

Work – Wednesday 28 December 2022

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Quote: “Man is not a vegetative body which only lives on material nourishment, nor is he destined to sensorial emotions alone. Man is that superior being who is endowed with intelligence and is destined to do a great task on earth. He must transform it, conquer it, utilize it, and construct a new world full of marvels which surpasses and overrules the wonders of nature. It is man who created civilization. The work is unlimited, and it is the aim of his physical limbs. From his first appearance on earth, man has been a worker. (The Formation of Man, Clio, 69)

Transforming the environment is the work of humans

Supranature

Supranature definition #1: everything humans have built on top of nature, and which depends on the balance of the natural world and interaction with it.

Supranature definition #2: Montessori explored the importance of sharing the marvel of man's accomplishments, or **the world of manmade things**, which Montessori called *supranature*. She used the word *supra*, meaning on top of, or out of (not superior as a value but as a position).

Supranature definition #3: “As human beings, we are fundamentally programmed to adapt to our environment and adapt our environment to our needs. What we change, what we construct, what we control, alter, synthesize, and mold out of nature—that is what Montessori called “supranature.” (Ewert-Krocker, *The Adolescent: Taking on the Task of Humanity*, The NAMTA Journal, 180, Winter 2013)

“activity and intelligent effort... and it is, by nature, social, collective and organized. (The Secret of Childhood, 167)

“The child teaches us that work is not a virtue; it is not the need to earn a livelihood. Work is man’s fundamental instinct.” (Education and Peace, 83)

“The battle between adult and child” (The Secret of Childhood) is about different kinds of WORK

Adult Work

- Adult doesn’t understand the work of the child
- The adult of the species transforms the environment
- FINALITY in constructive rhythm of life chart (transforming work)
- Adult work focused on efficiency and more faster and effective ways of meeting needs, impacting environment, outcome-oriented ways, driven by external factors/forces, dependent on resources available, networking to make more productive and efficient, adults form a collective discipline to do this work
- “natural ‘good laws’ which is essential if adult life is to be orderly and fruitful” (The Secret of Childhood, 167)
- Nature of work for adult human is timeless, universal and how we are wired
- But we can miss and not understand the child’s work (expression of human tendencies)
- The child’s *development* is their work, not the product/outcome

The Work of the Child

- Self-construction and development is the work of the child
- Therefore, the child’s work does not have the same manifestations as the adult’s work

- Adult often sees the child's work as a waste of time due to perceived inefficiencies
- Child (toddlers in particular) throw tantrums when their work is interrupted
- Montessori looked at complexities of modern life and how it has made it difficult for children to do their work of self-construction (modern humans - today is now more complex)
- Assumption that "He must be banished to living in a place apart, which, if it is not the prison assigned to extra-social adults, it is something corresponding, be its name nursery, playroom or school. Here are places to where the child is banished till he can live in the adult world without disturbing it. Then he may be admitted to society." (The Secret of Childhood, 166)
 - o The children MM worked with were banished simply by being left on their own, by being neglected to environments with nothing tangible or appropriate to do but in the same way she observed that children of affluent parents were and still are often banished to the pampering and passive existence of living under the care or despotism of caregivers who manage everything for them, who do everything for them, who answer all of their problems, and who obstruct their own movement and will and agency
 - o These circumstances leave children thwarted in their development
- Work of the child/adolescent must be interaction with their environment that allows them to develop their own characteristics and respond to their own needs (wired in us)
- Every child is primed internally to interact and adapt with their environment
- Child is the father of the man: personality formed in child becomes the personality of man
- "The child's work belongs to another order and has a wholly different force from the work of the adult. Indeed, one might say that one is opposed to the other. The child's work is done unconsciously, in abandonment to a mysterious spiritual energy, actively engaged in creation." The Secret of Childhood, 169) *Maximum Effort*
- Much of her work was then observing needs to prepare environments to respond
 - o To meet the child's vital instinct to work
 - Allows work with hands
 - Choice of work
 - To move
 - To repeat
 - To have space and time to focus and concentrate
 - To use language
 - To reach levels of independence
 - o She designed environments and materials that nurtured all of those needs and observed that adults do not manifest work in the same way (a child who exerts maximum effort actually appears rested when they are finished and not exhausted)
- "... his work is made up of activity, he creates by continual exercise. And we must clearly understand that he too uses his outer environment for his work, the same environment that the adult uses and transforms. It is through exercise that the child grows; his constructive activity is a real work which flows materially from his outer environment." (The Secret of Childhood, 170)
- The answer to "deviations" is always work
 - o When given a prepared environment that is appropriate and with time, the child is able to achieve a sense of equilibrium (faith in child)
 - o Do work with purpose, gain independence, allow child/adolescent to express themselves

