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Montessori Erdkinder: The Social Evolution of the Little Community

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After nearly ten years of working intensively with the land school concept, I can report that our findings today are true to the expectations of Montessori theory and practice. Our youth are encountering a society, to use Maria Montessori's words, "whose complications and contradictions are reaching the bursting point," a society that "finds itself having to face a crisis that menaces the peace of the world and civilization itself" (*From Childhood to Adolescence* 95). Being not only a realist but also an optimist, however, Montessori expressed certainty that strong community settings bring adolescents the vision and positive conviction to live their lives fully devoted to creating a better social organization and a better individual. We have found that adolescents, parents, and teachers alike can recognize that it is belonging to what Robert Redfield calls a "Little Community" and the consequent strengthening of the adolescent personality that forms the true basis for learning and future adaptation to the demands of society.

> *The rules, like the materials for the youngest children, must be "necessary and sufficient" to maintain order and assure progress. The organization must be conceived in such a way that the adolescents do not feel in any way out of place as a consequence, and so that they may adapt in any surroundings.*
>
> *The adaptation will then manifest itself by "collaboration," source of the social harmony which accelerates individual progress. (Montessori,* From Childhood to Adolescence *115)*

My colleague Laurie Ewert-Krocker, head teacher at the Hershey Montessori Farm School, produced a statement during our Montessori adolescent teacher development program this summer that clearly and concisely expresses the value of the "Little Community" experience. She has graciously allowed me to incorporate it into my presentation, in a form slightly modified from her original:

> *If adolescents are to develop a "feeling" of society and collaboration during their sensitivity for social interest (12-18), the following social conditions must be cultivated:*
>
> *A. The adolescent must encounter a microcosm, a Little Community experience, a prepared environment, that fosters social activity and the broadening of social understanding.*
>
> *B. The student must have the experience that a Little Community as a human mechanism for organization is fundamentally good.*
>
> *C. The individual must be able to adapt to the Little Community, to contribute to the social harmony.*
>
> *D. Adolescents need to know about their world as it is, but they also need to see the best aspects of human organization; see the gifts, the accomplishments, the possibilities that emerge from social collaboration; and experience what*

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social harmony can be like within a consciously cooperative community as well as how social harmony builds the individual.

These community conditions are what lead to the belief, which Maria Montessori asserts as the basis for education and peace, that there can be solidarity among humans.

I would like to present two examples of Little Communities as prepared environments: Colegio Montessori de Tepoztlan in Mexico, and the Hershey Montessori Farm School in Ohio. Each project prioritizes the Little Community as the means to internalize social values and, at the same time, one's sense of personal value, through an education that centers on the strengthening or what Montessori called "valorization" of the personality. Or, as my colleague John McNamara states it: Adolescents not only want to know what they are good *at,* but what they are good *for* within the context of community appreciation.

I visited a high school called Colegio Montessori de Tepoztlan in Cuernavaca, Mexico, in the spring of 2005. The school was founded by its Montessori students who had graduated from the middle school after age fifteen. After one year of traditional preparatory schooling at some of the best private schools in their region, they wanted to return to their Montessori home base. They wanted to return to their Montessori adolescent community because they remembered how they had been loved and respected for who they were and what they could and wanted to do.

No doubt this is because Montessori education views adolescence to be at the height of self-construction, parallel to early childhood, a stage of profound transformation—not merely the fabled storm and stress. Yes, Montessori acknowledges looming challenges in the adolescent personality to be overcome: doubts and hesitations, violent emotions, even criminal tendencies. But along with a realistic view, she presents a vision of the positive side of adolescence: Adolescents are experiencing what she called a second birth, a social rebirth. Adolescents have such a keen sense of justice that they thrive when they do service—with the elderly, in soup kitchens for the homeless, in projects that help protect the environment. Montessori understood young adolescents, their spiritual attraction, their keen humanistic tendencies, their sense of world solidarity, their creative expectations, and their deep absorption of the values and circumstances around them. The adolescent possesses not only a positive psychology and personal dignity, but also a zeal for social reform: "These feelings are the most noble of characteristics and ought to prepare man to become a social being" (*From Childhood to Adolescence* 101).

