

# **The Young People's Community**

## **AN OVERVIEW OF THE MONTESSORI PROGRAMME FOR ADOLESCENTS**

### **Cosmic vision**

As human beings, we seek meaning in our lives. We ask questions about the origin of the universe, and the purpose of life. Different cultures have their stories, their mythologies, through which people come to have a sense of their place in the world.

We tell the children stories. We offer them a scientific mythology, a narrative that helps them construct meaning. The fundamental narratives we offer them are simple. One is that there is order and harmony in the universe – universe as ‘cosmos’ – and that all parts of the universe play a role in maintaining that harmony. Another is that Life plays a part in maintaining the harmony of the Earth. That all forms of life are interconnected. That human beings are part of that web of life. That human beings form one body of humanity, utterly dependent on each other. That each human being has been given three gifts: a mind that can imagine, hands that can work, and a heart that can love.

### **The Human Being**

We see the purpose of human existence being ‘to do good things’ – to find joy in making this beautiful world even more beautiful – to come to know Life, and love Life, in order to serve Life.

### **Planes of development**

One of Maria Montessori's great insights about human development is that it takes place in four stages or planes, each characterised by different sensitivities and powers, and each with different developmental goals.

The baby for instance, has the extraordinary task of mastering their first language – mapping sounds onto concepts even while their vocal apparatus is still in formation. Each baby comes into being with the power to adapt to the language spoken by the group into which they are born – no matter how complex or arcane - a power we would consider magical if it did not happen every time a baby was born. The stage of infancy lasts for the first six years of life, or thereabouts, and the child of that age is characterised as a ‘sensorial explorer’ – they explore their physical landscape through their senses, and in the process of doing so, they construct ‘mind’.

Around age 6 or thereabouts, the child changes both physically and psychologically. Their milk teeth are replaced with the teeth that will stay with them for the rest of their lives (dentures excepting!), their hair gets coarser, and the relative proportions of their body change. They begin to understand the concept of time. The 6 year old emerges into an intellectual plane, and over the next 6 years they explore that intellectual landscape (across space, across time), using their mind. They are 'intellectual explorers'. They look for the hidden reasons behind the open facts, they long to understand why something happens the way it does, their inquisitiveness is insatiable, nothing short of the whole universe satisfies their curiosity.

### The 'third plane' of adolescence

The focus of the child is necessarily ego-centric: the world takes care of them. People exist to meet their needs. Puberty marks the end of this phase: the awakening of their reproductive organs signals the start of something new. Adulthood is a different phase of human existence: they move from being taken care of by, to taking care of, the world. It is the start of a Copernican revolution – no longer can the sun revolve around the earth, now the earth must revolve around the sun.

The adolescent experiences this change as a rebirth - into human society. It is as if the child lived in a natural world, surrounded by natural things, while the adolescent enters a human world, surrounded by human beings. They become sensitive to a new way of relating with people. The fundamental relationship of the family, based on love, is replaced by a new relationship with the family of humanity, and that relationship is based on human work. The adolescent is a 'socio-economic explorer' – and their field of exploration is human society, which they see as the worldwide organisation of human work. This is the new world to which their attention is drawn.

There is something else. In the individual stages of human development (0-6, 6-12), the human being had sensitivities that allowed them to move out into their environment and take from it what they needed to transform themselves. In the social stage of human development (12-18, 18-24), the human being has sensitivities that allow them to act on their environment and transform it. That is, the adolescent experiences the world not as a 'given thing', but as a human creation, and they experience themselves as having the power to change it. Just as the child is given particular sensitivities that allow them to reach for individual perfection - for e.g. in the way the hand obeys the mind, or the eye sees clearly – the adolescent is given particular sensitivities that bring about perfection in society – for e.g. justice.

The sphere of operation of these sensitivities is a small society, on which they can practice being human in the particular way that being human means, at this stage of their lives.

We call this the 'adolescent community'.

