

# FRAMEWORKS THAT ORGANIZE THE GROVE SCHOOL

by Ben Moudry and Andrew Christopherson

*As with the other case studies in this journal, Ben Moudry and Andrew Christopherson present a vision of a Montessori high school that is focused on fostering the adolescent personality in connection to society. This chapter uses concrete examples of the key experiences and programs that provide the adolescents at The Grove School with this goal in mind. A list of desired outcomes for adolescents along with associated adolescent-specific indicators is provided as these outcomes guide the work at The Grove School.*

The Grove School is informed and influenced by its physical location: a 9.5 acre farm campus that is on the edge of the town of Redlands, California. There are two learning communities at The Grove School, one for the 12-15 ages (middle school) and one for the 15-18 ages (high school). The Grove School is an independent charter school in its eighteenth year of operation.

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## FACTS AND DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE GROVE SCHOOL

- 216 students total (middle school = 126, high school = 90)
- Admission is by lottery
- Approximately 35% of students attended a Montessori elementary school
- There is no tuition; the school receives \$7500 for each student from the State of California like every other public school in California.
- 60% white, 20% Latino, 8% Asian, 5% Af-Am, 7% two or more ethnicities
- 25% of the families receive free and reduced lunch
- 15% of students with special education needs
- Two campuses: 9.5 acre farm campus and a high school building

Currently, the school is in a growth phase to increase the number of adolescents in its 15-18 community. The purpose of the growth is to provide a larger community that will be optimal to the older adolescent's development. Grove is also in the process of rewriting the outcomes for its graduates and documenting how those outcomes inform all of the designed lessons, experiences, and work for students. The outcomes will be shared and discussed later in this article.

When considering the frameworks for the school, I think about contrasting the purpose of a school to the purpose of an adolescent learning community. It is important to be aware of the preconceived constructs that we have when it comes to education and what it looks like. It is easy at any level to focus only or mostly on the information that a student is learning, especially at the high school level where there is great pressure for students to achieve academically to compete to get into colleges. Our work as a Montessori school though is to move beyond just the simple *information* and create a learning environment that is optimal for the *formation* of the adolescent. When one considers and focuses on the formation of the adolescent and her personality, then one starts to approach the ideas

for key frameworks for a Montessori adolescent community and the learning environment to support it.

### FRAMEWORKS AT THE GROVE SCHOOL

The framework for any school or organization begins with the mission. Here is the mission of The Grove School:

The Grove School is a public Montessori community that guides adolescents in their work of self-construction, as they become engaged and respectful world citizens.

Grove has a mission statement that is similar to many other Montessori schools and uses the terms *adolescent, community, guidance, self-construction, engagement, respect, and a world or international perspective*. Currently, Grove is in the process of deconstructing its mission to look carefully at each key term and how that term informs the work of teachers and administration at the school. It is also important to



The commercial kitchen produces an average of one hundred lunches every day. Older adolescents can be an assistant for the kitchen and earn their food handler card, which makes them more employable.

continue to connect these key terms back to Dr. Montessori's writings about the prepared environment for adolescents and their work to develop their personality in connection to society.

Montessori's writings outline general requirements for the adolescent level. The overarching work, which the theoretical requirements support, is the adolescent forming their personality and identity in their thorough exploration, experience, and reflection.

### **Requirements of Montessori Theory for the Adolescent Level**

- Economically independent
- Life experience
- Skilled with hands (practical life skills)
- Skilled with head (intellectual capability)
- Skilled at creating and being at peace
- Artistic and creative work
- Significant time away from nuclear family
- Healthy diet
- Ready to enter society as an independent adult
- Self-confident
- Found a calling in life, relates to soul and personality
- Independent and interdependent
- Reflective, can be silent
- Understand human development
- Social Skills
  - Intrapersonal
  - Interpersonal
  - Caring for others
  - Understanding people—psychology, sociology, wellness; caring for others—peers, children, elders, learning about differences

Grove is in the process of considering each key term of its mission, defining it, and identifying where and how it is supporting each of these terms in each subject area, key experience, and in policies and practices. Our next step is to take each of the key terms from the mission and cross-reference them with Montessori’s theoretical requirements.

### OUTCOMES FOR A GROVE GRADUATE

Montessori wrote and spoke about education as an “aid to life.” The role for those of us who work with the third plane of development, in being an aid to life, is to support young adults as they complete their final preparations for adulthood. At Grove, we consider and discuss what it means to prepare young adults for adulthood and all that it means. The six-year period of adolescence is a critical period of development because it is the second largest growth period physically and mentally in life. The physical growth of the body and brain is remarkable, but social development is just as significant and is actually the natural focus and drive for the age.



Animal Care: An older adolescent who participates in Future Farmers of America demonstrates sheep shearing to two younger students.



Produce in the field with the historic Barton Schoolhouse in the background. The schoolhouse will be used as classrooms and an event space as part of the school's economic ventures for student management and work.

Currently, Grove is in the final stages of rewriting the outcomes for its graduates and deciding on the evidence that each student will provide to demonstrate their work towards each outcome. Students can provide evidence through any of their work done for school or in the community. Below is a *draft* of Grove's current work on its outcomes for its graduates in the key areas identified that connect to the Montessori syllabus for the adolescent level. Teachers will use these outcomes to inform student work and experiences for each subject area. Students will create a portfolio of evidence to demonstrate their progress on each of the outcomes for the school.

The Grove School provides a variety of opportunities for students to accomplish these outcomes through its regular classes, key experiences, and unique developmental learning environments. The key experiences are specialized to support the developmental needs (see list and description below). The main developmental learning environments include a farm with fields and animals, greenhouse,

specialized music classroom, visual art and ceramics studio, woodshop, metal shop, a theater, a store, farmer’s market, and a historic schoolhouse to be rented out for events.