As part of their yearlong humanities study, the adolescents and teachers of the Colegio Montessori de Tepoztlan formulated a course section entitled *Noble Characteristics*. They explored two aspects of the human: "to be" and "to do." Consciously they stripped away the false masks created by society's youth culture and consumerism in search of their own psychological essence ("to be"). They sought out a life of commitment to social action ("to do"). They designed an experience that combined history, culture, philosophy, and society. Their first intention was to study a culture and place beyond the classroom.

Near the school are the great ancient ruins of Xochicalco, which provide historical context for the adjacent village of Cuentepec, a place that offers opportunity for service work in a "native community." I traveled with the adolescent community over expressways and back roads twenty-four miles south of their school. Here is where they came weekly to do their "Noble Characteristics" work. We arrived at a small museum, solar powered, set in front of a mountain plateau that held the stone and earth works of a great temple. Developed during the period 800 to 900 C.E., between the destruction of the Aztec and the beginning of the Toltec culture, the pyramid of Xochicalco was not only the oldest known fortress in Middle America, but also a religious center.

The students knew the history as it was embodied in the immediate surroundings. History was not a lesson from the books, but from the dynamics of the place: They knew about the heritage of ancient cobblestones beneath their feet as we climbed the small hill towards the ruins. They knew about Nahuatl, one of the true languages of Mexico before the Spanish conquistadors. They pointed out the markers that showed the restored and original pyramid. They escorted me up what seemed to me unending risers, each nearly two feet high, in the heat of the day, to see the serpentine altar

and ball courts. An ancient form of basketball was played on the courts with stone hoops fifteen to twenty feet off the ground. This game differed from modern basketball in one important aspect: The winners were sacrificed to the gods, the highest honor.

They took me into the ancient solar observatory, a large cavern. Sunlight was streaming through a cylindrical hole bored through the rock of the pyramid in the ceiling of the cavern. The observatory works like a *camera-obscura* pinhole: The image of the sun is focused on the floor of the cavern, moving across the room in accordance with the equinoxes and solstices. The motion of the sun materializes an ancient ritual in that cave; the energy of light is converted into the measure of time, tracing the seasons.

This one experience demonstrated multiple lessons: the whole of history as suggested by the ruins, the passage of time as suggested by the beam of light, and a genuine sense of historic belonging as suggested by the ancient people whose spirits, by association, still seemed present. Pedagogy of place fulfilled the integration of time, geology, nature, and humanity set in motion by the Montessori "Key Lessons" of the elementary.

My young companions knew they had captured my interest. Adolescents want adults to enter their process, and for this reason they make magnificent tour guides or docents. These adolescents were compelled by my interest in them and extended themselves to me because I was willing to step into their reality. It was a fast-moving exchange of energy. As we stood silently on the promontory, we took in the beauty of the surrounding mountains and fields through a simultaneous vision of the same breathtaking panorama. It was all one, common experience. The result was a warm connection and a momentary expression of solidarity—an emotion generated by just being there with the common mission of uncovering an area of mystery or the unknown. We realized that we were strangers and friends at the same time.

So here we experience *pedagogy of place,* a means of learning whereby the adolescent and the adult find the environment wrapped around the body, mind, and soul. We experience the call to wonder, to meander through these effigy sculptures and cobblestone walls, to touch, to share, to acknowledge that the whole is resonating in each of us, creating a passion to dig deeper, to know these ancients who crafted this masterpiece. At the same time we wish to know each other. Our community has the possibility of exploration as we observe the grandeur of another human community far back in time.

We boarded the bus again and travel to nearby Cuentepek, where the students and I walked through the plaza, full of elderly women with gray striped shawls. Each matron of the city had a place on the square, eyeing us as we walked by. "Buenos dias"—one voice, barely audible, came from the ensemble of somber faces. The students chanted back in unison, "Buenos dias." We walked the dusty roads where hungry mongrels foraged for scraps, we passed a bar with a boom box bellowing. A few children were playing in almost empty streets. We arrived at the house where we were to have lunch.