## The adolescent community

The ideal prepared environment for the adolescent is a community that 'does good things', where they experience themselves as being needed and valued. They are called to participate in this community, and to give shape to it, and to find in it the space for both the expression of their public lives (as human beings), and the nurturing of their private lives (as natural beings).

To say a little more about this. As a social being, the human being is called to working with others to transform the world. To marshal the resources of a number of people in a shared endeavour takes learning. We are not born with this ability – just as the baby is not born with the ability to talk. They are born with the ability to *learn* to talk. It is the same with working together – it something that is learned and practiced. Adolescence is the most potent period for the practice of that human tendency to work with others towards a common purpose. It is in the forging of a common purpose through the use of language (Word), and the coming together to transform the shared Word into the shared World, that developmental work takes place for the adolescent.

## Overview

The adolescent community offers young people mediated encounters with reality through the lenses of particular practices of human beings, or human ways of encountering the world. Each of the practices (disciplines in academic parlance, subjects in school-speak) we choose to offer as part of our 'explicit curriculum'<sup>1</sup> offers the young person an **apprenticeship pathway** into a **community of practice** that embodies the conversations, knowledge and skills – the ontology (way of being) and epistemology (ways of knowing) - that comprise the traditions evolved within the paradigm of that practice.

To unpack some of these concepts:

A **community of practice** recognises that human beings in any sphere of their activity organise themselves into communities, often professional. For example, there may be a community of environmental scientists, or a community of building surveyors, or a community of veterinarians or English teachers. They have shared traditions, common purposes, a body of knowledge, areas of

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<sup>1</sup> Contrasted with what Eisner (1996) called the 'implicit curriculum' – the silent messages communicated by structure, relationships, architecture - and the 'null curriculum' – what may not be offered and is not discussed as not being offered e.g. 'Gut bacteria & health' or 'Active engagement with Media' or 'Is GDP a measure of wellbeing?'.

expertise, ways of perceiving the world, undergo similar training, participate in the same bodies, articulate common professional guidelines, and so on. That is what makes them a community – they are not necessarily ‘holding hands’ but they are part of a tradition. We call these ‘communities of practice’. They are the embodied and relational aspects of a discipline. For example the discipline of mathematics is held and possesses its existence and meaning within a ‘community of mathematicians’ that stretches back in time to Pythagoras and Euclid, through to Descartes and Newton, Einstein and Nash but also to less illustrious but equally human mathematicians in Sussex.

Young people orient themselves to these different communities of practice, before entering one. The adult is a guide who acts as the dynamic link between the young person and that community of practice. The process begins with the legitimacy of peripheral participation, activities on the fringes /outskirts, where there is cursory contact with the practice. For example it might be the washing up of test tubes and beakers after a demonstration, or the joint labelling of chemicals in the chemistry lab. Or it might be the organisation of seeds for the garden over the winter, in preparation for sowing in spring. In mathematics it would be the peripheral gaining of mathematical skills while learning to engage in the core work of mathematicians which is conceptual rather than calculative (machines calculate, mathematicians think).

Gradually as the young person becomes confident and conversant with the traditions of that discipline they work their way into the community of practice. This process is akin to an apprenticeship. Usually associated with a vocation, we consider apprenticeship to be an appropriate noun to capture the scaffolded process through which a young person becomes accomplished in one or more areas of human endeavour. It is very similar to Vygotskian scaffolding with the proviso that we particularly emphasise a view of the nature of knowledge as being both embodied and communally held (i.e. knowledge exists in the individual and it also exists in the act of relating) not just socially transferred.

This **apprenticeship pathway** is made up of a series of encounters or experiences that we call ‘**presentations**’. A presentation puts the young person into contact with their reality (a mediated reality, or ‘**prepared environment**’) through an active experience characteristic of discipline-specific ways of engaging. Its purpose is to spark purposeful activity, open up doors for deep enquiry, and initiate sustained engagement within that community of practice.

