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Peacemaking

Establishing the Potential for a Peaceful Society by Achieving Community in the Elementary Classroom

By Claire J. Salkowski

In the early 1930s when the world stood on the brink of another disastrous world war, Maria Montessori articulated a brilliant vision for a new world. She saw the problem of war not as a political one, but rather a deeply human problem, rooted in the development of the individual life. With passionate energy and deep insight she warned of the potential for worldwide annihilation as technologies advanced. These new capabilities created the very real possibility for the end of civilization and, indeed, the entire planet. "Upon peace the very life of the world depends, perhaps even the progress or decay of our entire civilization" (Wolf, 1989). "It is urgently necessary for all men to participate and to remedy a defect that endangers the very existence of civilization" (Montessori, 1932, p. xii).

Her bold ideas were revolutionary, creating new paths and new hopes. She challenged old ways of thinking as obsolete for the dawn of a new age. We must prepare or perish, she admonished. She spoke of nothing less than reorganizing the very fabric of social life: the positive aspect of peace lies in the restructuring of human society on a scientific basis (Montessori, 1932). Her plan called for establishing a new way of thinking; for progress, she said, did not depend n new technologies, but on human themselves.

> The crux of the question of peace and war thus no longer lies in the need to give men the material weapons to defend the geographical frontiers separating nation from nation, for the real first line of defense against war is man himself, and where an is socially disorganized and devalued, the universal enemy will enter the breach (Montessori, 1932, p. xv).

As a true social scientist, Montessori stressed the need for objective analysis of human development, with the child as the focal point. Within each of us is the kernel of human truth, for war is strictly a human phenomenon. We must look within ourselves for the answers to questions that have perplexed humanity for millennia. Why do we, how could we, allow and even glorify the destruction of our own? Rather than looking outward to blame others, we must search within ourselves and the environments we have created for the solutions to this crucial problem. We must search our own souls, she told us. She spoke not of an intellectual problem, but one that fell within the realm of the spirit. "Social peace and harmony can only have one foundation: man himself" (Montessori, 1932, p. xiii). Long before it became a slogan, she was clearly saying "Peace begins with me."

The Scientific Study of Peace

Montessori maintained that the causes of war could be uncovered in our own way of life, if only we dared to look. "Our conscience does not even suspect that the actual causes of war are rooted in our own way of life" (Montessori. In Wolf, 1989, p. 20). Idleness and greed were bankrupting the morality of the day she admonished. In the pursuit to satisfy the self, to find immediate gratification of needs and desires, the individual isolates himself and destroys the chance for constructive community. Self-serving interests are met at the expense of others, and in this climate destruction and violence are often the results. What an apt description of our society today!

Montessori advocated for the scientific study of peace in all its facets. Only then would we uncover the hidden causes of destruction and war, only then could we begin to understand the dynamics and process of creating peace. True peace, she said, was not the absence of war, but a vital creative state of harmony and balance in which basic needs were met for all citizens of the world. Right sharing of world resources among the nations and the peoples of the world was mandatory, for there could be no peace without justice. "The prospect of true peace makes us turn our thoughts to the triumph of justice and love among men, to the building of a better world where harmony reigns" (Montessori, 1932, p. 6).

Her believe in the child was at the core of her work. Here too, in the pursuit of peace, she saw the child as the redeemer, pointing the way to new truths about the nature of humanity. Given the conditions in which to flourish, the child would unfold her natural tendencies and reveal the way to establish a new world order, Montessori predicted.

> In order to begin the task of restructuring man's psyche, we must make the child our point of departure…In the child we can find the natural human characteristics before they are spoiled by the harmful influence of society. We must have faith in the child as a messiah, as a savior capable of regenerating the human race and society. (Montessori, 1932, p. 14).