The Work of the Adolescent

- "the role that he will play in society"
 - o Not a specific role but to have a role/contribution at all times

- The work of the adolescent is STILL self-construction, even if its purpose begins to take on the purposes of adult work in the world
- Always a risk in assuming adolescents are doing adult work (adolescent between child and adult) – they are still developing neurologically, physically, socially
- Integration still taking place and in parallel to toddlers
- Montessori's term: **A school of experience in the elements of social life** (not school)
 - o The developmental mechanism for the work of adolescents is SOCIAL ORGANIZATION
 - o Pursue experiences that lay the pathways of productive engagement in socially organised activities of the group
 - o "The expression 'work for wages' at once suggests a trade and implies a technical trade and competition. This work should, instead, be an exercise of 'utilized virtues', of 'super values', and skills acquired beyond the limits of one's own particular specialization, past or future." "This conception of work implies a general principle that holds the work itself to be of greater importance than the kind of work." (From Childhood to Adolescence, 61)
 - o Development is not a trajectory towards a specific job or career, more so the experience and utilizing your contribution to the group
- "All work is noble; the only ignoble thing is to live without working." (From Childhood to Adolescence, 61)
- "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." (From Childhood to Adolescence, 61)

A school of experience in the elements of social life

- Social organization: the interdependent activities of the community/society
- Division of labour and roles
- Living together (levels of responsibility of care for self, others and the environment)
- Economic production and exchange
- Providing food (growing, harvesting, preserving, preparing, serving)
- Constructing and maintaining housing and other structures
- Using natural resources
- Cultural sharing (story-telling, ritual, exchange with wider community)
- Governance (rules, structures, codes, conflict resolution)
- Intellectual engagement/study (sharing ideas, teaching, debate)
- Engagement in the arts (self-expression, exchange of ideas, historical context and record of the human experience)

Work and Study

Study informs work

Work makes study valuable, purposeful and relevant

How the Work for the Adolescent is Manifest

- Developmental work required interaction with environment and concrete adaptation and impact to the environment
- Social cohesion and meaning is often their drive to the work
 - o If offered choices it is often the group of people they are working with that informs the decision, not the content
- Must use hands
- They will work with maximum effort when they are driven to make the contribution and engage with the group's work

What do Adolescents have to say about Work?

Responses from adolescents in Montessori programs

- What you are doing will benefit others
- Gaining skill and being able to work independently
- Doing work well is necessary for good outcomes
- Choice in work allows for self-reflection
- Working together allows for common success (meaningful and unifying)
- Farm work valuable? Yes
- Recognition by others is not as important as knowing your impact
- Genuine desire to do something good, important and to be trusted with that work

Primary obstacles to their work?

- Failure – but then you learn something
- Interruption of work cycles
- Peer perception and critique
- Feeling hopeless and alone
- Inconsistency in adults
- Adults not being there when you need them

The Moral Dilemma of Adult Work

- We value different work differently (compared blue and white collar)
- Moral disequilibrium of humans to think particular ways
- Not valuing all work as noble
- Focusing on possession rather than love of the environment
- Not recognizing interdependence on each other in the world
- We have value systems that promote disequilibrium
- “The child has given us striking revelations of different kinds of love, all of them directly related to work. Most of us experience the love that causes us to be deeply attached to others; but this is a passing love. There is ample reason, however, to believe that the human spirit is capable of another kind of love that is not transitory, that does not change, that does not die. Man expresses this by saying that he loves something that transcends his family – he speaks of his love for his country, of his love for God. This love comes naturally from children... and is characteristic of them. This love is the essential fire in man, without which he cannot live. It is not simply tender affection. I assure you that I have seen this love; I have been amazed by it; I have called it love for one’s environment.” (The Formation of Man, 84-85)
- The above is the power that she saw in children and adolescents and thought that it should be protected
- “This love of one’s environment is the secret of all man’s progress and the secret of social evolution. All the products of civilization are the result of man’s labour.... Everything in our social environment is the result of some form of labour.” (The Formation of Man, 84-85)
- “Men who have come to experience love are privileged. When there is an interchange between an object and a man’s spirit, something deep inside him is awakened – human dignity.” (The Formation of Man, 84-85)
- If it (love) is not aroused in man, he will not have a normal life. Instead of finding his work absorbing, it will exhaust him and he will feel hatred instead of love.” (The Formation of Man, 86)