We refer to the purposeful activity that emerges from a presentation as ‘**Work**’ with a capital W. The term ‘Work’ thus has a particular meaning within the Montessori context. It refers to a process that has developmental value. There is a wide range of possible ‘Work’

that can emerge from a presentation, only some of which is predictable. Their meaningful activity arises as 'emergent', and the goal or outcome that they work towards can be called an '**Emergent Outcome**'.

The work that the young people initiate as a follow-up from the presentations (process = 'Work'; product = 'Emergent outcome') is we believe of central value to the task of creating themselves. The human being in creation is a creative endeavour: we consider education to be an act of the child, and specifically, a creative act. These creative acts take place in a range of theatres, or 'prepared environments', which are curated collections of experiences that offer certain developmental possibilities to the young person.

## What we do

The Montessori programme for adolescents has two parts – the Elements of Social Experience, and the Plan of Study.

### A. Elements of Social Experience

Human beings, in working for each other, organise themselves for maximum efficiency and also for joy. In recognising the need for adolescents to enter into society while also acknowledging that adult society is not prepared to receive them, Montessori described a form of social organisation that could meet the needs of adolescents. A farm, a house, a hotel and a shop were the elements she described, akin to the primary, secondary and tertiary economies (which form the sum total of human work). With this in mind, we have constructed 4 'theatres' in which adolescent development takes place at the YPC.

#### 1. The House

The Residential provision is a significant component of the Montessori programme for adolescence. Every young person in the YPC has a bed, and they are welcome to stay for up to 4 nights a week. Most choose to stay at least 1-2 nights a week, and many stay all 4 nights. On occasion we have had them stay over the weekend as well. The young people take as much responsibility for their experience as is reasonable. They are helped towards independence, which is to grow in their capacity to care for themselves and each other, as part of a community.

There are 5 mixed-age dorms, 3 for the girls and 2 for the boys, reflecting the gender balance of the community. There is a programme of evening activities that ensures we offer a rounded experience - particularly for those who are staying at school all week. The diet is similarly considered. The young people take a central role in designing these different aspects

of their experience. Opportunities for sport, for recreation, and for quiet study come together to give a warm family feeling to this group of 30 young people, amongst a small number of adults they trust.

A major sphere of activity is the kitchen, where the young people cook food for the school under the guidance of a professional chef. A small team of 3-4 young people have the daily experience of preparing a nutritious, balanced, vegetarian meal for nearly 70 people. Their experience extends into the evening hours for those who board, and includes the planning of menus, the shopping for groceries, the preparation and serving of food, and of course the washing up. The growth in maturity these experiences produce is visible. The sense of ownership is palpable.

## 2. The Walled Garden

A second theatre is our one-acre walled garden, which is certified organic by the Soil Association. The young people work under the guidance of a professional horticulturalist to tend to a productive organic market garden which they take great pride in. This work results in the growing of fairly substantial amounts of fresh produce which they supply to the school kitchen, retail to the parent community and wholesale to a local veg box scheme. The agricultural work also includes the care of five bee-hives that produce 30-40kg of honey each year, which is also sold. Ancillary work emerges from the needs of the garden, such as the creation of irrigation systems or the construction of heated propagation benches. Opportunities for study abound – for e.g. nitrogen fixation by leguminous plants, or biological methods for pest control.

## 3. The Workshop

The third theatre of their work is a workshop from which the construction needs of the school buildings are largely met, under the guidance of a professional woodworker-artist. For instance, the creation of a new garden shed, the laying of wooden floors in their dormitories, the putting up of a stud wall, or the building of kitchen cabinets. Practical work that results in new or improved physical spaces that we inhabit confirms for them their capacity to transform their reality in ways that are beneficial to all. The relative ease of seeking consensus around practical needs (store plates?) and practical means (a shelf!) builds ability to seek consensus on less obvious matters that live in the hazy world of conflicting ideals.