Montessori deep abiding faith in the powers of the child has been echoed by others. Mahatma Gandhi shared her prophetic vision:

> If we are to reach real peace in the world we shall have to begin with children; and if they grow up in their natural innocence we won't have to struggle; we won't have to pass fruitless ideal resolutions, but we shall go from love to love and peace to peace, until at last all the corners of the world are covered with that peace and love for which consciously or unconsciously the whole world hungers. (Drew, 1987, preface).

The Necessary Conditions

Montessori revealed the conditions necessary for this enlightenment. She warned the adults not to impose their will upon the awakening spiritual life of the child. In the past, she said, the battle between the child and the adult, the old order and the new, was the cause of constant turmoil. The hope of peace was lost in this battle when the adult demanded that the child subjugate her will to that of the adult society. It was a grave error of society to continue in the belief that the child should be molded in the exact image of the adult.

The natural tendencies of children must be supported and nurtured. Montessori believed that, given the conditions for adequate expression, the children would reveal new human truths that would literally save the world. Given the opportunity to grow in an environment of cooperation and mutual respect and to make decisions and choices for themselves, children would become the pioneers of real and last peace in the world. With a healthy spirit and a clear vision, they would see the absurdity of war and the certainty of peace. They alone would possess the confidence and the strength of character to translate thoughts into positive action.

This was to be accomplished within the realm of education. "If education recognizes the intrinsic value of the child's personality and provides an environment suited to spiritual growth, we have the revelation of an entirely new child, whose astonishing characteristics can eventually contribute to the betterment of the world" (Wof, 1989,p. 35). Her directive was clear: establishing peace is the work of education. As Aline Wolf pointed out in *Peaceful Children, Peaceful World,* "Bringing peace to the world through education as the highest aspiration of [Montessori's] life and work" (1989, introduction).

Current Trends

Since her initial pleas in the 1930s many have heeded the words of Maria Montessori, whether they knew her name or not. Recent trends in the field of education are both encouraging and highly successful. Peace education and conflict resolution, begun in earnest in the 1970s with the publication of such classics as *The Friendly Classroom for a Small Planet* (Prutzman, 1978) and *A Manual on Nonviolence and Children* (Judson, 1977, has blossomed into a thriving movement.

Numerous curricula, texts, and workbooks abound in the marketplace. National groups such as Educators for Social Responsibility, Children's Creative Response to Conflict, Peace Works, Grace Contrino Abrams Peace Education Foundation, San Francisco Community Board, and the National Association for Mediation in Education (NAME) offer materials, books, tapes, videos, and training workshops. Community Mediation Centers and School-Based Peer Mediation programs have sprouted up all over the country and have trained hundreds of adults and students in the basic skills of conflict resolution and mediation. (For a fairly complete listing of resources, see NAME's *Annotated Bibliography for Teaching Conflict Resolution in Schools.)* By all indications, the work is in full progress.

Even on the global scale, we have witnessed dramatic moves toward creating world peace. With the fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of the Cold War and peace settlements in the Middle East, cautious optimism pervades the world scene. Yet, violence still exists in massive proportions around the world, in our streets, and in our homes. The devastation and destruction continue at alarming rates. What are we doing wrong?

Perhaps, like the six blind men who tried to describe the "truth" about what an elephant looked like, we too are looking at only parts and pieces, failing to comprehend the whole. In my own work with peace education, conflict resolution, and mediation training over the last 15 years, I have continually learned from the children, my own experiences, and the work and wisdom of others. I have discovered that there are some basic skills that give children and adults the tools for

constructing peace. An integrated and organized approach to teaching these skills has helped me create an environment conducive to the evolution of peace within the classroom. (For a detailed description, see Salkowski, 1991). However, teaching a set of skills alone will not always produce or guarantee the condition of peace.

The Context of Community

The whole of peace is achieved only within the context of community. In his third book, *The Different From: Community Making and Peace,* M. Scott Peck (1987) makes the case that a commonly held belief—that we can achieve community if we learn to resolve our conflicts—has it backwards. Peck asserts that if we can live together in community, then someday we shall be able to resolve our conflicts. If we accept this premise, then our job as classroom teachers, parents, or group leaders is to work toward achieving community. In real community, peace is a natural condition created, experienced, and practiced.

