeds. Therefore, schools should enable students to acquire basic knowledge and skills at their own pace by employing varied timelines and teaching materials. To achieve this goal, Washburne, drawing inspiration from the individual instruction technique advocated by Dr. Burk, restructured the knowledge and skill components of the curriculum of the Winnetka School. He developed teaching materials that facilitated self-study and self-correction and established diagnostic tests for each textbook unit (Washburne, 1926, 1952).

3.2.2. Human Progress Depends on the Comprehensive and Suitable Development of Each Individual

The progress of human society depends on the adaptive development of every member within the community. Because each child possesses unique capabilities, self-expression and creativity must be encouraged to contribute to human advancement. At the Winnetka School, individual differences are embraced, and the cultivation of personal creativity is prioritized by offering diverse opportunities and stimuli. This approach ensures that children can achieve appropriate development, thereby facilitating human advancement, which is contingent upon the comprehensive and adequate development of each individual (Washburne, 1926, 1952).

3.2.3. Every Child Can Learn Spontaneously and Appropriately

Childhood is a crucial phase of life in which individuals must develop in an unencumbered and comprehensive manner. Washburne endeavored to transform the Winnetka School System into a setting filled with joy and engagement for children. To encourage children to attend school, he cultivated a dynamic, comfortable, and nurturing classroom environment to help children to learn spontaneously and appropriately and enjoy their right to a natural, joyful, and fulfilling life (Washburne, 1926, 1952).

3.3. *Curriculum Development in the Winnetka Plan*

3.3.1. Principles of Curriculum Development

Complemented by his research and observations at the San Francisco Teachers College, Washburne's initial experiences in teaching made him deeply aware of the major disparities in learning abilities among children of the same age or grade across different subjects. He argued that subjecting children with diverse capabilities to the same learning materials and assessments can be excessively detrimental. Therefore, leveraging his experience in textbook compilation at the San Francisco Normal School, he led a collaborative effort with teachers in the Winnetka area to conduct research and revise the curriculum of the Winnetka School on an annual basis, which resulted in the creation of tailored textbooks for each subject. Overall, the Winnetka Plan was founded on five key curriculum development principles: (1) to clearly and concisely define the learning objectives that must be mastered in each subject, (2) to prepare self-study materials that facilitate self-learning and self-correction in each subject, (3) to devise diagnostic tests for each subject to gauge students' learning status, (4) to enable children to acquire essential knowledge and skills at their own pace, and (5) to allocate half the morning and half the afternoon daily for group and creative activities (Washburne, 1932, 1940; Washburne, Vogel, & Gray, 1926).

3.3.2. Connotations of Curriculum Preparation

The Winnetka Plan is broadly categorized into two main parts: common essentials and group and creative activities. Common essentials refer to the fundamental knowledge and skills that each child must possess to navigate life. These essentials include the ability to perform accurate calculations, the ability to use punctuation and vocabulary correctly, the ability to write fluently and clearly, the ability to read level-appropriate textbooks, the ability to spell commonly used vocabulary correctly, and the ability to identify the names of geographical phenomena and historical people, places, and events. They also include the ability to engage in intellectual discussions on civil, social, industrial, and other relevant topics with others. Group and creative activities are aimed at fostering the free development of children's creativity and potential while nurturing their social awareness. These activities include gatherings, autonomous activities, physical education classes, craft projects, drama performances, topic discussions, project work, and appreciation of literature, music, and art (Washburne, 1932, 1940; Washburne, Vogel, & Gray, 1926). Common essential knowledge is crucial for all students. However, because each student possesses unique abilities, this knowledge should be acquired on an individual basis. Group and creative activities focus on cultivating social awareness and practical skills, and they enable children to showcase their abilities. Because of the distinct purposes and nature of the aforementioned two curriculum components,

the methods for preparing corresponding courses differ. The following section discusses the preparation methods for these two types of courses (Washburne, 1932, 1940).