The dwelling was a small hut with a courtyard of chickens and a single open clay-firing pit. The roof was made of tin; a patch of corn grew through the cane-lined courtyard. Lunch consisted of sopes and quesadillas, and soda in recycled glass bottles. A student volunteered in the kitchen. The afternoon was for pottery making with terracotta made of clay, grass, and manure compost. The students were trained to shape the traditional pots. They were learning a skill; maybe they could join the production line next year.

At the beginning of the native community project, the students had studied the ancients, knew their facts about the town, but had no real responsibilities, no way of making connections (sustainable relationships). When a community meets a community, there is a desire on the part of adolescents to penetrate, to immerse themselves in the grown-up world; they want to engage in real responsibilities and deep cultural investigations, to be involved first with the physical work and then, later, with the planning, to become specialists in their roles. They might assist in the market, clean up the square, cook, make pottery, provide farm labor. They needed roles that were

sustainable. They needed an orientation to this reality stronger than what their teachers could provide. They were seeking relevance in the "elements of social life."

It took a specialist to devise these roles and make the connections within Cuentepek, so that the village would trust the students. The specialist's name was Gerardo. Dressed in blue jeans, his black hair tied in a pony tail, his eyes conveying his empathy and knowledge of the Cuentepek natives, he brought the students into the community's functioning. The students respected him even more than their own teachers. They put away their cell phones and urban affectations when he began to talk. That was because Gerardo knew what needed to be done to get beyond social tokenism and get into a deep bond with the native citizens of Cuentepek. To the adolescent, the specialist is the informant about reality who leads the young citizen across the great divide to the adult world. Montessori indicates that the specialist is indispensable to engaging adolescents.

What can we observe about this community engaging with another community? Let us listen to the students (speaking in English, their second language). These are not testimonials, but reveal the transformations that occur when community meets community:

> ***Mariana M.:*** *It seems incredible to me that the people who have less in life are the ones that are the most giving, amiable, and sweet. People in the urban community had no time for us and were unwilling to talk …*
>
> ***Aura:*** *The learning that I received from this project is that every one needs a guide for the different labors that there are in life. I believe that spending time with people who are less fortunate helps you to value what you have or don't have. To share and relate to different visions of life helps you understand your own reality as does the process of their relating to your reality. I learned that we must always remember where we came from in order to live life more fully.*
>
> ***Mariana C.:*** *We were able to see that in fact our project had worked, just not in the way we had imagined. All the time we had spent there with no apparent tangible results had in fact been the catalyst for a great change, and for learning on a deep level. We were witness to how interest and desire to learn from the community came from our hearts and ourselves. From my experience I can say that great projects are not great in the magnitude they encompass, they are great when they come from the heart because it is in this way that they reach spontaneity and the naturalness that is our essence.*
>
> ***Isabel:*** *There are so many things in our life we take for granted, because we've had them since we can remember or simply because we are too arrogant to notice.*
>
> *Although this happens to all of us, what really makes the difference is the ability to be conscious and to be able to put everything behind you just to take the very first step to build what we wish our life to be like. It is indeed crucial in every experience. When I think about my life and the most valuable things I own, most of them come from my education.*
>
> *As time passed I noticed that the routine of the community wasn't at all like what we lived in the city. I realized that what we wanted to give wasn't what the people really needed…. Maybe the most crucial moment came when we got emotionally involved with the people. We left pressure behind and we concentrated our energy on relating to people. These experiences are the ones that really shape us.*
>
> *Perhaps right now we don't appreciate the consequences they will bring into our lives, but for now I have realized the importance of having a different perspective on the global and local situation.*

These comments demonstrate reflection, the students' ability to see themselves as others see them. This effort to connect with a different culture triggered their innate humanitarian awareness. Each student's comments isolate noble characteristics—they express matters of heart, they see virtue in having fewer material things, they note the importance of their education, and they talk about providing for the next generation of students. Most fascinating of all, they are getting closer to people who are very different from themselves.

These students are studying culture. As they enter into their own adult culture they are seeing that people can live very differently. Cuentepek is a *Little Community* (a phrase coined by Robert Redfield in his book *The Little Community*) that has been preserved for centuries with its own unique character. The concept of Little Community can be applied both to the adolescent community itself and to the cultures the adolescents choose to immerse themselves in for study.