## 4. The Woods

The fourth theatre is a 10 acre mixed woodland which they are stewards of under the guidance of a professional ecologist. The work provides the opportunity for careful consideration of the different forms of life that we share this land with, and the taking of practical actions to support this biodiversity. This theatre is perhaps especially precious

because it does not serve any obvious need of the community – we derive no direct material benefit from it. It is instead a spiritual resource – it serves a higher purpose, of serving all of Life, and is therefore most directly connected to the grand narrative of human purpose on this earth; and the dedication with which many of the young people pursue this area of work goes to show how essential it is for their spirit.

## 5. The Shop

This is an aspect of Montessori pedagogy that is still under-developed at the YPC and Covid-19 has put the brakes on its continued development. In time it will take the form of a local shop, from where the young people will sell their products and those of local craftspeople, and through doing so, directly experience being of use in the wider world.

## B. Plan of Study

### Self Expression

#### Overview

Montessori's plan led with Self expression, and that is significant. The young adolescent is an utterly creative being – even their bodies are being given new shape. This creative instinct, at a time of psychological weakness, draws strength from the support we offer in opportunities for self-expression, both individual and collective.

Broadly speaking our Arts curriculum has two aspects. The first is the cultivation of perception - Appreciation or Aesthetics. The second is the cultivation of Forms of Expression. The first has to do with cultivating ways of seeing – the ways of seeing that are part of the human-as-artist. When someone paints they become versed in the traditions of painting, and when they see a painting, they consider it with an understand that they have earned through their work. Someone else, who does not paint, can be in front of the same physical object but what they see is totally different. A woodworker may for example notice details about the frame that others miss. These are acts of perception. Education is, amongst other things, an education of Perception.

As for Forms of Expression – perception allows for external reality to penetrate the human being and settle inside themselves as concepts. These concepts may be mental constructs but they may also exist at the level of feelings, and they may also be unconscious or subconscious – for example, it may give a person a thrill of pleasure to recall

Cummings lines 'I'd rather learn from one bird how to sing / than teach ten thousand stars how not to dance'. All this is part of the rich internal landscape of the human being. This internal landscape can be communicated or expressed. That expression can take many different forms: a linocut, a sonnet, a piece of furniture, a dance. This is a second aspect of education – an education in Forms of Expression.

### Visual Arts

There are six ways in which we offer an orientation to the Fine Arts. When young people start in the YPC we begin with two large group projects which draw on particular skills in fine art, and train those. The emphasis is on working together to create something that is beautiful and of value to the community. The pattern we are establishing is that one project is a mural on textile and the second is ceramics. Between the two projects we touch on some or all of drawing, painting, textile, print, ceramics and photography which are the strands we structure our fine arts curriculum along.

Young people then move onto those 6 strands. They usually participate in one strand at a time, over a period of 6 weeks each, covering all 6 strands over the course of the first year. Presentations are offered typically weekly and the young people receive individual attention to help them develop their skills. There are opportunities to see the work and the processes of working of artists in that community of practice, as part of our approach to Aesthetics.

The young people are invited to invest time outside of their presentations to practice and improve their skills. These courses form a springboard from which young people begin to increasingly differentiate and focus on particular artistic processes over others. We observe this taking place around the age of 15.

By this point many young people are engaging with art projects outside of the structured group presentations and are supported in their individual work through one-to-ones with the Arts guide. As they move from 15/16 some choose to study Art at A-Level and embark on a series of termly assessed projects over a 3-year period.

## Language Arts

We consider English Literature as an Art. The young people are introduced to the great artists of the primary forms of Literature – the Epic (narrative), Poetic and Dramatic. This introduction is offered through a series of weekly presentations over the 6 years of the programme. Term 1 is Epic, Term 2 is Poetic and Term 3 is Dramatic.