(1) Curriculum Preparation for Common Essential Knowledge

Washburne believed that the instinct for learning is innate among children. However, he acknowledged that in the current intricate civilized society, effective learning necessitates systematic planning (Washburne, 1940). Living in an era dominated by testing, efficiency management, and scientific inquiry, Washburne was a proponent of the idea that progressive education must be grounded in scientific research and reasoning. He argued that scientific research in education is instrumental for identifying which teaching methodologies most effectively foster children's development (Washburne, 1952). Therefore, while compiling teaching materials for subjects such as reading, mathematics, spelling, writing, and social studies, Washburne used scientific methods to evaluate students' learning readiness, identify children's learning interests, compile step-by-step teaching materials, and collate essential social knowledge required for life. He also designed personalized record cards to carefully track students' progress and attitudes toward learning in various subjects (Washburne, 1932, 1940).

(2) Evaluating Students' Learning Readiness

Washburne observed major disparities in the knowledge and abilities of children of the same age across various subjects. He underscored the importance of understanding each student's starting point for learning through suitable diagnostic tests before commencing instruction. This approach is valuable because an accurate assessment of students' readiness for learning is crucial for providing them with appropriate teaching materials. For instance, in the Winnetka School System, the first step in implementing individualized reading teaching is to conduct tests, with different tests employed across different grades. Specifically, the Burgess Picture Scale is utilized for the third and fourth grades, the Stanford Reading Test is utilized for the fifth grade, the Gates Silent Reading Test is utilized for the sixth grade, and the Stanford Reading Test and Gates Silent Reading Test are utilized for the seventh and eighth grades. Following the administration of these tests, teachers analyze the obtained scores to determine each student's reading level. This approach enables a clear understanding of each student's reading level and clarifies why some students may be unable to study other subjects at their grade level, such as geography and mathematics word problems (Washburne, 1932).

(3) Identifying Children's Learning Interests

During his tenure at the San Francisco Teachers College, Washburne employed scientific methods to explore the scientific topics that intrigued children. He frequently visited primary school classrooms and invited students to ask various scientific questions. Washburne meticulously answered these questions and documented the children's inquiries. To broaden the scope of his investigation, he also enlisted the help of graduate normal school students teaching in different cities to answer questions that interested children in a similar manner. By analyzing the scientific principles underlying these questions, Washburne classified them to serve as a foundation for the development of science textbooks (Washburne & Marland, 1963).

The Winnetka School conducted surveys among children in 34 cities across the United States to determine their preferred reading materials. These surveys analyzed variations in book preferences among children with differing reading abilities. The findings were compiled into resources such as *What Books Children Like—Winnetka*, *What Children Like to Read—The Winnetka Graded Book List*, and *Measurable Difference in Books Suitable for Different Grades*, which offered brief descriptions of each book's content. This compilation enabled teachers to select appropriate books for children at various reading levels (Washburne, 1926, 1952), thereby effectively catering to the children's learning interests.

Compiling step-by-step teaching materials posed a major challenge for teachers, particularly in terms of establishing resources that support self-study and self-correction. To address this challenge, the teachers of the Winnetka School drew inspiration from the self-study textbooks used at the San Francisco Normal School and across the United States. They adapted these resources into self-study books, exercise books, and diagnostic tests tailored for individualized learning to compile step-by-step teaching materials. However, these instructional materials were not static. Over a period of 7 years, Washburne led a comprehensive review of school children's performance across various subjects from May to July every year. This process gradually indicated the normative performance for each grade and the achievable learning standards for children. These insights were subsequently used as a reference for refining the aforementioned teaching materials (Washburne, 1926, 1952).

(4) Collating Essential Social Knowledge Required for Children's Life

While editing science textbooks, Washburne extensively compiled various scientific phenomena encountered in daily life, such as why objects fall down, why balloons fly upward, why kites fly in the air, why rain falls when dark clouds are present, and why lightning appears before thunder. He classified thousands of such scientific inquiries on the basis of scientific principles and used

them as a foundation for editing science textbooks (Washburne & Marland, 1963). This approach aimed to provide a compilation of knowledge essential for children to navigate their lives effectively.