What is the Little Community? Redfield says that first the Little Community is distinctive because it is apparent where it begins and where it ends. The distinctiveness is expressed in the collective consciousness of the community member. Secondly, a Little Community is "small," a unit of personal observation. For instance, a group of adolescents going to school creates a norm that is easy to observe. Third, a Little Community changes slowly, with activities that remain somewhat constant. You cannot force an adolescent community; it evolves. Fourth, the Little Community strives toward self-sufficiency. The adolescent attempts to find a base for a multifaceted independence, but the greatest of all independence is social.

Adolescent Little Communities are achieved in different programs in different ways. The key is to give young people independence and trust to do their work and run their own communities in cooperation with adults within and beyond the classroom setting. Visiting and studying existing Little Communities, outside the adolescent community itself, enhances reflection on the greater attributes of life. Such Little Communities are plentiful—an Amish settlement, a nearby neighborhood, a downtown community. Adolescents in Cleveland, for instance, have chosen to tour the neighborhood known as Little Italy, with all the traditions of a Catholic church; a historic mural; bakeries with cannoli, gelati, and mascarpone; restaurants with pasta, pizza, and wine; an Italian butcher shop—all of these elements make for an identifiable, distinctive Little Community. A holistic study of Little Italy or any community arouses social questions that define how a community connects its members and establishes observable traits.

Similarly, the Mexican students had questions about the Cuentepek culture. When Aura says, "to share and relate to different visions helps you understand your own reality," one can see that this isolated village of Cuentepek educated his own sense of how their little adolescent community works and how place teaches. The visiting adolescents might think: How do the old women of the square create their group, who is it that clusters together, who is kept apart? What parts are connected to other parts? What work is connected to the whole? The adolescent becomes conscious of this different community through empathy, informed observation, and "human solidarity," about which Montessori says: "We must begin with the children, making them reflect upon the social value of work, and the ideal of work done for others, so that the common effort shall enrich the life of all" ("Human Solidarity" 243).

The structure of the "common effort" in the Little Community creates conditions for both harmony and conflict, because wherever there is responsibility, there are feelings of achievement and collaboration as well as feelings of friction and failure. So the Little Community is concerned about how conflicts are resolved. Community members establish codes of conduct or civility so that there is a vocabulary for harmony and good human relations. A protocol for addressing disagreements is formulated, perhaps even posted. After working with formal supports throughout the school year, informal human relations mature and in time conflicts are resolved quickly and naturally. Adolescent Little Communities over time evolve towards a very sophisticated level of social interaction because adolescents have very acute social perception.

Social interaction provides feedback if it is tied to purposeful work that helps adolescents understand themselves as constructive human beings. Community feedback in fact is so powerful for adolescents who are engaged in maximum effort that it results in a dramatic "conversion"

somewhere between the ages of twelve and fifteen. Montessori describes this phenomenon as a "swift, sometimes instantaneous change brought about always by the same cause. It would not be possible to quote a single example that did not involve the concentration of activity on an interesting task" (*The Secret of Childhood* 168).

Examples of conversion through community feedback are plentiful. A student who begins his adolescence as combative and disparaging is converted into an informed debater who is thoughtful and always has an interesting opinion. Another who hates school but loves parrots chooses a career in life sciences focused on ornithology and eventually goes to Costa Rica for eco-activism. What about an introspective poet with no self-assurance making a book of her poetry and having acquired a glimpse of making a difference in the world? A student filled with fantasy and storytelling finds self-confidence by writing songs and stories performed at social events. Through various successes within the web of Little Community social interactions, almost every adolescent can *find self-acceptance beyond the opinions of others*. This is a recurring phenomenon for individual adolescents. Through optimal engagement, they care for themselves and others with compassion and a sense of responsibility for the group as a whole, and they stop worrying about themselves.

So it is that community feedback happens when one learns how to take meaning from another, so that you learn about yourself through others who are learning about you. That is how we educate through individual personality in connection with the social whole. Adolescents learn a great deal from feedback and exchange within a community context, especially from peers. But when they study a community outside of themselves (such as Cuentepek or Little Italy), adolescents initiate open discussions about civilization and the human condition as a whole, where interaction is paramount and feedback about the experience at hand continues to be essential to personal growth as well as thinking about society and the history of civilization.