Another theme that is followed is the historical development of English Literature from the earliest forms of expression such as the creation myths of our and other cultures, through great early European literature, to contemporary writers, poets and playwrights. An immersion in these literary traditions allows for a conversation to develop between the young person, their peers, and those human beings who have gone before and whose work has given shape to the community of practice of E Literature.

Seminal inventions that transformed the literary world – the Greek Alphabet, the Codex, the Printing Press, the Digital Revolution – form a third theme that runs alongside the other two. These themes are woven together into a single narrative.

The English Literature course is offered in 3 2-year cycles, which allows for a mixed-age group to meet developmentally appropriate literature. As with the Fine Arts, we follow an apprenticeship pathway. The young people are helped to develop an appreciation for the various forms of great works of literary art, and from that appreciation are led to their own experimentation with those forms. This includes the routine performing of dramatic works – their own and others – as part of participation in the conversations of these traditions.

All students sit an externally examined qualification in English, the iGCSE English Language, in May of the academic year they turn 16. Formal preparation for that particular genre of writing examinations are begins from September that year, through weekly and then bi-weekly lessons.

Starting the year they turn 16 students who choose to embark in parallel on an English Literature A-Level. This track accompanies rather than replaces the English Literature & creative writing course that all young people take until age 18.

### Music and Dance

Our music programme comprises four parts: Music Appreciation, Instrument (including music technology), Voice and Ensemble. We have a small music room and recording studio. Weekly lectures in Music Appreciation introduce the young people to the different musical traditions of the world, set in their social contexts. Weekly individual tutorials in singing, piano, guitar, violin, cello and music technology are available to the young people through peripatetic staff. In the summer of 2020 we put together our first musical ensemble that involved the whole community. It was an unequivocal success and something we intend to repeat each term.

Our dance programme is as yet undeveloped. This year (2020/21) we are evolving our 'Arts Appreciation' course to include an orientation to the traditions of dance around and alongside attending performances each term.

### Sport

We are a small mixed-age community of 30+ young people and this has guided our choice of sports to offer coaching in. Peripatetic technical instructors support skills development in tennis, climbing and swimming through weekly sessions both on- and off-site. We offer a parallel path in physical development, through weekly sessions in Yoga (flexibility) and Fitness (strength & stamina). Future focal areas include cycling.

## Psychic Disciplines

### Overview

The psychic disciplines develop the 'organs of the mind'.

### Mathematics

Our approach to Mathematics has three strands – Arithmetic, Algebra and Geometry - that are woven through their experience over the six years from 12 to 18. Statistics is added to this as a Data Science.

The study of Mathematics has three themes. The first is a grounding in the historical roots of the tradition through an explicit narrative that relates their current work in Mathematics to the larger historical traditions from which that work has emerged. The second is an apprenticeship into the community of practice that mathematicians represent, which is somewhat different from the field of activity governed by 'school mathematics'. The former is a grounding in an open-ended, artistic and philosophical enquiry into the nature of 'mathematical reality' and is thus more characteristic of the work of actual mathematicians. All students continue their study of Mathematics in these forms through to age 18.

Thirdly, there is due consideration to the particular areas of mathematics that are part of the 'explicit' and examined curriculum of this country. All students take their iGCSE in Mathematics (Higher or Foundation) in May of the academic year they turn 16. Formal preparation for this begins in the September of that academic year. Starting that same year students who wish to embark in parallel on their Mathematics & Further Mathematics A-Levels. The first two terms of this track moves in parallel with iGCSE preparation.

Presentations in mathematics are given in small groups, often mixed-age across 2 years, typically twice a week. As with other disciplines the presentation is an encounter with a new concept or idea, or extension of an existing concept or idea, and work emerges from that. As far as possible this work is created by the young people (e.g. make up their own problems to share with each other) and they are supported through this process. The young people are not divided into 'sets'. Individuals who need help receive that help - sometimes ahead of a group presentation, and sometimes after it.