## KEY PROGRAMS AND EXPERIENCES AT THE GROVE SCHOOL

### Campouts

The annual, overnight campout provides an opportunity for staff and students to come together as a community in preparation for the upcoming school year. This event is planned by teachers at the farm and by students at the high school. It creates a shared experience to build community, share student knowledge, establish norms and practices, and prepare for the school year.

### Mini-Courses

Mini-courses are designed to allow students to explore physical and creative interests in eight sessions over the course of a trimester. The classes are designed by teachers, volunteers, and students to provide students with experiences in a wide variety of activities that



Students line up to get food for the community meal at the middle school campout.

meet the students' interests and developmental needs. Everything from baking to Shakespeare has been taught as a mini-course.

## **Winterim**

Winterims are designed for middle school students and consist of a week of student-driven curriculum, which may include nights away from home and travel. Winterims require weekly planning meetings, extensive fundraising, and oversight by staff. Winterims take place the week before spring break and are chaperoned by teachers and staff.

## **Creative Academic Weeklong Experiences (CAWE)**

CAWE is the high school equivalent of a Winterim. It includes outside experts, academic, interdisciplinary objectives, staff and student accountability, travel outside the local area, 8 two-hour class sessions (an afternoon mini-course), 5-7 days of continuous activities during the last two weeks of the second trimester, a presentation of knowledge/skill or a demonstration of an activity to the whole community, and the completion of an academic paper that demonstrates the mastery of the interdisciplinary objectives.



Creative Academic Weeklong Experience (CAWE): A student showing a Grove keychain made during a 3D printing





Students meet with their mentor groups once a week for two hours. Mentors usually have check-ins with each student in their mentor group at least once a month.

## Mentorship

The school places each student with a teacher to act as their mentor for three years. Mentors are responsible for working with their students in goal setting, checking on academic progress, being an advocate and support, and completion of school-wide projects (i.e., internship, community service, Praxis, student-led conferences, senior projects, etc.). Mentors also help maintain an open line of communication between parents and the school.

## Praxis

Completed by 10th, 11th, and 12th grade students once a trimester, this activity requires students to answer a driving question in an academic paper and present their findings (with two other students) in a creative way. To do this, students must use technology and critical thinking skills and demonstrate a proficiency in writing. Praxis connects the various disciplines and guides students to show understanding of subject matter beyond the recall of facts and completion of single subject projects.

## **Student-Led Conferences**

Twice a year students will give a formal presentation to their mentor, parent/guardian, and a peer. In this presentation, students will reflect on their performance in the Expected Schoolwide Learning Results (ESLRs) of the school and discuss their goals. Mentors and other audience members can ask questions or ask for clarification.

### **DRAFT OF OUTCOMES FOR GROVE GRADUATES**

#### **A Grove Graduate Actively Participates in Their Psychic (Academic) Development**

- As a scholar, a Grove graduate is able to connect knowledge in the areas of social studies, mathematics, science, languages, and the arts.
- A Grove graduate constructs knowledge through inquiry-based, cross-curricular activities and assignments.
- As members of not only a local community, but a global society, a Grove graduate is knowledgeable in at least one language other than English.

#### **Evidence / Artifacts**

Students will:

- Determine and understand key vocabulary.
- Successfully analyze texts, problems, artifacts and situations, from multiple perspectives.
- Successfully synthesize information from various sources and disciplines.
- Defend a position with evidence and properly cite their evidence.
- Reflect on successes and failures and create goals to further their development.

#### **A Grove Graduate Is an Active Community Member**

- As a community member, a Grove graduate understands that a combination of academic pursuits with

meaningful experiences in the school, local, and global communities are necessary to provide the greatest benefit to society and themselves.

- A Grove graduate knows that in order to be an active community member, they need to actively pursue opportunities to work with experts and specialists.
- A Grove graduate knows that participating in community service is necessary in order to have a well-functioning community.
- A Grove graduate is economically independent.

### **Evidence / Artifacts**

Students will:

- Be involved in service to their community.
- Actively take steps to pursue career interests.
- Demonstrate awareness of community issues.
- Participate in community events.

### **A Grove Graduate Expresses Ideas Creatively**

- A Grove graduate understands that creative expression is an important part of the human experience.
- A Grove graduate actively cultivates an appreciation for, and a skill in, different forms of artistic self-expression.

### **Evidence / Artifacts**

Students will:

- Effectively communicate when presenting information.
- Create and evaluate project plans and use a variety of tools to complete a project.
- Explain concepts and ideas through multiple perspectives.
- Express emotions and ideas through original creations.



There is an outdoor theater for student performances. All students have the opportunity to participate in two plays each year.

### **A Grove Graduate Is Involved in Physical Expression and a Healthy Lifestyle**

- A Grove graduate understands the importance of physical activity and fitness and mental and emotional health.
- A Grove graduate actively pursues a healthy physical, mental, and emotional lifestyle.

#### **Evidence / Artifacts**

Students will:

- Create a personal plan for better physical health.
- Actively pursue activities that allow for physical expression.

## **A Grove Graduate Is Prepared for Life as an Adult**

- A Grove graduate understands what it means to have economic and social independence.
- A Grove graduate is prepared to live independently.

### **Evidence / Artifacts**

Students will:

- Demonstrate an understanding of financial independence and entrepreneurial endeavors.
- Demonstrate an understanding of social independence.
- Demonstrate good study habits and practices.
- Demonstrate complete independence with care of self, care of others, and care of environment.

