

THE MONTESSORI ADOLESCENT AT THE MONTESSORI CENTRE FOR WORK AND STUDY, RYDET, SWEDEN

Let's find out more about the adolescent by looking in detail at the Montessori Erdkinder in Sweden run by Jenny Marie Höglund. We'll get insight into how Dr. Montessori's ideas for the adolescent years work in practice, we'll get inspiration for our homes, and we can witness just how capable our adolescents can be.

DAILY STRUCTURE. The days have a clear structure. In the morning, the students either work on the farm or go to the schoolhouse to do "work and study." Then in the afternoon, they swap. There will also be a couple students in the kitchen each day to prepare breakfast and lunch for the community, and another group who will prepare the evening meal.

On Friday mornings, there is community work where they are all involved in cleaning inside and out, and on Friday afternoons, there is a community meeting. On the weekend, it may be necessary for work to be done. The students don't complain, as this is part of their life on the farm—the freedom with the responsibility.

WORK & STUDY. Each student has an overview of all the subjects they need to cover over the year and can see which areas they still need to complete. Interestingly, the older adolescents begin to choose work that is not their favorite subject. They make very conscious choices about what to study, learning to plan and organize their time.

As a group, they decide on a topic to explore for a period of 4 to 8 weeks. The topic chosen will be based on a real-life need or interest, such as recycling, agriculture, finances, biodiversity, energy, innovations, population growth, livelihoods, or mechanics (they may look at old machinery on the farm to understand history and science and how people once solved problems in simple mechanical ways). It's not adults deciding what they need to work on; they have interest in the work because it is real and it is meaningful to them.

They brainstorm to make a mind map of all the directions they might like to explore around this topic.

Let's say the topic was finances. The mind map could include investing, the origins of currency, money as an abstraction, how money is made, monetary aid, money as a means or as a goal, inflation and deflation, banks, the impact of money on society, the stock market, the cost of living, making a budget, taxes, different forms of money, *The Merchant of Venice*, self-expression, "production and exchange" (the sale/exchange of their goods at market), and practical work.

They choose one part of the topic to work on and explore it in many different ways—there are opportunities to discuss questions and express their opinions; they research, write, draw, use the library and the internet; they receive presentations from teachers; and experts might come to speak to them. They also have reading and math seminars, and the teachers present lessons on chemistry, biology, and history related to the chosen topic.

They compile their work into a binder to present to the teacher and their fellow students and, at the end of the topic, they present their findings to the group.

FARMWORK. Alongside the intellectual work outlined above is the manual work. Both are essential and complement each other—the head and hand in harmony. Working on the land allows the adolescent to be in touch with the earth and to get their hands in the soil.

The farm is full of opportunities for manual work, from daily tasks like feeding the animals, cleaning the animal stalls, and collecting eggs, to repairing the existing structures or building a new pigsty or fence.

If they decide they would like to buy a new animal for the farm, it is a group decision, and they must budget for this animal as well as think about its housing and care. To build a house for a new animal will require them to study how to build a structure, to calculate the materials they will need, and to do the physical work as a community to make it happen. The adolescents, who worked on breaking up a concrete floor to improve the barn for their cows, talk about how difficult it was physically, but also how they laughed as they worked together; they thought about others in difficult situations and were grateful for what they had; and they didn't want to let the group down. Not to mention the satisfaction they felt once it was complete.

There is also the work to maintain the farmhouse. They may be repainting the house, vacuuming the rugs, doing laundry, or cleaning the oven.

The practical life activities of the adolescent are to take care of themselves, others, and the environment, just as when they were in the earlier planes of development. They do it wanting to contribute to their community. They previously studied the fundamental needs of humans, including shelter, food, and clothing. Now they are putting those needs into practice.

THE ROLE OF THE ADULT. On the farm, Jenny Marie is the guide who has regular meetings with each of the students and supports their whole development. There is a houseparent or a couple who usually lives on the farm, and a farm manager. The adults work as hard on the farm as they expect the students to. Visiting teachers, experts, and tradespeople (like electricians) will come to the farm as needed. There are many adults coming and going on the farm, all examples to the adolescents of adults in society.

