

Liberty and Hope for the Adolescent: Valorization of the Personality

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If Montessori believed that we are to set up an education and living space that brings forth the psychic development of the child, then it means that we, parents and teachers, have a responsibility to do our homework, just as I expect my students to. That homework involves preparing ourselves in spirit and with the necessary understanding of what an adolescent needs to grow up healthy. As we enter this process of living with and educating a teenager, we are more likely to respond with (at least a little bit of) grace as we encourage and guide our adolescent through the third plane (ages 12-18) of Montessori's developmental levels.

I hope I am not making it sound as though adolescents themselves are a challenge. Adolescents are actually the flowering of the social and political human, and as such, we must take great care to encourage and support them through this pivotal phase.

In order to facilitate this process, the environment for the adolescent must be planned with the concept of Valorization of the Personality in mind. Valorization is Montessori's term for the adolescent's process of becoming a strong and worthy person. Valorization comes gradually to the adolescent as she realizes she is useful and capable of effort. This is accomplished only by the work of the mind, hands, and heart. It happens when adolescents have appropriate responsibilities and expectations; when they are able to experience the joy that comes from successfully meeting challenges, and the character building that is the result for their restitution when they have made poor decisions.

The following chart is a list of characteristics that John Long shared with me 16 years ago. It shows the characteristics the child is ready to develop at both planes, given the proper environment. It is an effective guide when making decisions about building and adolescent environment and planning field studies for the adolescent.

Normalization – ages 0-12

Valorization – ages 12-24

Love of order	Joy
Love of work	Selflessness
Profound spontaneous concentration	Optimism
Attachment to reality	Confidence
Love of silence and working alone	Dignity
Sublimation of the possessive instinct	Self Discipline
Power to work by choice, not just curiosity	Initiative
Obedience	Independence
Spontaneous self discipline	Helpfulness
Joy	Good judgment
	Ability to work with others

By using a set of guiding principles and keeping in mind the characteristics we are hoping to call forth in the adolescent, a well planned adolescent community will enhance and encourage the development of valorization. The adolescent needs opportunities to experience academic challenges that open her mind to new ideas and ways of thinking. She needs the work of the hands to help her understand her power and the concrete effect she can have in the world. She needs the work of the heart so that the flowering of social justice can grow. The potential for all of these experiences is maximized when she has the chance to work in a community of learners. That community does not need to be a large one, but living and working with a group in which the adolescent learns to practice accountability to a community is essential for the application of the principles of valorization.

Interdisciplinary academics should be guided at this phase to encourage wonder and hopefulness, and deep thinking. Students learn in this context to question and query. They are given the structure and tools to research, investigate, and mediate. They are taught to approach issues at hand as problems to be solved and are taught the tools to solve them. Discussions with peers, guided by a skillful seminar facilitator, can create a lively and provocative conversation that can give students a healthy sense of how to challenge and support diverse opinions and ideas.

Ideas and concepts studied in class are often linked to field studies. The adolescent work of the hands can involve building projects like Habitat for Humanity, hiking and backpacking, physical challenges and adventures that are alternated with periods of rest and relaxation. This is a period

for learning to use tools, work the land (it can be your own school campus!) and perform minor repairs and maintenance to buildings and equipment. Often the work of the hands can help students develop skills for which they can be paid. Money students earn can be applied toward meaningful, practical expenses – like paying for their own school field studies, tuition, or another important financial obligation. This type of earning, saving, and spending is a cycle that enhances the process of valorization and is not to be confused with saving for personal luxuries.

Just as earning money for a worthwhile endeavor leads to valorization, so does any activity that encourages selflessness. Given the particular sensitivities of the adolescent, stewardship for the school community, the land, the town or city and the service work to put the stewardship in action are essential components to any adolescent program. We can see that the adolescent comes from the elementary program with a sense of responsibility to society, so the study of society is important. Then the work to serve the society is also important and should include working with big ideas in politics and with big hearts on service projects.

All of the work during this period will shift the plea of the child in the period of normalization from “Help me to do it myself” to the plea of the adolescent in the period of valorization, “Help me to think for myself.” It is best to find interdisciplinary projects for students that link academics to the heart and the hand. All aspects of their Montessori education should now guide them toward respect for the nobility of all types of work and the dignity of humans; two essential components of a humane society.

During the third plane, whether on a farm, in the city, or both, students are preparing to find their eventual work, not as a means to an end, but to take their place in society. I continually ask myself, “What sort of adults do I want my students to become?” Rereading her words keeps me closer to her sense of intention. Along with a solid skill base and ability to think critically, there is an expectation that we guide our students in the understanding that they are the heirs to a tradition of increasing liberty and rising hope. Our children will naturally take their place in society when we have helped guide them toward valorization – a society that will have a greater chance for liberty and hope because our children are its members.

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