

Montessori's Erdinger Appendices
Appendix B: Study and Work Plans
Summary Thoughts and Reflection
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Montessori's second appendix to the book *From Childhood to Adolescence* opens immediately with the phrase "study and work", echoing her redefinition of an educational environment which sees study as a "response to a need of the intelligence," and which "if based upon our psychic nature does not weary." Education, she holds, should widen education rather than restrict it. For the adolescent, education should work directly toward what Montessori refers to as the valorization of the personality, a process which sees students' preparation for the future not simply as an end, but as a means through which adolescents become members of society, building and maintaining of their own values and feelings of responsibility toward society as a whole.

In this writing, Montessori again speaks of responding to learners by addressing the needs of their developmental stage, in the case of adolescence by addressing both the "moral and physical care" of the students and the "syllabus and methods of studies" which an adolescent "center for study and work" requires.

The Moral and Physical Care of Adolescents

Montessori's ideas for adolescents are based on the development of an outdoor environment, with work upon the land serving as a starting point for studies in culture, the sciences and human interaction. Writing perhaps as a physician rather than an educator, she offers here general suggestions for physical development, all of which seem ideally suited to a life of study directly tied to physical work and accomplishment. At the same time, however, Montessori cautions that we must consider not only the physical, active occupations provided by this environment, but also adolescents' need for solitude and quiet, which she deems as "essential for the development of the hidden treasures of the soul."

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Related to the physical health Montessori seeks, she also writes of the relationships which exist between students, teachers, and the environment they share. She refers to the moral care of young people as being primarily based on respect for the young personality, remembering that "in the soul of the adolescent, great values are hidden." In the minds of young people, she writes, lie not only humanity's hope for future progress, but also the judgment of ourselves as a people and of our times. So much in Montessori's writings on adolescence speaks to the nature of the transition through which young people move on their journey toward adulthood, and the need for the care and understanding which we as adults can bring. Indeed, she writes that in this delicate time, "It is better to treat an adolescent as if he had greater value than he actually shows, than as if he had less and let him feel that his merits and self-respect are disregarded."

Our respect for young people, Montessori states, is of the greatest importance, and must be reflected in both our daily practice and the environment which we prepare for the students. In a center for study and work as Montessori proposes, young people need the freedom to take action based on individual initiative. As part of our practice of respect for young learners, however, and in keeping with the idea of the prepared environment, Montessori calls us to create a structure, “restricted within certain limits and rules that give the necessary guidance,” within which students’ individual actions can be “both free and useful... necessary and sufficient to maintain order and ensure progress... The environment must make the free choice of occupation easy, and therefore eliminate the waste of time and energy in following vague and uncertain preferences.”

Educational Syllabus and Method

Writing again in the broad strokes of thought which comprise the Erdkinder Appendices, Montessori envisions an educational plan which divides into three parts: the opening of self-expression, the fulfillment of fundamental needs, and the theoretical knowledge and practical experience gained from what might be called general education.

In addressing opportunities for self-expression, Montessori turns to some of the “artistic forms of occupation” which have flowered in human society: music, the use of language, and work within the arts. In exploring these forms, she writes, adolescents engage their imagination, and the linguistic/artistic skills needed for full communication. She speaks of music appreciation and the making of music; the writing of stories and poems, dramatic interpretation, speech making and debate; and the individual expression of aesthetic feeling which can come through the handwork and technique in the physical and graphic arts.

Montessori also addresses young peoples’ “psychic development,” seeing the active fulfillment of our needs as humans as motivating forces in both personal and social

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evolution. Looking first to the idea of moral education, Montessori refers to a “spiritual equilibrium” on which all else depends. Spiritual balance, by its nature, is a subjective device unique to each person, yet Montessori encourages us to consider stability of the spirit to be as vital to the adolescent as physical stability. Montessori also addresses mathematics and language in this section, seeing the first as important to both

understanding and action within “the special forms of progress characteristic to our time.” The development of language, she writes, is part of the development of the personality, and the primary tool in expressing thought and developing understanding. On the strength of this, she states that it is simply a “social convention” that education should lead to the ability to communicate in several languages.

Lastly, Montessori calls on education to play a vital role in the preparation of young people for adult life, looking to both knowledge and experience as interactive avenues for social engagement. Recalling the themes of the first Erdkinder appendix, Montessori here calls for general education to be comprised of three groups: study of the earth and

living things, study of human progress and the building of civilization, and the study of the history of humanity.

Within the study of the planet and life, curriculum connections can easily be made to a broad range of biologic and physical sciences, including geology, astronomy, botany and zoology, physiology and anatomy. The study of human progress leads to an examination of ideas and tools in areas such of physics and chemistry, mechanics, engineering, and genetics. She speaks of machinery as giving humanity “supra-natural” power, greatly expanding our ability to impact our physical surroundings, and calls for a commensurate growth not only in our own use of such tools, but in an individual and social morality concerning their use. For there is a “responsibility toward humanity” incurred, she notes, when people assume powers greater than those which are natural to us.

When considering a study of the history of humanity, Montessori writes of the need to examine the history of scientific discovery and geographic exploration, looking to observe not only the ways in which humans have acted upon their surroundings, but how humanity has improved as a result. She speaks of humanity’s effect on the geographic environment, of contact between peoples and races, the “ideals and moral standards” of wars and conquests, and the influences of religion and patriotism on human behavior. Such studies, she suggests, should consider the uplifting of humanity toward “tendencies which grow ever less in cruelty and violence, and strive to form ever wider groups of associated individuals.” What, Montessori asks, are the relationships between human action in history and human/social evolution? In studying “the present day and the nation”, its constitution, and the “special merits and moral characteristics” of its laws, what can we learn historical continuums as they reach forward into current times?

While offering ideas specific to the academics, the overriding theme of this essay is one of respect. Montessori calls us not only to recognize the needs and abilities of the adolescent student, but also our own roles as guide and support in the lives of adolescents. Care for this age group, she tells us, includes the provision of structure which allows for the openness of change, and an offering of multidisciplinary curriculum, with its inherent possibilities for understanding and growth.