If we understand community as "a group of individuals who have learned how to communicate honestly with each other, whose relationships go deeper than the mask of their composure, and who have developed some significant commitment to rejoice together, mourn together, and to delight in each other, and make others conditions their own" (Peck, 1987, p. 59), we will begin to see why it is so difficult to achieve. Even in the smallest community of a marriage or a family, these are demanding prerequisites.

For those who endeavor to facilitate the evolution of peace, a more complete understanding of community is necessary. The community of which we speak is not the loose definition used by most: any group of people who share some common ground. Rather, it is a rare state of being, a phenomenon which actually defies definitive explanation. It is according to Peck, like a rare gem—more than the some of its parts, understood only through its many facets. It is mysterious, miraculous, and even mystical. A group becomes community in somewhat the same way that a stone becomes a gem. Through the process of cutting and polishing, it becomes something beautiful to behold.

Peck also explains that the gem of community is so exquisite that it may seem unreal, dreamlike and unattainable. Like the concept of world peace, it seems utopian and illusive. Because most of us lack any experience with real community, we doubt its existence. But, like peace, it *is* possible. Community can be created in the classroom, but only with concerted effort and real commitment.

Like Montessori's description of the cosmic curriculum as a web, the facets of community are interrelated and interconnected. Although inadequate, one way to explain community is to isolate its individual parts and find the threads that tie them all together.

Safety

First and foremost, a real community is a safe place. If our classrooms are to become communities, we must endeavor to create an atmosphere of "unconditional positive regard" by accepting each child as she is and by encouraging her to accept others as they are. By *accept*, I mean *to see as it is, without judgment*. It means that we must learn to listen, truly listen to each other. We must learn to hear and accept both feelings and content. When we listen to each other actively, we feel validated and valued. To be understood and accepted without criticism or judgment is the first step to feeling safe.

In such an atmosphere, I can dare to risk. I can make mistakes without feeling I have failed. When my efforts are valued and encouraged, I experience learning as effortful, yes; but also joyful, rich, and rewarding. I begin to work hard, not because of what I will gain as a reward from the outside, but for what I feel on the inside.

If I am affirmed each day, I can come to believe in my own inestimable value and worth as a human being. I can begin to share more of myself. When I come to believe in myself, I can also believe in others. In this mutual exchange, the circle of acceptance grows larger and larger. Then phrases such as "You can do it…It will be okay…Nice try…Are you all right?" will be words heard each day.

In an atmosphere of cooperation and mutual respect, when effort more than product is encouraged, children learn to be self-evaluators rather than placing the full responsibility of judgment outside themselves. When the language of encouragement rather than the judgment of praise is used, children learn to believe in themselves and their own abilities. They experience mistakes as learning opportunities rather than failures, and from this flows the courage to be imperfect.

The adult first creates an atmosphere of safety by modeling behavior and language that engender trust. At times the teacher must protect the net of safety by insisting that the children use constructive phrases and kind behaviors. Ultimately the children learn to create it for each other; as each child internalizes the peace and safety, ears are replaced by hope and wholeness. There are many specific activities and games that teach these skills; they should be part of the *daily* class routine (Salkowski, 1991). When we have accomplished all of this, we have established trust—the first psychosocial task in the development of the healthy personality (Erikson, 1963).

Inclusive

Communities are inclusive rather than exclusive. In his analysis of community, Peck (1987) speaks first of this characteristic. True community continually strives to include rather than exclude. Although not absolute, communities seek to extend themselves rather than limit themselves, by becoming exclusive or cliquish. Everyone in the group is included in processes and procedures. Boundaries between young and old, new and experiences are "soft." Responsibilities and privileges are shared among all. Cooperation rather than competition is the natural milieu. It is not a place for authoritarian domain.