A further feature of our mathematics environment is the use of weekly seminars in mathematics. Once a week the young people meet in small groups (facilitated) to discuss their solutions to a shared problem set. The emphasis is on creative thinking and clarity of communication.

#### Foreign Languages

The young people are expected to study at least one of French, Spanish, German or Latin for at least 4 years (over 12-16). Their exposure to the language is through weekly small-group sessions facilitated by a language instructor, alongside independent preparation prior to the session through Rosetta Stone, and individual and group follow-up after the session. Students have the option of studying French and Spanish at A-Level. Continue to seek ways to integrate language learning into the life of the community rather than having it as an isolated 'subject' that lives independent of everything else.

#### Morality

Maria Montessori saw morality as a practical matter – the shared values that emerged in the process of a group of people finding a harmonious way of being together. This form of morality emerges naturally in the course of living, studying and working together in the Young People's Community. It is consolidated through weekly seminars in mixed-age groups (usually 12-14, 14-16, 16-18) where the young people explore questions about what the good, the true and the beautiful are. We pay special attention to the reaching together for the common good – to rise beyond our individuality and search for the 'common unity' that forms the community, or the 'res publica' (public thing) that forms the republic. The central lens through which we ask these questions is that of 'freedom and responsibility', and we explore this through reflection on both our own lived reality and the thoughts of others in the near and distant past. We seek to create together a new morality that accounts for all of life, including the as-yet-unborn.

## Preparation for Adult Life

### The Earth and Living Things

An ecological narrative frames the study of the earth and living things. In the recent words of Nobel Laureate Sir Paul Nurse, 'Life is precious. We need to care about it. We need to care for it. And for that we need to know about it.'. To know, to love, to serve.

Geography is studied through the lens of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), one of which is explored in depth each half-term, in different ways, across the mixed-age community. The earth is studied in relation to an ecological narrative – one that includes but is not limited to human wellbeing, and that considers human beings as part of an interconnected web of life – that the good of each form of life is bound up in the good of all forms of life.

Geography presentations – pertaining to a particular SDG - are given weekly to the entire mixed-aged community, and follow-up possibilities are then discussed and consolidated for smaller groups alongside. From age 15 the young people have the opportunity to begin an A-level course of study in Geography.

Similarly, living organisms (or 'organised beings' as they used to be known) are studied through the lens of that same ecological narrative. Following on from the Story of the Coming of Life in the Elementary, the cosmic narrative in the third plane shifts to an understanding of life itself in both its individual and ecological sense. The question 'What is Life?' is met through a series of narratives that begins with the Cell, moves on to the Gene, then to Chemistry and then to Information. When we finally arrive at Information we return to the question posed at the start of the narrative which is to what end – what Immanuel Kant referred to as 'natural purpose' – and that brings us to Natural selection and Ecology. A scientific grounding answers the existential question of human purpose – it is to know Life, to love Life and to serve Life.

The narrative is presented over the first year and deepens in a spiral format over the following four years.

Biology presentations are given typically weekly over the course of four years, from 12-16. Presentations in these areas, as in every other, are intended to inspire exploration and experiment. Young people also have the opportunity to study herbal medicine. From age 15 young people have the opportunity to begin A-level study in Geography and Biology. Those who do not specialise continue to receive presentations through to age 18, although expectations of follow-up work in these areas are limited.

#### The Building up of Civilization

Human beings design, create and use tools of various kinds to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of their productive capabilities. This is a cumulative process that has gained speed with time. The study of the processes and products of a technological civilisation forms a branch of study in Montessori pedagogy, and this is called 'The building up of civilization'. Physics and Chemistry represent this study of the physical world, the understanding of its behaviour, and the use of its materials for human ends.

Physics and Chemistry presentations are given typically weekly over the course of four years, from 12-16. The young people also have the opportunity to study (a) programming languages such as Python and Java, (b) electronics - Raspberry Pi and Arduino, (c) sub-disciplines such as Architecture and Engineering.

