

"The Root of Peace"

Infant Teacher of Peace Education Plan

Hong Kong Montessori Research and Development Association

Chairperson: Lau Wing Sze Daisy

Introduction

*"The children themselves can show us the mystery of the human spirit."
 "Infants have the strongest power of life in the world to sustain the human mind towards positivity."
 These are quotations from the three-time Nobel Peace Prize nominee Dr. Montessori's speech in London in 1939.*

Ms. Daisy Lau, then-Chief Executive of Hong Kong Montessori Research and Development Association (HKMRDA), published an article related to virtue and childlike innocence in a special column of Hong Kong Economic Journal's Education Edition in January 2015. Following the teachings of Dr. Montessori, the Association began to take actions to implement "The Root of Peace" education plan in Hong Kong starting January 2016.

Menckes said, "A great man still retains his childlike innocence." A vulnerable and respectable gentleman must possess the innocent heart of a child, the highest state of virtue is to return to the original human nature and instinct, emphasizing inaction. Neo-Confucianism also puts forward the theory of "utter innocence": "At the beginning of life (i.e., infancy), children can do anything without learning, know anything without thinking; this utter innocence is men's conscience." Li Zan also mentioned in The Theory of Preserving Childlike Innocence, "Child is the beginning of life, childlike innocence is the origin of the soul". Just as Li Zan said in the twenty-eighth chapter of Tao Te Ching, "Even you know what is strong indeed, you would also like to be gentle streams flowing in the world. Willing to be the world's streams, the eternal virtue will not lose, but revert to the status of mere baby."

Using the infant and childlike innocence as the ultimate goal, one will never stray from "virtue." As long as one can adhere to natural inquiry, maintain an unchanging rhythm of natural development, the one will embody life's law of survival: "Tao." Such thinking has been extended to modern times. Cultural historian Yu Guoyu said, "Human nature is more superior to culture." An infant's eyes, facial expressions and actions are very close to an uncontaminated anthropological textbook. Characterized by natural, simple purity and peaceful humility, an infant's virtue enables people to return to nature and establish a loving heart.

Childlike innocence represents the "truth" in the origin of human nature, something that exists naturally, with no need to consciously create after birth. That is to say, the child's "innocence" represents a "natural state of perfect condition", which is an "original truth" in accordance to nature and emphasizing "return to innocence." As adults, we should return to what it is like to be a child. This is the ideal state of being.

Since 1996, primary and secondary schools in Canada, the United States, Europe, the United Kingdom, New Zealand and other places have launched the "Root of Empathy" plan. Participating schools will receive a newborn in the community to hold the post of "peace teacher". The peace teacher follows his mother to the school per month, when his/her mother will describe his/her development and growth. Students are required to regularly watch the infant's growth and development and discuss interpersonal relationships with each other, thereby leading to instinctual care about others.

"Root of empathy" is expected to develop and maintain people's empathy (what is called "compassion" in China) from childhood, not only to create a harmonious atmosphere on campus, suppress acts of bullying and violence, but also to promote and extend compassion to other areas of the community. "Infant" means "silent wise man" in Latin, allowing these compassionate teachers to spread their immense positivity onto mankind. The idea of "adults should learn from children" preached in Montessori education philosophy is perfectly harmonious with Eastern philosophy for children thousands of years ago.

Coming into effect in 2016, "The Root of Peace" Education Plan is to treat the infant as a mentor of love and awaken the human truth, compassion, and beauty to fill schools and families with the power of love. To be specific, it brings love into community schools, gives publicity to the importance of the development of infant and toddler, so that the students can love life, learn to live and cultivate kindness as well as mutual help and love. It raises the duty of parents to a higher level to show the miracle of an infant's power of life. It contributes to the growth of an infant, increasing the social importance of education of children growth. Through the cohesive force of society and family to respect for children, the plan can improve children's relationship with the family and society, building early childhood education jointly. Furthermore, through the guidance of an infant's love and mentorship, primary students can return to the "original truth."

Humanistic education is not only related to personal happiness, but also the driving force behind the country's development. This force builds the foundation for world peace. Dr. Montessori once said: "As the teacher of peace, children teach us the mysteries of human nature, on which we can reproduce the human nature of goodness."

Since 2010, the Education Bureau has appointed Hong Kong Institute of Education's Centre for Religious and Spirituality Education to implement the "Programme on Planning Life Education in Primary and Secondary Schools." Through Dr. Ho Wing Hon, at the end of 2015, HKMRDA began initial discussions and designs of "The Root of Peace" education plan with fellow educators from HKICKLA Buddhist Chan Shi Wai Primary School. Educators and staffers from both organizations formulated a best-fit plan for how to incorporate the seven goals of the Programme on Planning Life Education in Primary Schools 2015-2016:

1. Implement complete life education programmes in primary schools suitable and adjusted to each school's situation;
2. Master strategies and techniques to effectively implement life education programmes to help students establish positive values and attitudes;
3. Master strategies and techniques to effectively implement life education programmes to help raise students' perseverance;
4. Determine assessment methods of life education programmes' effectiveness;
5. Conduct exchanges and studies in other areas of the world to understand different regions' experiences with life education programmes;
6. Implement and promote each school's programme plan with support of professional experts; and
7. Formulate communities to share experiences and learnings.

