The New School Montessori Center
Envisioning an Adolescent Community

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  • quarterly overview, readings, links to NC Essential Standards for 7th and 8th Grade Science

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• physical and biological sciences, algebra, language arts, computers and technology, micro-economy
Part One
The Plan of Study and Work
A Prepared Environment for a Time of Deep Change

Developmental psychology tells us that adolescence is a time of great change. Young people work to adjust to any number of changes in their lives: rapid bodily growth and the onset of puberty, the changing dynamics of peer relationships, a growing psychological independence from the family, and growth in their own system of personal values. At the same time, adolescents face changing expectations from the society around them, new cognitive demands at school, and the pressure to develop goals leading toward the choice of a vocation.

Dr. Montessori tells us that adolescents are in a period of self-construction similar to that experienced in young childhood, and are in need of protection and aid as they enter into adult society. As for each of the planes of development preceding adolescence, Montessori calls for a prepared environment in which adolescents can learn and grow according their developmental needs.

Writing in the NAMTA Journal in an article titled “Key Experiences for the Adolescent” (Long, “Experiences”), Montessori teacher John Long identifies seven experiences key to the social, academic and moral development of the adolescent:

• the development of personal identity
• the development of the intellect
• opportunities for self-expression
• experience in building and living in community
• to be in the service of others
• to learn the ways of the society they are entering as young adults
• to learn the ways of the natural world

In another NAMTA Journal article titled “The Prepared Environment” (Ewert-Krocker, “Prepared”), Laurie Ewert-Krocker notes that a prepared environment for adolescents offers chances for exploration in all of these areas. She emphasizes, however, that adolescents’ experiences in a prepared environment should be seen as opportunities for growth, rather than as simple learning requirements, and that young people should be given encouragement rather than judgment in their work.

In her book Education and Peace, Montessori states that an environment for adolescent education “must promote not only the function of the individual, but also the formation of a society” (Montessori, Education 103). With all of these in mind, the prepared environment for adolescents should contain a number of different elements:

• a community structure which allows students to take part in a positive social organization
• meaningful work, both manual and intellectual, which appeals to the adolescent’s developmental needs and which offers opportunities for community service
• an academic structure which allows for creativity in solving practical problems
• opportunities for self-reflection
• experiences in production and exchange, leading toward economic independence
Curriculum and Experience Within a Sense of Place

Much of the curriculum for a Montessori adolescent program is rooted in the idea of “Pedagogy of Place,” the recognition that there are implicit learning possibilities in any location, and that these possibilities can become available to adolescents through their own work and study.

Using the town of Holly Springs as an example, there are many ways in which the town itself could serve as a platform for engaged learning. Elders of the community could be interviewed for their perspective on the town’s history. The workings of city government might examined. The economy of the local business community could be explored. Issues of waste management and water purification could be discussed.

By viewing one locale as a web of dynamic learning opportunities, adolescents are able to use the various academic disciplines in ways which expand their perceptions across time, and deepen their understandings of complex social and natural interactions. Through their own work, students can see not just the history of a place, but also the nature of its present functioning and future possibilities.

(See flowchart in the next section.)

Montessori’s Plan of Study and Work for Secondary Education

In the appendices to her book From Childhood to Adolescence, known as the Erdkinder Appendices (Montessori, From), Montessori envisions an educational plan made up of two primary sections:

• Practical Considerations for Social Organization
• The Educational Syllabus

The Practical Considerations concern the development of the adolescent’s social and economic independence. The Educational Syllabus is divided into three parts: self-expression, psychic (formative) development, and preparation for adult life.

Practical Considerations for Social Organization

Living in Genuine Community

Important in the development of an adolescent program are the binding elements of genuine community. In living and working together, adolescents take on responsibilities toward one another, participate in the practical tasks of shared space, and negotiate with one another as they maneuver through the aspects of social organization. Sharing in communal life helps adolescents to explore new ways of belonging, and of finding a useful role among their peers. The emphasis is not simply one of relating to others in a group, but contributing to the cohesion and advancement of one’s community.

