

Introduction and Purpose Education for a Better World

In the years prior to the Second World War, Maria Montessori and others became increasingly concerned with the question of peace. Deepening her previous work in education, Montessori began to consider the problems of both human and social development, and the role of education in enhancing each. Indeed, in her book *Education and Peace*, Montessori declared that “Establishing a lasting peace is the work of education; all politics can do is keep us out of war.”

Montessori presented her ideas plainly in a 1937 address. War, she said, cannot be prevented by simply keeping children from playing with weapons, nor by steering the study of history away from the view that honor comes from victory in battle. In a short essay entitled “Erdkinder,” Montessori wrote that the development of society had outstripped the development of the human spirit, that people had lost their understanding of events as well as their ability to protect themselves against them. The role of education in improving the situation, she wrote, “involves the spiritual development of man, the enhancement of his value as an individual, and the preparation of young people to understand the times in which they live.”

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In relation to social engagement, Montessori believed that education should be a developing force for both inner discipline and a sense of morality. Toward this end, Montessori looked to education to help young people see “the fire of genius, the value of intelligence, and the light of conscience” as important tools in the creation of peace. One of the effects of Montessori education has been to aid societal development by helping individuals understand the interdependent natures of our physical and social worlds. This, in turn, encourages a cultural exchange based on confidence, self-sufficiency, and actions of communal peace. Montessori’s contributions to education in this regard have been both deep and profound. That the Montessori community continues to expand this thinking through the development of adolescent learning environments is both hopeful and gratifying.

The purpose of this writing is to outline various aspects of Montessori adolescent education. Sections include thoughts on Montessori’s own philosophy; the idea of pedagogy of place as applied to the humanities and sciences, microeconomy as seen in the context of an adolescent program; and the development of human interaction within community. These are followed by a proposal for the creation of an adolescent program, including thoughts on preparation during the 2010-2011 and 2011-12 school years, and development goals for the first year of the adolescent community in the 2012-13 school year.

Whether this program would be developed as a land-based or classroom-based program is open to discussion. For the purposes of this proposal, it is assumed that the program would be classroom-based with regular, secure access to open land and community cultural resources.

Part One

Philosophy and Program Elements for an Adolescent Community

Montessori's Philosophy for Secondary Education

In the three appendices to the book *From Childhood to Adolescence*, Montessori outlines her thoughts on secondary education. In the first of these, simply titled "Erdkinder," or Earth Child, Montessori writes about secondary education in broad themes of labor and land, production and activity, and the role these play in helping adolescents move from childhood into broader, mature societal relations.

In developing her ideas, Montessori speaks of a prepared environment which offers adolescents protection during a time of physical transition, and guidance during a time of expanding vision and involvement. In the Erdkinder essay,

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Montessori calls for an adolescent learning environment where "...above everything else, the adolescent should have a life of activity and variety."

Much of Montessori's thinking in the Erdkinder essay is about rooting the expansion of adolescence in ways which are forward moving, community oriented, and which support the goal of helping young people enter society not simply with a skill set for self support, but with the experience and knowledge required for self-sufficiency. Toward this end, Montessori writes of an educational environment which appeals to both the

developmental needs and the capacities of adolescents as they prepare to interact in larger and more significant ways with the society around them.

One can easily make connections between these ideas and the overall cultural curriculum of the elementary grades. There, emphasis is given to the ideal of the cosmic task, revealing how seemingly simple things aid one another in interdependent systems of support which lead to expanding structures. In the Erdkinder essay concerning adolescent education, Montessori continues to speak of cosmic tasks, but not in relation to the planet, nature or early civilizations, themes gracefully drawn throughout students' elementary years. In her thinking on adolescent education, Montessori gathers elementary's ideas of interdependent support and reflects them onto the economic, civic and relational roles each of us plays as we interact with society.

In the adolescent years, Montessori writes, young peoples' tendencies toward adult socialization rise, accompanied by a growing sense of social order born of individual responsibility and the forging of productive relationships. The primary symptom of adolescence, she notes, is "a state of expectation, a tendency towards creative work, and a need for the strengthening of self-confidence... For success in life depends in every case on self-confidence, and the knowledge of one's own capacity and many sided powers of adaptation." In writing the Erdkinder essay, Montessori called for a secondary education which considers not only the needs of present society, but the vital needs of adolescents as well. Education, Montessori wrote, should lead young people into broader work

experiences, both manual and intellectual, helping them to bind their expanding independence to their own sense of self-sufficiency. These ideas reach beyond the idea of school as a place of educational structure, and toward the notion of an educational environment which supports of the psychological growth of the adolescent.