This tells us adults that we must venture to establish a *method* of seeing other people and cultures more accurately as a whole process of interaction and feedback. We also must view the people of other cultures as specifically different from us as they are shaped by whole cultures different from our culture. Cultures are both intensely relative and universal at the same time, says Ruth Benedict, one of the pioneers of social and cultural anthropology and a contemporary of Maria Montessori. And this same interaction of particular and universal applies to the Little Community of adolescents, who come from every background and every region. To penetrate the personality of the adolescent requires a very special kind of observational/analytical skill, which can develop only with the understanding of your own Little Community—an understanding that grows between adults and students as they work side by side—coupled with the understanding of surrounding Little Communities, where adolescents meet adults.

The task of human understanding, Montessori writes, is "the task of mending breaches, filling gaps that are vast and serious. Its primary goals must be the realization of the values of the human personality and development of mankind" (*Education and Peace* 54). The *Little Community* is a means of development presenting a series of "whole" realities to the adolescent. The first whole for the adolescent community is the self, where there is a need to get inside yourself, mending the developmental quirks and hurts and comprehending just who you are and what you need to become. So many of these young people feel the pressure of their parents' worry, the abandonment of divorce, the social isolation of the nuclear family. It takes a Little Community outside the home to develop a strong will, a sense of play, a personality that knows how to perceive others in relation to the self and how not to take oneself too seriously. We have seen many adolescents learn to ward off bullying and ignore teasing and negative remarks because the feedback system of the Little Community provides practice at addressing comments and realizing that one's peers have the same insecurities and the willingness to work things out.

Montessori describes the underlying social integration even for the Children's House: "This unity born among the children which is produced by spontaneous need, directed by an unconscious power, and vitalized by a social spirit, is a phenomenon needing a name, and I call it cohesion in the social unit" (*The Absorbent Mind* 212). One is able to look at Montessori education as a broadening series of Little Communities, a spiral nautilus of chambers from womb to world. We

see the Little Community as ongoing but moving toward a clearer picture of society and its place within the history of civilization.

The Erdkinder farm community is the ultimate Montessori expression of Little Community for the adolescent. Why does Montessori view the farm community as one chamber to occupy on the way to social reality? Why does the farm introduce the Little Community so well to the adolescent, who is developmentally ready to test a diversity of community components, a wide range of experience, and deep relationships with a small group of people all at once? The social structure of the Erdkinder is established by the operating parameters of the farm: manual labor, a chance to produce, to enter into direct contact with the larger farm community through the store or sales stand, a hotel, a youth hostel—all of which provide an educational syllabus for integrated work and study.

The Hershey Montessori Farm School in Huntsburg, Ohio, is a safe haven. It is a Little Community aligned with nature as well as a farm, a green womb, a barge that floats on top of the "Great River" of civilization where all can stand on one deck and see the woods and fields or night sky. The farm is a place that nurtures.

The boundaries of fields, ponds, trails, farm commons bring its members together, shaded from noise, media hype, and consumerism. There is no culture like agriculture to mitigate the anxieties of urban/suburban culture that often come from a lifestyle of minimum real-life responsibilities. For example, there is no substitute for growing and cooking your own food on the farm. Human values are discovered in the work of the hand and the head, through knowing that humans can physically work with nature and still benefit immeasurably without exploiting its resources.

When new teachers or new students come to the farm school they need to find some place to stand within the whole and make their way to the whole. Everyone starts with practical roles and physical orientation—their chores, their occupations, where they sleep, where they store their belongings. How does the stove work, how does the dishwasher function, and where do the dishes go? Who is like me? Who do I like? Like a cubist painting, there is, at the beginning, a buzzing fragmentation of the whole in terms of the parts. The community from the start must mend these breaches and fill the gaps.

Integration of the parts into the whole is the answer to social integration, but we're not talking about classification and concepts any more. We are talking about experience. We are talking about life spaces for tools, tractors, log splitter. We are talking about the relationship between the animal barn, the chicken coop, the log cabin, the fields, the store, the garden, and the kitchen. We are talking about the wood shop and its role in repairing the farm. We are talking about the horse barn where we learn to ride. But there is one difference here from weekly trips to Cuentepek: The school is *on* the land. The work is daily. At Cuentepek, the students must strive for community participation because, at the end of the day, Cuentepek is only a place to visit. Adolescent communities that are not on farms can select ethnic neighborhoods, school neighborhoods, small towns, or villages for study, but the adolescent needs to work *in* a Little Community, not just study it.