Hong Kong Montessori Research and Development Association (HKMRDA)'s Plan Goal:

Life influences lives. According to our years of experience in parent and 0-6 children education, we believe Hong Kong children have the ability to absorb newborn infants' positive energy. The Chinese proverb from the *Timetric Classic*, "the beginning of life (「人之初」)", suggests the great power that infants have on providing the world with positivity. Infants bring about a powerful life force that can influence individuals of different strata, with positivity, proactivity, self-motivation, and optimism. We need newborns and infants to influence our primary school students. The rare opportunity to witness a newborn's growth and development from the beginning can guide and spur the students' compassion, care, understanding, humility, inclusivity, respect, acceptance, and many other positive human traits. We hope to find a platform to help Hong Kong schools to use life to influence lives, and for this plan to become a model for life and personal education. HKMRDA wishes to contribute to our community and peace within it however we can.

HKMRDA follows Dr. Maria Montessori's "Peace Education" as our plan's cornerstone and philosophy. Applying HKIEA's seven programme goals as listed above, we designed "The Root of Peace," as outlined below:

Parents who have been trained by HKMRDA bring their newborn children (the "Infant Teachers") to a participating primary school once a month for three months (Phase One). Each visit will be the same primary school, so that students can witness the growth of one infant teacher. Parent and Infant Teacher will visit the primary class once every two months during Phase Two (Month Four of the plan), until the Infant Teacher reaches 36 months old. The plan shall continue for three consecutive years to allow for students to witness and observe the Infant Teacher's growth and developmental process. The parents will share with the students how to take care of the infant, how to observe his/her growth, and students will interact and prepare different varieties of work (e.g. worksheets, projects, etc.) to learn and understand human development and their own identities.

In addition, HKMRDA will design activities to further increase students' attitude towards peace, utilizing the state of normalization that would develop into "peace." (What Dr. Montessori described as "normalization" is equivalent to what modern educators refer to as "whole-person development.") Within a whole and contextual environment, human's instinctual abilities for truth, compassion, and beauty can be awakened. The development of life is simultaneously development of the body, mind, emotions, spirit and soul. Dr. Montessori once said that human is a life force made from body and spirit. Therefore, education shall serve children's spirit and soul, assisting their growth in life.

Research Methods/Procedures:

Hong Kong Montessori Research and Development Association presents the following three voluntary plan:

1. Full planning and design of plan
2. Teacher and parent training
3. Arrangement of Infant Teacher visits

Phase One Timeline:

- Suitability of campus/site, 2/2/2016
- Hong Kong Montessori Research and Development Association (HKMRDA) sends delegate to observe and determine suitability of the school's campus.

First visit from "Infant Teacher of Peace," 25/2/2016, 9:00am to 10:15am:

- Theme: The Miracle of Life
- Allow primary school's students to first observe photos and videos of the infant's development from embryo to newborn.
- Mother and Infant Teacher enter the classroom. With the guidance of Ms. Daisy, the mother introduces the infant's growth and development.
- Together with the primary students, the infant's height, leg and arm lengths, head circumference, and waistline circumference are measured. Primary students take down data and any other notes of interest, and ask questions about life and growth.
- Primary students' work: Create their own time-line of their lives.



Parent Meeting 26/2/2016:

- To explain the goals and methods of the plan.

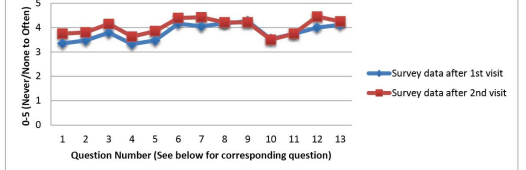
Second visit from "Infant Teacher of Peace," 24/3/2016, 9:00am to 10:15am:

- Theme: Preparation for New Life
- Mother and Infant Teacher enter the classroom. With the guidance of Ms. Daisy, the mother discusses the preparations needed for the new life and any changes within the family.
- Together with the primary students, the infant's height, leg and arm lengths, head circumference, and waistline circumference are measured. Primary students take down data and any other notes of interest, and ask questions about preparing for new life.
- Guide students to discover that their hands can produce contributions to the world.

Result

Research finding:

1. Quantitative data from the survey:



The team prepared two surveys after the first and second visits for parental reporting on how children act at home. The data from these two surveys are shown on the graph above. This quantitative data showed that the students involved in this program were modifying their behaviors after their participation. Even though the time gap was short, there were some changes on behaviors. The team would dig out more empirical evidence as the project continues to see whether the changes in behavior are statistically significant given more time.

2. Quantitative data from documentation:
 During the third visit, the head teacher of the participating class gave the team a self-criticism letter from one of the students in her class. The student was eating snacks secretly during class time, which was not allowed according to the school policy. The head teacher was surprised to receive this self-criticism letter since the student was not caught and this act was totally voluntary. The content of the letter is as follows:



Third visit from "Infant Teacher of Peace," 21/4/2016, 9:00am to 10:15am:

- Theme: Learning about Breathing
- Infant Teacher fell ill and could not attend. Guiding teachers lead children to learn and appreciate about the needs of others.
- Students learn about the importance of mindful breathing.