Montessori believed that school can and should be a “center for study and work.” Her ideal for the Erdkinder setting was a land-based model where adolescents move into intentional community away from family and home, planning together and carrying out physical work on the land where they live. “The first stage of civilization is that of the transformation of nature to a higher level of beauty and usefulness,” Montessori notes, and proposes that as Erdkinder students engage their surroundings in this same transformation, using the land itself and their experience as a center for study and work, they too live in the first stage of civilization. Their work on the land raises its beauty and usefulness. They garden, plant and harvest crops, keep animals and, in so doing, experience the same things that people in our first societies did: agriculture, animal husbandry, tool work, and the related sciences these things require. And as they do, they also experience the challenges and rewards of community and social organization. They perceive the need for communication, the benefit of gathering and directing group energy, a sense of growth in the accomplishment of planned action, and the resulting development of culture within their own group. Erdkinder students learn of civilization, Montessori wrote, through their own experience of its origin.

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As Montessori education has expanded further into the adolescent level, some schools have adapted the land-based model described above into a more classroom-based model, where students work to affect their surroundings through things such as community service, urban studies, and the examination of local history. Many of the same goals can be achieved in the classroom model, provided that students have strong and regular access to natural surroundings where they can build, grow and harvest the fruits of real labor. Many classroom-based adolescent programs also build a network of relationships with area cultural resources – university programs, research libraries, museums, etc. – in order to provide students with a broad range of experiences related to the work of cultural knowledge and exchange.

As the Erdkinder essay closes, Montessori reminds us that if humanity, working together in cooperative community, can raise the beauty and usefulness of nature, so too must each of us as individuals rise to a state higher than our natural one. Success engenders confidence and further action. Facilitating a sense of physical, mental and spiritual self-sufficiency is key to the success of young people in transition, be it from the family to a larger social grouping, or from adolescence into social adulthood. Education, Montessori believed, should empower young people to create occupations for themselves, moving with the confidence of awareness, insight, and maturity.

Curriculum and Experience Within a Sense of Place

Important to a Montessori adolescent program, in either a land or classroom-based setting, is the idea of “Pedagogy of Place,” the primary tenet of which is that the possibilities of learning implicit in any one location can be made explicit to adolescents through their own work and study. In examining the converging and diverging historical elements of any one location, adolescent students come to see more clearly not just the history of a place, but also its present functioning and future possibilities. In viewing one locale as a web of dynamic phenomena, adolescents are able to use interrelated academic disciplines in the pursuit of knowledge, expanding their perceptions across time, and deepening their understandings of complex interactions.

Using the framework of the human tendencies outlined in Montessori’s writing, the flowering of our human lives as individuals, as well as in social community, can be examined in an historical context.

Pedagogy of Place, or the deep examination and consideration of phenomena, is readily seen when applied to physical, biologic and social historical study. In Upper Elementary’s exploration of ancient civilizations, much can be found in the consideration of ways in which societies have worked to meet humanity’s physical and spiritual needs. In the work of the adolescent, historical study continues to be based on the life of humanity, applying understandings of the past to our lives in modern time, and examining our own abilities to affect the life and nature of social reality.

In the information which follows, the idea of Pedagogy of Place is expanded to include more abstract grounds, such as the commonality of human thought, study and work within the scientific occupations, the workings of a microeconomy, and the development of the human spirit. Each of these can be seen as expressions of basic human tendencies, including exploration and orientation as we seek to understand environmental relationships; manipulation and work as we strive to raise the beauty and use of our surroundings; and abstraction and communication as we learn and convey our thoughts, feelings and information to one another.

The Humanities and Sciences

Pedagogy of Place in Human Understanding

Human Tendencies and the Ground of Social Possibility

A careful study of human history holds the key to a more full understanding of our own humanity, both as individuals and in relationship with one another. The study of history offers an examination of how the common tendencies of humanity have worked to develop past societies and culture, and a chance to consider how these same tendencies affect our present culture and the lives we lead within it. Studying the ancient world as revealed in the flowering of Alexandria, together with the development of human societies along a comprehensive human time line, allows us to examine specific cultural elements such as literature, philosophy, and social history and organization. Within this context, more broad questions can then be considered: What does it mean to be civilized? What is truth? Duty? Power? Can there be a perfect civilization?