Washburne was also intent on transforming the traditional method of teaching social sciences, which often relied on the rote memorization of chronological events and historical facts. He envisioned a curriculum in which the study of history would enable children to grasp major life events. He also believed that geography lessons would inform children of the living conditions, economic development, and environmental aspects of domestic and global residents and that citizenship education would impart political knowledge and civic skills (Washburne, 1926, 1952).

While editing social science textbooks, Washburne adhered to two primary criteria for content selection. The first criterion was the frequency with which names of people, places, and historical events appear in the literature or conversations, and children must be familiar with frequently appearing names. Without such knowledge, children would lack the necessary background to engage meaningfully in further reading or learning. The second criterion pertained to the relevance of knowledge to help children address real-life problems as they participate in social life (Washburne, 1926, 1963, 1969).

(5) Designing Personalized Record Cards

In the Winnetka School System, each student is provided with a unique goal card, which differs from traditional report cards that typically list scores or grades in each subject for the purpose of ranking or comparison. These personalized record cards are designed with two sides. On the front side, the card lists the student's objectives for each subject and unit as well as the date of mastery. On the back side, the card documents the student's learning attitude every 6 weeks, indicating their group activity participation, collaborative efforts, and overall learning attitude. This approach indicates that learning within the Winnetka School System is not predicated on competition and comparison. Instead, it clearly focuses on individual progress and development. In addition, the Winnetka School System places equal importance on learning attitudes as it does on knowledge and skills acquisition. These detailed record cards serve a dual purpose: they enable students to be fully aware of their learning goals and progress, and they provide parents with a transparent overview of their child's educational status at school s (Washburne, 1926).

4. Reflection: Education Should Be a Democratically Oriented Learning for Children

To improve the quality and efficacy of teaching, it is vital to use teaching approaches that foster students' initiative, positivism, and creativity in learning, in addition to standard teaching methods (Tra, 2023). Adaptive learning is a kind of learning that provides learning support suitable for individual characteristics with the differences in the individual learning process, and its technical core is to help teachers and students achieve better learning effects through personalised learning (Li & Liu, 2024).

Teaching philosophy statements reflect our personal values, connect us to those with shared values in the larger teaching community, and inform our classroom practices (Beatty, Leigh, & Dean, 2009). Children are integral members of the community. While individually developing in an appropriate manner, children must cultivate their social awareness to contribute meaningfully to their society. They must also be educated on the interrelationship between individuals and groups, a concept that Bobbit referred to as large-group consciousness. At the Winnetka School, many cooperative activities are designed to foster children's social awareness and enable children to develop appropriately while contributing their unique talents to their respective groups. For instance, through drama performances, the compilation of school magazines, group games, and band performances, children can realize the importance of showcasing their strengths and the value of teamwork and division of labor. In addition, student assembly activities can help children to develop a sense of citizenship. History and geography lessons are also instrumental in cultivating children's social awareness. Realizing human well-being relies on each individual's ability to develop social consciousness (Washburne, 1926). To nurture children's social awareness, Washburne employed the concept of adaptive teaching. This approach allows every child to learn in a manner that is spontaneous and tailored to their readiness, interests, and abilities. By evaluating students' readiness to learn, exploring their interests, and designing personalized record cards, the Winnetka School ensures that education is closely aligned with each child's unique requirements. Hence, education should be a democratically oriented learning for children. Children can learn about democratic society where they live.

Overall, Washburne's belief in the importance of the holistic and appropriate development of each individual underscores the philosophy that children should be encouraged to create and learn according to their unique interests and abilities. In this article, the authors consider the intersections of teaching philosophy and adaptive education. These principles of the Winnetka Plan not only underpin its adaptive educational philosophy but also offer valuable insights for teachers implementing adaptive teaching strategies for children. After all, education should be a democratically oriented learning for children (Shih, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c; Smithers & Mazzei, 2024; Washburne & Marland, 1963).

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