In the Erdkinder Appendices, Montessori offers a list of “practical considerations for social organization,” separated into categories having to do with social development, as well as experiences in economic production and exchange.
Residence for Young People
While our program will not be a boarding setting, aspects of “residential life” can be encouraged in a variety of ways:

- weekly adolescent community meetings
  - manage a budget for program supplies and materials
  - discuss matters concerning land activities, such as gardens, bee hives, etc.
  - consider matters of a student run business, including cost analysis, reinvestment needs, specialist remuneration, transportation costs
  - consider logistical, programmatic, and social aspects of the adolescent community and reach agreed upon solutions and ideas
- school community service
  - assistance with maintenance tasks
  - assist with morning and afternoon carpool
  - all school community work on Friday afternoon
- community meals
  - prepare, eat, and clean a full lunch together two days a week
  - prepare a lunch addition (i.e. salad, fruit, etc) three days a week
- overnights
  - monthly Friday night overnight
  - after school break, prepare dinner, movie/game time
  - Saturday morning engagement in an off campus community service
  - occasional school night overnight
  - after school break, prepare dinner, study hall, personal time
  - school-based community service the next morning
    - prepare baked goods for staff
    - assist with morning carpool
    - early morning story time in Children’s House rooms
  - quarterly two school night overnight
    - first day: normal class time, after school outing, prepare dinner, study hall
    - second day: breakfast/off campus community service/day long adventure, break, prepare dinner, study hall, personal time
    - third day: breakfast, class/work time, regular dismissal

(See flowchart in the next section.)

Guesthouse: Hosting Others
We will not be operating a small hotel, as suggested in Montessori’s appendices, but elements of caring for the comfort of others can be achieved in a number of ways:

- work with administration to welcome prospective families on school tours
- host visits for families of students rising into the adolescent program

It is a different form of life that is lived in the group so closely knit together. A higher form of self-control is needed here, which is at the base of social education, and it has to be worked out and actually experienced in the sensitive period during which man is creating his social personality.

(Montessori, Third)
• host visits for students rising into the program
• host opportunities for current adolescent program families to take part in our school day
• work with administration to host chess tournaments
• host events which involve Montessori adolescent students from other schools
  • coffee house type events
  • literature workshops
  • science expo

(See flowchart in the next section.)

Micro-economy: Community and Academics in the Economy of Goods and Services
The fulfillment of a child’s developmental needs at any stage can be seen as leading toward one ultimate goal: the expansion of the child’s independence. The nature of that independence changes, however, depending on the child’s stage of development.

For the very young child, independence is found in mastery of the physical: being able to dress, to eat, or to complete a task such as wiping a table. For the elementary aged child, independence comes in being able to explore with the imagination, leading to expanding knowledge and skills, including a deeper observation of the ways of social interaction.

In adolescence, young people begin to move more deeply into the adult world. Now, they are not so much observing society and adult life as beginning to take an active part in them. For the adolescent, the goal is the development of economic independence.

In a 1936 lecture in Oxford (Montessori, Third), Montessori spoke of economic production and exchange as the primary ways in which humanity supports and expands itself. Independence for the adolescent comes from involvement in economic activity, and in moving toward self-sufficiency within that structure.

The development of a small business in the context of a micro-economy is directly encouraged in Montessori’s Erdkinder appendices. “The essential reform is this,” Montessori wrote, “to put the adolescent on the road to achieving economic independence.” (Montessori, From 64)

In the creation of a small business, students come to understand the principles of production and exchange, marketing, accounting, use of capital resources, and the division of labor as they contribute to a local economy. Examples of specific goods which could be produced in a student operated

Envisioning an Adolescent Community Part One: The Plan of Study and Work
business include the following:
• soaps made with herbs grown in school gardens
• salad greens grown in school gardens
• jams
• hand made jewelry
• eggs
• honey/bee products
• a magazine of student writing and art

With the creation and operation of a small business, adolescents also develop a sense of entrepreneurship, and a take part in a variety of opportunities within a multi-disciplinary curriculum:
• mathematics in budgeting and money management
• reading, writing, research and telephone skills
• data organization
• cooperative relationships in the logistics of production
• applied sciences in the logistics of production
• community awareness in the development of integrity in business
• writing and computer skills through marketing and community interaction

(See flowchart in the next section.)

The Educational Syllabus
Adolescence is not only a time of expanding knowledge, it is also a time when young people begin to examine themselves more deeply, forming interests which they often carry into adulthood. The Educational Syllabus, as outlined in the Erdkinder Appendices, is divided into three sections, each dealing with a different facet of the overall development of the adolescent. These sections include self-expression, psychic (formative) development, and preparation for adult life.

Self-Expression
The first section of the Syllabus calls for opportunities for self-expression, which are especially important at this age.

