

## Prepared Environment

### Definition

- An environment prepared so that human tendencies can be active and self-construction can take place;
- It offers children or adolescents all they need to become fully functioning, healthy adults, adapted and orientated to their time, place and culture;
- It provides opportunities and materials that naturally elicit developmentally appropriate activities;
- It is free of obstacles to growth and assures respect, integrity and support for every child or adolescent in the environment, regardless of background or unique needs.

### "The Triad"

1. Child (inner teacher of the child)
2. Prepared environment
3. Adult

Third Plane Triad differs in that the social component is really important

1. Adolescent/s
2. Farm-residence-shop; social organisation; plan of study and work
3. Adults

### Characteristics of a Montessori Prepared Environment (in general)

- Designed for self-construction;
- Provides developmentally appropriate activity;
- Supports human tendencies;
- Materials/activities provide appropriate challenge and opportunity for independence;
- Beauty (natural materials) and order;
- Isolation of difficulty (mindset that asks adult to consider how materials will be used and understand steps/process/challenges may occur with children using independently)
- Scaled in size;
- Limited materials (don't provide all materials to everyone, when limited they are valued and shared while waiting, care is taken, children move carefully around work, choose different space, engender value and respect, make it more likely that environment will be orderly because all materials have a place);
- Incorporates care of self, care of others and care of the environment (start in practical life in the first plane, fundamental to functioning and adapting to the environment, it requires responsibility and agency, more complex responsibilities as the child grows older);
- Indoor/outdoor (free flow required, continuous extension to study of life).

*"I then understood that in the environment prepared for the children everything should not only be kept in order, but also within certain measured limits and that interest in concentration arises where confusion and superfluity are eliminated."* (Maria Montessori, The Secret of Childhood, Montessori-Pierson, pg 109)

### Psychic Environment

Sense of psychic support for the work that the children need to do we ensure they feel safe, welcome and agents of their own work when they have choice and are respected.

- Respect;
- Choice;
- Developmentally appropriate work;
- Trust: freedom and responsibility (freedom to make choices and mistakes, responsibility to be free but understand the responsibility part and impact of mistakes on physical and social; grace and courtesy linked to respecting others, friendliness with error,

environment without judgement, a joyfulness in learning, providing enough time for human tendencies to be fully expressed, time to repeat, enjoy, socialisation, and reach a state of concentration).

### **Social Environment**

- Mixed age groups;
- Children learn from children (children learn from each other, teach each other);
- Freedom to work with others or alone (individual trajectories that cannot be defined by grade/year of development – it happens over many years and at different paces, impossible to know when children are ready, so we give them time in mixed social group, freedom to work with others and alone);
- Freedom to use language;
- Free to experience social relationships.

### **The Goal of Independence**

- “Help me do it myself.” (first plane) – physical and functional independence
  - “Help me think for myself.” (second plane) – cognitive, moral independence
  - “Help me do it myself and make a contribution to the community.” (third plane)
- \* Environments are different at different planes because development has different characteristics, highlights, needs and focuses at different stages

*“Thus by preparing to a free environment, an environment suited to this moment of life, natural manifestation of the child’s psyche and hence the revelation of his secret should come about spontaneously. Without this principle, efforts at education can only go further and further into an inextricable maze.” (Maria Montessori, The Secret Life of Childhood, Orient Longmans, 1936, pg 114)*

### **The Role of the Adult**

- A material in the environment (part of psychic space in environment, bring them to the work that will open up their own work towards independence);
- The link to the environment and the activities in it;
- The one who prepares and maintains the environment (although children have a part in this), the environment doesn’t belong to adults but to the children/adolescents, students own work and feel like they are free to use environment;
- To facilitate human development;
- To prepare the environment;
- To link the child/adolescent to the environment;
- To observe and respond (to their activity and their needs by supporting their work).

### The Two Pillars of the Adult’s Role

1. To prepare the environment.
2. Not to interfere with or obstruct the child’s work (requires preparation of ourselves and knowledge, internal preparation is not that simple).

### Preparation of the Adult

1. Professional.
2. Scientific (observe objectively).
3. Spiritual (for most involves deconstructing paths in the brain re education experience, tradition).

We must be lifelong learners who continuously seek a desire to know more – cultures, science, technology, economics, people and their history. We must be committed to growth towards self-awareness, uncovering of own biases, obstacles we are all experiencing,

contributors to own society, developing and sustaining the respect of all of us, cultivating in ongoing introspection about our work.

Pitfalls:

- Anger;
- Pride.

Antidotes:

- Humility;
- Observation;
- Lifelong love of learning and enthusiasm for life.

We need to have hope for the children/adolescents we are working with. Adolescents in particular have really good antennae to whether or not we believe in them and their futures. We need to cultivate love and enthusiasm for life.

The Challenge:

- Need for personal work;
- Cultural obstacles;
- Cultural expectations/demands (educating parents of the importance of supporting natural growth of children);
- Time.

**Conclusion: “The Intelligence of Love”**

- The child incarnates the environment;
- The child builds intelligence through love of the environment.

*“Indeed it is as love of his environment that we may envisage the irresistible urge which, throughout the sensitive periods, unites the child to things. It is not love in the sense that is commonly understood, as an emotional feeling, but love of the intelligence which sees and builds itself through loving. Yes, the inner guide which leads children to observe what is about them could be described, in Dante’s phrase, as “intelligence of love”. (Maria Montessori, The Secret of Childhood, Montessori-Pierson, pg 84)*