Laurie Ewert-Krocker explained in our summer session how the farm's "occupations," its day-to-day operating tasks, help to consolidate the adolescents as a Little Community. Here again is a slightly modified form of her statement:

> *Complex occupations (adult-like tasks) require collaboration, division of labor, collective pooling of various expert knowledge and abilities, which constitute responsible roles. Each occupation forms a small community within the Little Community to get something done collaboratively. Division of labor on a task allows for application of individual talents.*
>
> *Occupations give everyone a global view of the whole Little Community: Tasks are bigger than what one person can do; everyone must have the option to help.*

This allows everyone to experience the interdependency of individual contributions. Thus social harmony supports individual growth.

Finally, occupations facilitate collaboration between manual and intellectual labor, which are both part of being a whole person. The hand/mind connection creates an appreciation of the interdependency of the social organization grounded in the reality of the farm and its physical components.

The farm's "occupations" create smaller, constantly changing groups within the Little Community. Some work is individual, some in pairs, some in groups, but all requires practical knowledge and has a real goal: There is pond study, food preservation, woodlot management, simple machines, bioshelter, nutrition, pigs, sugar bush, human development, astronomy, bees, chickens, organic gardening, bridges, cows, weather, forest study, sheep, organic gardening, and then some.

Each small group of students forms an occupation community—they have a job to do with a rhythm of individual and group work. Each occupation group reveals a small whole, the whole of the cow's world, the whole of the bioshelter, the whole of the organic garden—each is an operating system, each is a community within a community and a stepping stone to the overview of the social structure of the whole farm enterprise. Each occupation also requires research in the sciences—zoology, botany, chemistry, physical science, economics, archaeology—connected to both history and culture. The interface of all occupations compounds the potential for shared community information.

Knowledge and practicality, head and hand work together to create a balanced approach to problem solving. After the student experiences the full gamut of occupations for each of the science categories, the process of mending the breaches and filling the gaps means that the whole farm, its cooperative work, its derivation of science will converge as one social structure, even though the occupations exist independently of one another and are centers of activity unto themselves. Often the Little Community develops a kinship of place through the occupations, just because so many individuals grow to become specialists, leaders, idealists, teachers, and crafts persons; they must complete their occupation to complete the network. In the simplest terms, it takes all kinds to make a whole Little Community. This is what creates the balance between the unique individual contribution and the harmony of the whole.

(I might add that the real measure of the students' ownership of the occupations is apart from their reporting to community. It is when they talk to visitors about their occupations that they realize just how their knowledge has been expanded.)

From an anthropological standpoint, the mending of the breaches and the filling of the gaps refers to the connection between the individual cultures in the study of history. In teaching history we emphasize the chronology of individual places that are culture-specific yet have unfolding stages that are universal: the early stage, which is agricultural (the connection to the farm); the classical stage, with the emergence of the city; the transitional stage, when regions debate how they are to form a federal union or constitution; and, finally, the unification or adult stage, which usually results in the explosion of culture.

With continued respect for the sequence of individual cultures and national histories across time and space, there is a cumulative effect. The participants are guided to ask about where history is going, and this means that the big sweep of historical cultures is pointing somewhere. At the Farm School, the student undertakes twelve in-depth cultural studies of different communities, moving from ancient to modern history in order to investigate the big sweep of history, or what Montessori refers to in various sources as "the whole of human history."

And then there are the emotional issues of human endeavor. Throughout history, humanity has struggled over basic human rights and has experienced the tragedy of racism, of ethnic and religious prejudice. To study the moral challenges and shortfalls of humanity as well as its greatest triumphs is to begin to find good answers to very difficult questions. In seeking understanding of a period in history, one encounters turning points, self-expression, and flights of emotion, which

adolescents really love to dramatize and upon such build their own sense of life struggles and personality conversions.

