

**Statement of Residential Principles and Practice**

**Planes of development**

Maria Montessori observed the passage of childhood to go through four distinct planes from birth to maturity, each plane having its own special needs and characteristics, and each needing a different environment designed around those needs and characteristics.

In the first plane, lasting from birth to age six, the child is a sensorial explorer. They absorb the world as it is, unconditionally, and incarnate it into their being. They become, by age six, an individual of their time and place. The environments we prepare for them respond to their particular sensitivities and needs – for order, for sensorial exploration, for the acquisition of language, among others. Their thirst for independence has its expression in the phrase “Help me do it for myself”.

As they lose their first set of teeth, the psychology of the child changes too, and so too do their needs. The defining characteristic of the child from age six to twelve is their powerful intellect. Their curiousity is insatiable, their ability to acquire knowledge unparalleled. These children, between the ages of six and twelve, need a new environment - one that recognises and responds to these extraordinary changes in their intellect. Children in the second plane are intellectual explorers, and they say, “Help me to think for myself.”

Adolescence signals the end of childhood and the start of a new phase of life. Maria Montessori referred to the adolescent as a “social newborn”. They are moving from childhood, which has itself as the centre, towards adulthood, which has the world as the centre. The revolution is Copernican. The adolescent experiences extraordinary physical changes in their body, and the psychological and neurological changes are paralleled only by those that took place in infancy. Puberty represents a rebirth, and the adolescent is as if newly born. This “newborn adult” has very specific needs and characteristics, which are very different from those of the child, and the environment we offer them seeks to meet those needs and suit those characteristics. That is the basis of the educational experience we offer in the Young People’s Community.

**Adolescents and the Family of Human Beings**

The educational experience we offer is grounded in the body of work that the Montessori movement represents. There is quite naturally a process of adaptation to our specific circumstances (a 1600 square metre building in a 13 acre woodland in Eason’s Green, East Sussex), but it is inspired and shaped in the first instance by Montessori’s writings, by the experiences of others in the Montessori movement, and by our own observation of adolescents in these environments.

Neuroscience has, in recent years, confirmed what Maria Montessori observed to be true: adolescence is a peak period for social experiences. There is an acute sensitivity to the social during the teenage years. This idea of “social” is larger than having friends, and being with friends, though of course it includes that. It is the idea that the family of human beings is one family, which stretches across borders and boundaries, and in that oneness that the family of human beings is, each of us is an individual separate from and yet constituting that family. Ideas of patriotism, of nationalism and of religion emerge in this period. There is a desire to establish connections to other human beings through ties other than those of blood. There is a desire to enter into the systems of production and exchange that the whole of society is structured around.

**Elements of Social Experience**

The educational experience for the adolescent that Montessori considered ideal had the following five components:

* Residence
* Working farm
* Shop
* Guesthouse
* Museum of machinery

These, taken together, are referred to as the “Elements of Social Experience”, and they form a single whole. Taken together, they represent the whole of social life, and this is why they correspond so strongly to the needs of the adolescent, who is intent on penetrating society, and whose whole being revolves around the profound psychological need to become a contributing part of human society.

This need is not a practical one. Our purpose is not that to train these young people in becoming independent, or to offer them practical skills that will stand them in good stead in life, although of course this does happen. We cannot emphasise enough that the need is psychological. It is like the young child who does not practically need to put their shoes on by themselves because there is someone else who is not only able to do it for them, but who finds great joy in doing this for them, as an expression of their love for the child. But as with the young child, the form our love takes, respecting their wish (sometimes unconscious) to “do it by myself”, is to prepare an environment in which the adolescent can acquire independence. The fruits of this independence are fundamentally psychological.

At the Young People’s Community we are evolving in our capacity to offer this whole set of experiences. We do consider these to be fundamental in our educational approach for the adolescent. We began in 2016 with the beginnings of a horticultural enterprise, the beginnings of a sales enterprise, and of a museum of machinery. In 2017 we open the residence, and in future wish to explore running a guesthouse.

Why did Maria Montessori consider it essential for the adolescent, arriving at puberty, to experience creating a home away from the home of their childhood?

Montessori saw this period of "coming of age" as a special one in the life of the child, where they make their way from childhood, represented by life in the family, to adulthood, represented by life in society.

In this period of tremendous change, both physical and psychological, Maria Montessori observed the need of the adolescent to detach from their families for periods of time, in order to give themselves the space and freedom in which they could create the adults they are going to be. Adolescence is a period in which the human being necessarily pushes against, for a time, the way of life that their family represents. This is a healthy expression of independence.

Maria Montessori proposed the ideal environment for this creative work to take place as being a home in the countryside, where nature could play a therapeutic role in what can often be the most difficult and trying period of a person's life. In this country home, the adolescent lives, studies, and works with other young people. Here, the adolescents learn to take care of themselves and one another, to grow in their socio-economic independence and reap all its accompanying psychological fruit, in an environment specifically designed to meet their needs.

The Young People's Community offers that special environment in which young people can experience first hand what it means to live as part of a nurturing community that they help create. They begin to see themselves as being transforming agents of the world in which they live.

This document should be read alongside the YPC Parent Handbook.