Presentations in these areas, as in every other, are intended to inspire exploration and experiment. From age 15 young people have the opportunity to begin A-level study in Physics and Chemistry.

The three ethical questions of (a) the machine in relation to the loss and gain in the Being of human beings, (b) technology in relation to the impact on the earth and living things, (c) technology as a cause of human inequality and a means of its intractability, are of primary concern.

#### The History of Humanity

History is considered the backbone of Montessori education. The young people's study of history covers the entire span of the human story, including pre-history. The primary narrative they are introduced to is that

‘Human beings work together to create the world’, and this is then elucidated in increasing spirals of narrative detail – for example ‘The interconnected world as we recognise it today emerged 600 years ago’, ‘The inventions and discoveries that shaped the world emerged in a social context’, ‘The story of humanity is the twin struggle for freedom and equality’, and ‘Human societies have adopted different forms of organisation influenced by their geography’. We eschew national narratives in favour of one that sees all human beings as part of the single family Home Sapiens, that originated in Omo Kibush in Ethiopia some 80,000 years ago, and walked across the earth to its most distant points.

Weekly presentations illuminate these ideas and their significance. The thrust of the narrative is on the ‘one humanity’ and the love with which we ought to consider all those who have lived, do live, and are yet to live. The time at which particular topics are introduced is based on our study of development – for example the visible causality of phenomena appeals to the 12-14 year olds, while the high ideals of freedom and equality that appeal to the 14-15 year olds cedes way to a pragmatic groundedness in geography for the 15-16 year olds. From age 15 students have the option of studying for their A-Level in History, Sociology, Psychology or Politics.

### C. Work is at the centre

A word we use often is ‘work’. By this we mean the purposeful activity of any entity, for example a living organism, for example a human being. For children and young people we understand the word ‘work’ to mean their activity that contributes to the transformation of themselves in the light of the human purpose (to know Life, to love Life, to serve Life). All this sounds esoteric. What does it mean in practice?

In practice it means that we trust in the nature of the young person to act in ways that serve their development. When we spot the glimmer of an intention to act in that way, we protect it. We don’t necessarily acknowledge it, we definitely don’t probe it, but we allow it and we protect it. That intention begins invisibly because intention takes place within the human mind. We see its first expression in some small or large gesture. It could be that we observe it in a question that is asked, or the way a young person’s attention seems drawn, or a small act that they perform that almost goes unnoticed.

From there we look for ways to help them define what the thing is. Once it finds definition, we can call it work. It may be for example, to draw a self-portrait. It may be to find out all they can about the oil spill in the Maldives. It may be to start a petition in their local community. It may be to bake 40 brownies for snack. It may be to write the first act of a play. All of these are 'work'. What makes these 'work' is that they are constructive acts that put the young person – individually or collectively – in relation to their world.

We protect their work.

When a young person is engaged with work, something fundamental to becoming human takes place. They draw energy and sustenance from these acts. When engagement of this sort takes place, the right kind of 'learning' is happening and it is happening effortlessly. Our work as adults is to create the conditions ('prepare the environment') conducive to their work.

This includes not interrupting their flow of work with a scheduled presentation.

In order to create an atmosphere in which a flow of work can take place, we only schedule presentations for first thing in the morning and first thing in the afternoon. Young people who are using their time wisely and responsibly can seek and do receive permission to skip specific presentations and attend review sessions later.

This is a hard thing to put into practice – it causes complications with other people's time management - but it makes a big difference to the rhythm of their workflow. What makes it work is (a) planning presentations that are sparse rather than dense and that give rise to a variety of follow-ups ('emergent outcomes'), (b) helping bring those follow-ups to completion ('forms of expression' that are drafted-assessed-feedback-complete) and (c) keeping track of who has received what presentations and engaged with what follow-up work.