Anyone who works with adolescents knows that they have feelings, strong feelings, angry feelings, loving feelings, but most of all they have a need-to-belong feeling. There is nothing more binding for the adolescent community than the expression of the personality in all of its raw and unfettered drama. So the play is the thing, wherein characters with difficult questions come alive, and wherein the adolescents' own real emotions emerge. The Little Community is a stage, and the adolescents and adults are actors upon it.

Can I tell you about an adolescent "coffee house"? Here adolescents communicate to each other through their unique strengths of expression—standup comedy, songs they have written, reading of their poetry, telling of stories, dancing, gymnastics, rock band. Through the impact of self-expression, adolescents reflect on who they are and how they relate to the big picture. The Little Community functions in a valorizing way when its memories are put in into a reflection process. Fyodor Dostoevsky has a nice way of putting it:

> *You must know that there is nothing higher and stronger and more wholesome and good for life in the future than some good memory of childhood [or adolescence]…. People talk to you a great deal about your education, but some good sacred memory preserved from childhood [or adolescence] is perhaps the best education. If one carries many such memories into life, one is safe to the end of one's days, and if one has only one good memory left in one's heart, even that may be the means of saving us. (cited in Coles et al. 183)*

I believe, in the end, it is the memory of the Little Community and its positive psychology that constitute its true meaning for taking on the challenges of the future. Graduates of the Farm School often give graduation speeches that touch on their memories of the school. Please allow me close by introducing Saraya Mireille van Someren Boyd, one of our graduates, who will read the speech she gave at her graduation in June, 2005.

Saraya:

> *When you think of the world, what comes to mind?*
>
> *I automatically get visions of people and places, everyone in a hurry. I get glimpses of ideas and creations that people have spent their whole lives fighting for or working towards…. I see technology blooming like a child and it makes me wonder all sorts of things. Questions dance in my head about the past, the future and what I should be doing right now.*
>
> *I watch clouds fly by, rain come and go and flowers open up to breathe for the first time the glorious sunshine seeping towards the earth. Then, I remember as a child thinking birds would fly for fun. I remember knowing that my daddy would always be able to help me with anything and that one day, it might be possible to float on a cloud like a fairy.*
>
> *But now when I see a hawk soar through the air and draw circles in the sky, I know the real reason. I know now that there are some things even daddy doesn't know the answer to and I know that clouds couldn't hold me very well because they are just rain waiting to happen.*
>
> *I see now how my thoughts have changed although I don't know how or when it happened. I remember thinking that the world was perfect just the way it was but I am not so sure about that now.*
>
> *All around me, life buzzes, crawls and thrives to its own rhythm and I feel sometimes as if I am beating to somebody else's drum. People move too fast.*

They get wrapped up in their goals and forget about their true dreams of happiness. They are living a fake form of love and think that they are making their way to the perfect lifestyle and their perfect job so therefore, it is okay to be unhappy in the meantime. They forget how to buzz, therefore they are not thriving. They are just moving like machines that haven't been programmed to dance or smile.

Our poor earth can't keep up with the busyness of our heads anymore than we can keep up with each other and that is why there is chaos. People must live in harmony with each other for there to be peace. All that takes is realizing that we are all fighting towards the greater good of the same thing.

Though our ideas may be different, as well as our language and the color of our skin, I know that there is potential in the soul of the human race to break free of stereotype and start to recognize others' positions. I know the potential is there because I have seen it shine through. Just like the grass growing through the cracks in the pavement, under every city, there is rich soil, inside every human, there is harmony—the potential to be peaceful.

When I get caught up in the newspaper headlines and I feel like there is no hope, I just open my eyes and I see that here there is something. I see that there is something in the way that we plant flowers and seedlings. There is something to putting your hands in the dirt and placing new life in the soil, knowing that without the home you have just made it and the precious water you have given it, it would not be able to survive and produce the tastiest rich wholesome tomato you've ever eaten in your life. There is something in the way a person holds a fresh egg and caresses its shell that shows me that the world has hope. It shows me that I can go to the earth and tell her everything is going to be all right and watch her smile.

When I am here, with the ground below me, and the sky above me, I can see us, as children and adults, working together to plant tomatoes and gather eggs. Here I see the harmony sparkle in my friend's eyes and it makes me smile and crave the land because I would like to thank it.

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