The study of history at the adolescent level is a multi-disciplinary examination of cultures across time and geography. Both broad and specific examinations can be conducted through the use of primary and secondary source material for academic reading, multi-media experiences and visits outside of the classroom to cultural and historic sites, and the use of seminar discussions in the consideration of the both history and related current issues.

Historical studies can include a variety of writing opportunities, including research, analysis, and response papers, historical fiction, poetry, and journaling. Units of study can culminate in presentations for the whole school community, such as in a dramatic presentation, through which a sense of the lives of people in different times and places can be conveyed.

Language and the Ground of Human Thought

Language is a vital presence in our lives. Whether as self-expression, or group communication, the acts of reading, writing, and speaking are at once personal and communal, and serve as a unifying force in the building of community.

Reading plays an integral part in the perpetuation of human understanding and knowledge, bringing both factual information and the enjoyment of literature to our experience as learners. Readings in the adolescent program range through different

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genres, from fiction to source documents in historical study, which can then be engaged in seminar discussion. In this format, students are encouraged to engage with text in meaningful ways, and to use both intuition and skill in determining an author's meaning. This helps them to apply what they read to their own experience, and to find deeper understandings of the role and power of writing in cultures throughout the world.

Seminar discussions can also be a valuable tool for understanding within the frameworks of group projects, community-wide events, the consideration of philosophy, and the solving of community issues. In any application, seminar discussion offers adolescents valuable opportunities to take part in dialogue, and to practice the social skills that have long been encouraged in their prior Montessori experience.

Writing is present in nearly all aspects of the adolescent program, including essay writing within historical studies, documenting plans and accomplishments in project settings, recording and interpreting data in science related work, responding to literature, and personal journaling. In regular workshop settings, students can explore the elements of both fiction and nonfiction composition, work to build their own craft of writing, and take part in round-table opportunities to share their writing and to reflect on the writing of others.

Public speaking and the art of presentation are also necessary components of the adolescent program. Opportunities such as dramatic presentations, the presentation of

research findings, and outreach in the context of public service and program business all offer chances for the development of clear and effective spoken communication.

Science and the Ground of Study and Work

The biological sciences provide many chances to engage in task-oriented problem solving studies which challenge adolescents' interest in real and productive work. Science "occupations" begin with the formal presentation of a set of concepts, often followed by related readings, before moving into open work times during which scientifically based ideas can be explored in real application. Planting and harvesting foods, working with animals, or becoming involved in community conservation efforts, for instance, all contain opportunities for practical task work in a land setting or in the community. Lab experiences can be engaged as needed, as can applied mathematic concepts and other curricular applications. Seminar discussions of literary or historical connections, and the synthesis of information and experience, culminate in individual and group presentations of what has been learned and accomplished.

Building a Microeconomy

Pedagogy of Place in the Economy of Goods and Services

The development of a small business in the context of a microeconomy is directly encouraged in Montessori's Erdkinder essay. In the creation of small business, students come to understand principles of supply and demand, marketing, accounting, use of capital resources, and the division of labor as they contribute to a local economy. With the creation and operation of a small business also come a sense of entrepreneurship, and a variety of opportunities for the application of a multi-disciplinary curriculum: mathematics, budgeting, and money management in the elements of finance; reading, writing, research and telephone skills, data organization, and cooperative relationships in the logistics of production; applied sciences in the logistics of production; community awareness in developing integrity in business; and writing and computer skills in marketing and community interaction.

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Valuable opportunities are available to older students in the adolescent community through various management positions within the microeconomy. Having worked in all areas of the chosen business as first year students, second year students assume the roles of managers in areas such as production, public relations, finance, and the development of a community service program. Working as managers offers students the chance to exercise self-sufficiency in positions of direct responsibility while also providing opportunities for them to apply academic skills in deep and expanded ways.

Examples of products created by other adolescent communities include items such as jams, handmade candles, handmade jewelry, seasonal cards, harvest items such as fresh herbs, honey and organic produce, and a literary magazine.