Creative Expression
Questions of personal value, interest and belief are rapidly changing during adolescence. As a result, adolescents often express themselves through the arts in one form or another. Under the guidance of faculty, skilled members of the parent community, or through the use of visiting specialists, activities in creative expression might include the following:
• music and movement
• music skills exploration
• formal music lessons
• language/communication
• theater and performance
• creative writing
• story telling
• communications technology
  • video production
  • sound editing
  • photography
• manual arts
  • ongoing skill lessons
  • specialty workshops
  • pottery
  • sculpture
  • jewelry making
  • woodworking

Physical Expression
Physical expression is also important to adolescents as their bodies strengthen and grow. Under the guidance of faculty, skilled members of the parent community, or through the use of visiting specialists, these might include things such as the following:
  • dance, yoga, tai chi
  • outdoor recreation such as canoeing, distance biking, or hiking
  • a personal exercise regimen or a chosen sport
  • cross-country running

Psychic Development
The second element of the Syllabus, “psychic development,” addresses the development of those characteristics which make us distinctly human. In this section of the Syllabus, Montessori speaks of moral development, language, and mathematics as innate human abilities for analysis and communication.

Moral Development
When speaking of moral development in a Montessori context, we consider the practical needs that arise out of social interaction. The adolescent is in a sensitive period for the development of justice and personal dignity. In the pursuit of mature independence, experiences with production and exchange and social organization help adolescents to understand that a healthy human society requires its members to operate on a basis of reciprocal help, and that that help depends upon a set of rules which govern social interactions. Experiences of this kind can be addressed in a number of ways:
  • through cooperative work in the micro-economy
  • in the context of community social experience
  • through learning and practicing negotiation techniques in the context of conflict resolution

Moral education is the source of that spiritual equilibrium on which everything else depends, and which may be compared to the physical equilibrium, or sense of balance, without which it is impossible to stand upright.
(Montessori, From 76)
through seminar discussion of the emotional roots of conflict, and of the choice of conscious thought patterns leading to more common understanding

**Language**

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 genres, from fiction to source documents in historical study, both of which can then be engaged in seminar discussion. Seminar discussions can also be a valuable tool for understanding within the frameworks of group projects, community-wide events, the consideration of philosophy and ideas, and the solving of community issues.

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. Students in the adolescent program will take part in a writing workshop which meets each week. Here, students practice the skills of composition, editing and publishing their work.

Public speaking and presentation skills are also necessary components of an adolescent program. Opportunities such as dramatic presentations, the presentation of research findings, and outreach in the context of public service and the program’s small business all offer chances for the development of clear and effective communication.

**Mathematics**

Mathematics have been an important skill in humanity’s advancement. Through mathematics we analyze, calculate, hypothesize and investigate. Care is taken at the beginning a young person’s involvement in the adolescent program to be sure her arithmetic and geometry skills are intact. From there, each student will move through a sequenced Montessori algebra curriculum. The mathematics program also includes business applications in the context of the micro-economy, and seminar discussions in mathematic problem solving.

**Preparation for Adult Life**

This portion of the Syllabus is divided into three groups which Montessori held as the base of a common general education: the study of the earth and living things, the study of human progress and the building of civilization, and the study of the history of humanity.
The Study of the Earth and Living Things
The Study of Human Progress and the Building of Civilization

The adolescent’s work in the scientific disciplines is built around both physical and intellectual pursuit. This is accomplished through “occupations,” extended activities that involve students in experiences which are engaging, relevant, and have a sense of real purpose. Students involved in an occupation have opportunities to take on real responsibilities, to be involved in group decision making, and to work with others in an integrated, cooperative setting.

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.

Activities such as planting and harvesting foods, working with animals, or becoming involved in conservation efforts all contain opportunities for practical work based in the application of scientific principles. Lab experiences can be engaged as needed, as can applied mathematic concepts and seminar discussions of literary or historical connections. Students’ synthesis of information and experience culminates in both individual and group presentations of what has been learned and accomplished.

The following are examples of occupations in which students might take part, and their connection to science topics listed in the North Carolina Essential Standards for 7th and 8th grade:

- organic gardening
- cellular reproduction, forms of energy, energy transfer, composition of substances and their ability to serve an organism as energy and material for growth and repair, atmospheric studies
- bee keeping
  - agents of disease (colony collapse), history of earth and life forms, functions of living organisms, patterns of inheritance
- stream water quality assessment and riparian protection
  - functions of living organisms, hydrosphere, properties of and changes to matter,
  - environmental implications of resource usage, cellular reproduction, history of earth and life forms, how organisms interact with biotic and abiotic components of their environment
- nutrition and cooking
  - agents of disease, composition of substances and their ability to serve an organism as energy and material for growth and repair
- food preservation
- agents of disease, cellular reproduction
- woodlot management

Education should therefore include the two forms of work, manual and intellectual, for the same person, and thus make it understood by practical experience that these two kinds complete each other and are equally essential to a civilized existence. (Montessori, From)
environmental implications of resource usage, composition of substances and their ability to serve an organism as energy and material for growth and repair, how organisms interact with biotic and abiotic components of their environment, functions of living organisms, atmosphere, hydrosphere, history of earth and life forms

