

AMS POSITION PAPER



HOLISTIC PEACE EDUCATION

There is much discussion about the lack of peace and harmony in the world today. We, as a culture, are beginning to examine the possible causes of such unrest and violence as we face ever-growing challenges to find solutions that might reverse the course of destruction. Maria Montessori, over 80 years ago, provided deep insight into the solution of this problem. She advocated that children are the hope of peace for the world and that we must learn to educate them in such a way that they will be able to develop their potential as human beings and reveal to us the "spiritual embryo" of humankind. Unveiling this "spiritual embryo" within the child is the core focus of Holistic Peace Education.

Holistic Peace Education consists of providing opportunities and experiences for the children to help them understand and access their spiritual essence, the source of Peace within themselves. It further provides opportunities and experiences for them to learn to relate harmoniously with other people, cultures, and the environment.

Preparation or "Setting the Stage"

In order for Peace Education to be effective the following preparations are necessary:

- The teacher begins a process of inner awareness and transformation "...to purify her heart and render it burning with charity toward the child." (1) The teacher becomes a model of peace, respect, humility, and unconditional love and acceptance for all children.
- Through the modeling of the Head Teacher, Assistants in the classroom work on developing the qualities of peace so they can better understand how to encourage the development of peace and harmony in children.
- The environment in the classroom is carefully prepared to meet the unfolding needs of the children, to attract them aesthetically and to reflect a feeling of love, respect and peace. Once a child is involved in an activity, the child passes through deeper phases of concentration and eventually has the potential of reaching the supreme state of inner peace.
- The children are prepared for peace education by setting a tone of peace and awareness. This is done by focusing on their "peace within," their purpose for being in school, establishing ground rules for peace, encouraging respect for everything in the environment and introducing the "Silence Game" where children practice becoming still to feel their inner peace.

Peace -- Individual Awareness and Centering:

As children become aware of how their body, mind, emotions and spirit interrelate, they begin to gain mastery of their bodies, minds and emotions so that their spirit and potential might be more easily manifested.

- **BODY:** As children become conscious of the importance and interaction of the various aspects of their bodies, they begin to develop more appreciation, as well as learn that they can have some control over their mental, emotional and spiritual states through conscious care and use of their bodies. Areas of focus include: body parts, skeletal structure, muscles, organs, internal systems (i.e. respiratory, digestive, etc.)
- **MIND:** As children become aware of how the mind operates they begin to work proactively, creatively, and consciously with it. Areas of focus for the mind include: sensory awareness, thought process, imagination, and creativity.
- **EMOTIONS:** As children become aware of their emotional states and how these states are affected by their bodies and minds, they become empowered in their ability to work constructively with their emotions. Areas of focus for the emotions include: identification of

emotional states, expression of feelings, acceptance of feelings, understanding of mind/emotion connections, etc.

- **SPIRIT:** As children become more aware of and experience the deep abiding love within themselves -- "Peace," they begin to manifest it in other aspects of their lives. A new consciousness of peace grows among the children, creative ideas emerge, sharing happens more naturally, cooperation is more frequent and love is expressed more freely, spontaneity and joy abound -- a "New Child" is born. Areas of focus for the Spirit include: celebrations, rituals, opportunities to "give away," values clarification, education for the heart (awareness of positive qualities, i.e., courage, understanding, patience, truthfulness, etc.)

Harmony -- Interrelationship and Community:

- **TRUST:** This is the attitude of love that is willing to take a chance and risk opening up to the possibility of union with life. Areas of focus include: trust exercises, stories involving trust, promises, truth, honesty, and the provision of unconditional love for the children.
- **OPENNESS:** As children develop trust and feel comfortable, they begin to share their thoughts and feelings with others and risk new challenges. Areas of focus include: communication skills, "I" messages and empathetic understanding, conflict resolution skills, values clarification, and the provision of authentic adult models willing to relate person to person with the children.
- **REALIZATION:** As children feel accepted for who they are and what they feel, they develop positive self esteem and are able to manifest greater and greater potential. Areas of focus include: self esteem exercises, appreciation exercises, honoring creative work, and providing opportunities for recognition of achievements and creative development of talents (i.e. plays, programs, projects, etc.)
- **INTERDEPENDENCE:** The happier children are with themselves, the more likely they are to reach out and interact cooperatively with others. As the children's confidence in self increases, their ability to be interdependent and part of a community increases, also. Areas of focus include: providing opportunities for children to plan and carry out special projects and activities such as feasts, parties, and celebrations, exploring the needs of man, clocks of eras, timelines, etc.

From a sense of community or interdependence the children can glimpse, on a micro scale, the unity of all peoples. From this experience, perhaps their level of trust will be heightened, and they will spiral to greater heights of openness, realization and interdependence.

Cultural and Environmental Awareness -- Global Vision of Peace and Harmony

As children become more aware of their inner peace and learn to relate harmoniously with others, they begin to develop sensitivity and awareness for people of other cultures and the global environment.

- **CULTURAL AWARENESS:** Learning to accept and appreciate the differences of other cultures becomes crucial to the development of world peace. Areas of focus include: exploration of countries of origin, attention to the needs of all people, attention to similarities and appreciation of differences, exploration of various cultures, cultural experiences, foreign language, feasts and celebrations of other cultures.
- **GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS:** Learning to be sensitive to the needs of the Earth's environment and live harmoniously with them is crucial to world peace. Areas of focus include: attention to the needs of the soil, water, air, plants and animals, science experiments to develop sensitivity to the delicate balance of the environment, projects to help the environment, presentations, etc.

In Summary:

Holistic Peace Education begins with the embryonic environment where the children, through the delicate nurturing of adults, come in touch with their inner peace and learn to relate harmoniously

with others. From this micro experience the children will, hopefully, have the tools and understanding to be able to accept and relate harmoniously to all people and their earthly environment. Holistic Peace Education is educating the "life within" the child and assisting them in learning how to relate harmoniously to the "life without."

1) E.M. Standing. *Maria Montessori - Her Life and Work*. New York, Mentor, 1957.

Suggested Readings:

- Maria Montessori. *Peace and Education*.
- E.M. Standing. *Maria Montessori - Her Life and Work*. New York: Mentor/New American Library, 1957.
- Sonnie McFarland. "Holistic Peace Education," *Holistic Education Review*. Vol. 1., No. 4, Winter, 1988.
- Edwina Hartshorn. "Educating the Whole Child," *Dawn*. Vol. 7, Nov. 2, 1987.

The American Montessori Society (AMS) is a nonprofit education society founded in 1960 whose purpose is to help children develop their potential through the educational principles of Dr. Maria Montessori. This includes the following: developing Montessori programs, accrediting schools, granting credentials, encouraging research, organizing seminars and symposia, and promoting all other areas which relate to the dissemination of Montessori philosophy.