Creative and Physical Expression

Pedagogy of Place in the Development of the Human Spirit

Self Expression and the Ground of Inner Life

Adolescence is not only a time of expanding knowledge, it is also a time when young people begin to examine the self more deeply and form interests which they often carry into adulthood. Opportunities for self-expression are especially important at this age. Through the use of visiting specialists, these might include things such as calligraphy, drawing, scrapbooking, drama (from improvisation to set and costume design), crafts, woodworking, pottery, jewelry making, learning a musical instrument, singing, and music appreciation.

Physical expression and the Ground of Motion

Physical expression is also important to adolescents as their bodies grow and strengthen. Opportunities in this area might include dance; yoga; outdoor recreational activities such as canoeing, biking, or hiking; a personal exercise regimen, or cross-country running.

Spiritual Transformation

Pedagogy of Place as Intention and Care

While Montessori wrote of the development of humanity's social and scientific environment as having outpaced the development of the human spirit, she also spoke of social structures which can lead toward equanimity and peace. We are all affected by the imbalance between structure and spirit, Montessori noted. To counter this, she spoke of the need for a spiritual transformation on the part of teachers, that they might better guide young people by learning to follow their interests and demonstrated needs.

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In this period of social and cultural uncertainty, however, there is also a rising need for a more broad social/spiritual transformation which can help citizens engage in the dialogue required for participatory democracy to thrive. Effecting this transformation is especially important in the preparation of adolescents as they enter into broader interactions with the world around them. Young people cannot be expected to simply embrace constructive emotional and social structures upon gaining adulthood. They must be involved in these structures from the youngest of ages, living within them, and learning to uphold themselves and their peers as humanity works to achieve a

more productive and cohesive society. Social interaction, therefore, can also be seen as a ground of study within the construct of Pedagogy of Place, purposefully exploring relationships between individuals as well as within the processes of group functioning.

In the examination of human interaction, community life can be seen as a thing shared among individuals and, as such, something which can be refined through conscious, individual choice and practice. Along these lines, the concepts of nonattachment to ideas and of interdependence within natural and social systems would seem to be directly related to Montessori education.

The sequence of Montessori education builds ideas one upon another, moving from concrete realities to abstract representations. This is certainly seen in the materials for mathematics, as well as in the development of children's global understanding through the unfolding of the cultural curriculum. The process depends heavily upon the idea of accommodation as a component in learning, where new and related ideas are incorporated into existing cognitive structures. Incorporating ideas in this way is supported by a learner's ability to allow ideas to change, intuitively trusting that loosening one's hold on a previous thought will lead to new and expanded levels of understanding. This ability to allow our points of view to broaden and to grow is the heart of nonattachment.

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That interdependence is the guiding principle in both nature and society is made abundantly clear in Montessori education. A scientific aspect of this is seen in the cultural studies of planetary creation and early social organization, which reveal for the child a web of mutually supporting elements within structure. But there is a spiritual side to this as well, found in the idea of each being having a cosmic task within creation, and a role to play in both the giving and receiving of things necessary for life.

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Both of these ideas can be applied to social interactions within an adolescent community. In relation to interpersonal communication, nonattachment enhances dialogue by allowing opposing intellectual positions to exist without conflict, while interdependence offers the idea that mutually supportive thoughts can exist within seemingly contradictory points of view. Frequent consideration of these ideas, and their purposeful application to topics of group discussion can, over time, transform the nature of social discourse among adolescents and help prepare them for productive dialogue in their social lives to come.

In tandem with these ideas, however, must come the action of helping young people to live and work in ways which build trust and cooperation, a willingness to both lead and follow others, and the ability to support others along a common social path. A mindful examination of the structures of social interaction, and the conscious adoption of specific patterns of communication, can lead to more respectful and productive outcomes.

One structure which might be examined, for example, is found in Buddhist psychology, and calls for the purposeful development of loving kindness, compassion, joy and equanimity in our dealings with others. More of a practical than spiritual construct, these ideas encourage us to make conscious choices in our relationships while keeping the ideas of both nonattachment and interdependence in mind. Through the conscious practice of loving kindness, we actively work to support the happiness of others. Interacting with a sense of compassion allows us to ease the difficulties of others by offering the comfort and security of understanding. Expressing a feeling of joy in the happiness of others provides a mirror in which their happiness is reflected and supported. Practicing our affairs with equanimity allows happiness and strength to grow around us

as we open ourselves to the offerings and needs of others. In developing ideas such as these into interactional goals, young people can begin to mindfully observe their own actions in communication, and practice working together through conscious dialogue and with a sense of mutual support.

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