**The Study of the History of Humanity**

A careful study of human history holds the key to a 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 affected the development of past societies, and a chance to consider how these same tendencies affect our lives in present day culture. Studying the ancient world, for instance, allows us to examine specific cultural elements such as literature, philosophy, and social history and organization. Within this context, 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 academic reading in primary and secondary source materials, multi-media experiences, and visits outside of school to cultural and historic sites. Seminar discussions can also be used to consider relationships between historical events and related issues in our own time. Historical studies can include a variety of writing opportunities, including research, analysis and response papers, historical fiction, poetry, and journaling. Students may present oral presentations with prepared visual aids. Units of study can also culminate in presentations for the whole school community, as a dramatic presentation for instance, through which historical information about people and events can be conveyed.

Historical studies in the adolescent program will center around world and United States history. Specific units of study include the following:

- the agricultural revolution and Mesopotamia
- classical civilizations: Greece and Rome
- urban life and the arts in the Renaissance
- the modern city/immigration (culminating in a trip to New York City)
- slavery and the pathways to the Civil War/our expanding Constitution
- early industrialization and labor history
- the Depression: issues of social and economic justice
- America on the world stage: the League of Nations and the United Nations

*(See flowchart in the next section.)*

**Program Logistics**

*Curriculum Across a Two Year Cycle*

Over a two year cycle, students take part in the examination of a broad range of ideas and skills. Units of study in the humanities and scientific occupations move in cycles, each
totaling four weeks within each quarter of the school year. The humanities topic for the fourth quarter of each year culminates in a trip planned by the students. More detailed information for the first year of the cycle can be found in the part two of this document: The Educational Syllabus: An Overview of the First Year.

Skills in mathematics and the language arts are taught in response to individual student’s needs and interests. While skill development is always paced to the developmental readiness of each student, we do have benchmark expectations for each grade level and work to help each student meet or exceed these expectations.

**Life and Work Off Campus**

A portion of the students’ experiences will happen off campus. The group will take a three to four day trip to an outdoor education center at the beginning of each school year. There will be a three to five day trip at the end of each year, culminating the humanities topic of study in the 4th quarter. Students will also leave campus for community service opportunities, field studies, interaction with experts in various fields, etc.

**Composition of the Student Group**

The adolescent program will serve students in their 7th and 8th grade years. Most students will rise into the program through The New School’s own Upper Elementary program, though there is an also an enrollment process for students coming from outside of the school. The New School is working to establish relationships with several other schools whose students might feed directly into The New School’s adolescent program.

The following enrollment projections are based only on the number of students rising from within The New School’s existing Upper Elementary program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>Total Number of Students</th>
<th>Composition by Grade Level</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year One (2014/15)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>five seventh years, two eighth years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year Two</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>four seventh years, five eighth years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year Three</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>four seventh years, four eighth years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year Four</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>six seventh years, four eighth years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Homework**

Students in the adolescent program can reasonably expect an hour of homework each evening. Families can support this by helping to make homework a normal part of their child’s home routine. Helping the child to find a place with minimal distraction where she can work, preferably at the same time each evening, is the most conducive to completing homework quickly and well.
**Family/School Partnership**

Adolescents experience a change in psychology which leads their orientation away from the family and into broader society. While this transition is to be respected, we know that families still need to know what is happening with their children. Families can expect a structured process of reporting on their children’s successes and needs in school.

Parents should call the school with any questions about the school calendar or special events. Parents with questions or concerns about the adolescent program or their child’s school experience should schedule a conference with the program teachers.

**Conferences**

Before the start of each school year, students and their parents will be invited to take part in a goal setting conference. This is meant to be a conversation between the student, the parents, and the teachers to discuss goals and hopes for the coming school year.

Twice during the year, in November and late March, each student will prepare and lead a conference between the student, parents and teachers. The student will review project work and lessons that have taken place since the last conference, progress in relation to goals from the goal setting conference, and share self-evaluative information about the student’s social experiences in school. The criteria used to guide these evaluations include accuracy, clarity, comprehension, thoroughness, engagement, thought, effort, and presentation.

As the conference concludes, student, parents and the teachers together can make plans for growth, and address any areas of concerns.

**News/Communication**

The faculty and students of the adolescent program will communicate information about the program and the students’ experiences through newsletters, photo journals, and videos posted on the school’s web page. Direct announcements will be made by email. Teachers or school staff will telephone parents directly should that need arise.
Works Cited