Upcoming visit from "Infant Teacher of Peace," 26/5/2016, 30 minutes:

- Theme: Responsibility of Life
- Mother and Infant Teacher enter the classroom. With the guidance of Ms. Daisy, the mother expresses her hopes for the new life.
- Parents and the primary students, the infant's height, leg and arm lengths, head circumference, and waistline circumference are measured. Primary students take down data and any other notes of interest, and participate in Q&A session with the mother.
- Primary students' work: Short essay and corresponding actions on "My Calling and Responsibilities."

Notes and details for Teachers at the Primary School:

- No speakers or flash photography
- No direct contact with infant
- Use soft and gentle voice for speaking
- Limit to 30 people for each session
- Adult or student suffering from illness are not allowed
- Adults should control overly-enthusiastic students
- HKMRDA will send 2-3 members for photography and record-keeping purposes
- Teachers' work and related creations shall be available for viewing for all involved parties
- Students shall retain each month's work and creations to be edited into a "Book of Life" in the future
- Parents shall be encouraged to sing the infant's song to the infant using soft voices during every visit

There will be student-behavior parental response surveys after every visit to assess changes of participants and the plan's effectiveness.

The head teacher reflected:
 "I was surprised to receive the letter and I thought the parents made her do that. However, I talked to the parents and found that they did not know about that either. I was so impressed by this act. I think the project is working."
 The research team agreed with Miss Kwun. This voluntary self-reflection is an act of showing empathy; this student cared for her teacher. She understood that her act was causing discomfort to others and she also promised to change her behavior so that she could prevent similar things from happening in the future.

3. Findings from other studies:
 Influences of Roots of empathy (ROE)(Canada, USA, UK, Europe, New Zealand)
 Help with relationships today (empathy, insights and capacity for human connection)
 • 584 children participating in the ROE project classrooms showed significant positive improvement on care of infants, peer nomination for pro-social behaviors, and teacher reports of pro-social behaviors and relational aggression (Schwartz-Reisch, Smith, Zuidam-Zan, & Hertzman, 2012).
 • Through ROE, children's ability to take the perspectives of others is strengthened. They show fewer tendencies to bully and tolerate bullying behaviors (Gordon, 2009).

Affect the quality of parenting in the next generation
 The "Roots of Empathy" program offers real outlook in breaking the inter-generational transference of poor parenting and violence (Gordon, 2003).

4. Limitations of Hong Kong's Plan:
 Although the plan did not have enough time to reach full completion, the beginning positive influences can already be seen. At the third visit, the principal of our participating primary school decided to implement the Root of Peace education plan for all Primary One classes throughout the school starting September 2016. HKMRDA is looking forward to conducting a longitudinal systematic research with the school.
 References:
 Gordon, M. (2003). Roots of empathy: responsive parenting, caring societies. *The Keio journal of medicine*, 52(4), 236-243.
 Gordon, M. (2009). Roots of empathy: Changing the world child by child. Workman Publishing.
 Schwart-Reisch, K. A., Smith, V., Zuidam-Zan, A., & Hertzman, C. (2012). Promoting children's prosocial behaviors in school: Impact of the "Roots of Empathy" program on the social and emotional competence of school-aged children. *School Mental Health*, 4(1), 1-21.

Conclusion:

"Hand is our second brain." Dr. Montessori believes that our hands are our tools to learn about ourselves, our values, and to absorb and express our mind and spirit. Knowing our hands is a very important step. We need to understand the effects of working diligently with our hands. Our hands build up our mind. From the outside in, we realize we can use our hands to build, serve, and contribute. This positive message reaches our mind, which adjusts behaviors and emotions. These emotions then internalizes within the human spirit, becoming traits of normalization: positive, proactive, motivated, and optimistic.



As educators, the first consideration is the children's internal psychological needs. In order to provide a suitable environment for children's life beginnings, education needs to be reconsidered and revamped. Modern education's first blind spot is "results over child." Education is not strictly teaching knowledge and facts, an educator can't focus solely on academic results and neglect a child's basic human values and qualities.

"The child who has felt a strong love for his surroundings and for all living creatures, who has discovered joy and enthusiasm in work, gives us reason to hope that humanity can develop in a new direction. Our hope for peace in the future lies not in the formal knowledge the adult can pass on to the child, but in the normal development of the new man." - Education for Peace, Chapter 7

- References:
 1. "Education and Peace" by Dr. Maria Montessori
 2. "Peace in the classroom" (Practical Lessons in Living for Elementary - Age Children) by Ms. Hetty Adams, Canada
 3. "Honoring The Light of the Child" by Ms. Sommie Mc Farland
 4. "Roots of Empathy: Changing the World Child by Child, by Ms. Mary Gordon
 "Education is not for the system, but for the life."
 Dr. Maria Montessori

Contact Information:
 Ms. Daisy Lau
 Chairperson of Hong Kong Montessori Research and Development Association
 Telephone: (852) 3859 6366 info@hkmrda.org