The adult inspires rather than instructs. They ensure that there are opportunities for purposeful work so the students have the freedom to choose. The adult's focus is on the student and their "inner teacher," helping them to understand themselves and their place in society.

As they do with children in the other planes of development, the adult practices observation. This could include observing to understand how each of the students learns best; observing to see if the environment meets their needs; observing how they take responsibility (or not); observing when to step in if needed; observing aspects around concentration (e.g., do they continue until the end of a task or need assistance to stay on track); observing how they exercise choice; observing social relationships in the group; and observing how they deal with mistakes and solve problems.

One of the most important roles of the adult is to help every child feel like they have something to contribute and that they belong in the community. The adult provides guidance with the group's social development and their developing morality. Mostly, the adult observes to ensure that the community is working for the interests of the whole group. Yet there may be times when the adult will need to step in as the authority figure.

The adult can guide the adolescents in their social interactions. If they say something or use a tone that may be hurtful to another student, the adult might make a suggestion like, "You might need to rephrase that."

COMMUNITY. Whereas they studied societies theoretically in earlier years, they are now learning to live in a mini society of their own. When you live and work with the same group, you need to have clear expectations, be able to resolve conflicts, and find strengths in other people. The adolescents are learning about interdependence, that they all have a role, and how work might mean putting the group's needs above their own.

As in all Montessori settings, there is a mixed age group of students. The older students are role models in the community; they pass on the social conventions to the younger ones, and work side by side with them. The younger students love to work with their hands and do practical work; the older students still do the practical work but also get more interested in academic work and what interests them most to maybe study in the future.

They have had as many as twenty-eight students on the farm and as few as seven. One concern might be that with a small group, there would be less opportunity for the students to find friends of the same age and interest. There might also be concern that children of this age would become more interested in pairing up romantically. However, the culture of Jenny Marie's farm school is like that of a large group of siblings living together. Pairing up as friends or romantically is not encouraged, to allow everyone to feel welcome and not left out. They are like one big family.

CREATIVE EXPRESSION. There are a lot of creative pursuits taking place on the farm, giving the students opportunities for self-expression. There is drama (putting on plays or perhaps role-playing a person they have studied), art (including making things to sell in their shop), music (group evenings singing and playing instruments or studying an instrument), poetry (including writing their own), and dance (because there is always a reason to dance).

Drama is a way for an adolescent to be someone else, to see how it feels, and to try out different things by taking on another persona. Adolescents also enjoy sharing their favorite music and poems, and listening can be a fun way for the adult to connect with them.

"It is a critical period for the human soul."

—Jenny Marie Höglund, AMI adolescent trainer

EARNING MONEY (ALSO KNOWN AS PRODUCTION AND EXCHANGE). On the farm, there are many ways members of the community can earn money, meeting their need as adolescents for economic independence. This gives them real work and responsibility and helps them see that they are capable and that their skills have value.

They grow things on the land, have their own shop, take things to market, and have built some guest accommodations to run a bed-and-breakfast for visitors. They keep bees on the farm and sell the honey at a local market or to people passing by. They craft things to sell, like ceramics, knitting, needlework, and woodworking. They have also experimented with an online store, working out what to do if people don't receive things or their payment doesn't come through.

It's more than just producing and selling. They experience being interdependent as a group; they interact and connect with others outside of the farm; and they learn the rules of society and can explore the morality involved in doing business, such as by using sustainable practices or being honest.

As a group, they have a choice of not only how they will earn money but also how they will spend it. Jenny Marie gives the example of three boys who had written a research paper about the history of the Swedish language and became interested in the similarity between the Icelandic language and the ancient Swedish language. The boys found an Icelandic teacher at the local high school and wanted to pay her for lessons. They asked the community if they could use some of the community money for these lessons. There was a long discussion, and the others did eventually agree, with the understanding that if any of them were interested in other things, they would also get some financial help.

TIME ALONE. The adolescent also needs time by themselves, and there is free time every day when they can let their mind wander and rest. Some go to the river to lie in the sun and contemplate life. They also keep journals about how they are feeling, which they regularly review with Jenny Marie.