In community, power is shared. There is no one leader or set of leaders. In effect, everyone is a leader. Creating community in the classroom requires that the adults relinquish their need for total control. The teacher must stand beside the children, not in front of them or behind them. They must be true partners in a process where everyone learns from each other.

In a Montessori classroom, the essence of inclusiveness is encompassed in a climate of respect. Adults do not condescend to children and children do not place absolute authority or responsibility in the adults. Class problems are owned by the group, and together they are charged with the responsibility for finding their own solutions.

Plans and procedures can evolve and grow as the group discovers the vast resources and gifts of each member. It means trusting in the ideas and feelings of the children and allowing them the space to express themselves freely. When the adults place their trust in the instincts and natural abilities of the children, the children learn to believe in themselves and thus begin to meet their highest potential. It requires creating opportunities for discussion and discovery. The individual is respected, nurtured, and encouraged within the supportive context of the group. As the children grow in insight and ability, they are given more and more responsibility for charting the course they will take in their learning and in living.

Work Plans

In order to encourage independence, organization, self-discipline, and responsibility for their own learning, the children in our classroom keep a log of their daily work and grow into formulating weekly, monthly, and yearly goals that are organized into work plans. These are written in consultation with each child and are reviewed together, weekly or biweekly. For children who need more structure, a daily "To Do" list is written from the work plan. It serves as a wonderful record-keeping device and supports the evidence of real growth. The children are able to view their own progress and learning style in a truly concrete form, and it gives them a real sense of personal history.

When children are supported and encouraged individually, they gain the self-esteem and self-confidence to hear and accept the contributions of others. This kind of openness allows for the "flow of leadership" (Peck,

1987). Each person may see a different aspect of a particular idea, situation, or problem; and through supported discussion, the pieces are laid out in the open for everyone to see. In this environment, the whole is put together with clarity and focused energy. The final product is always richer and ripe with the input from all. For the teacher, witnessing this process can be a real source of wonderment and awe.

The major vehicle for decision-making is the group process and everyone is included. All opinions or ideas are considered when the class makes decisions. A useful format for allowing this process to take place is the Class Meeting.

Class Meetings

In our classroom, we meet biweekly to discuss any decisions which affect the group. A student moderator runs the meeting and the agenda is formally set and posted, in cooperation with all class members. Each meeting begins with a cooperative game or song (generally chosen by the moderator) and ends with an affirmation exercise. Minutes are kept of each meeting in a special log book that is open to all. The recorder may be a teacher or a student, depending on the abilities of the group. The topics of each meeting vary, but generally we discuss any problems that occur in the room and make plans for the myriad of events that take place in our class, including special events and programs¸ community service projects, fundraisers, camping trips, and field trips. (Additional suggestion for conducting class meetings can be found in Chapter 12 of the STET: Systematic Training for Effective Teaching Handbook, Dinkmeyer, 1980).

Community decisions are made by consensus rather than by democratic vote. Issues are thrashed out among the group until everyone is in agreement with the final decision. In this way no one feels that he or she has "lost" and everyone has an invested interest in the successful execution of plans and resolutions. Decisions based on multiple points of view are always richer than any one decision the teacher or any individual could make alone. It is a valuable lesson in perspective taking, tolerance, and understanding. Children begin to appreciate each other's gifts and their own limitations. In this way they develop another characteristic of community—humility. As they become aware of the vast diversity in the world at large. Tantamount of this is the inevitable recognition of the interdependence of one human being to another.

Montessori's cosmic curriculum does much to

expand the child's awareness of the world and everyone's rightful place in it. As children work with the physical realities of history, geography, cultural anthropology, and the other various sciences, they learn to appreciate the concept of the global village and come to see the common fundamental needs of humans. Academically, much work is done in the elementary class to support the discoveries that children make, regarding their vision of the whole and the connections between the individual and the larger human family.

Prejudice, we know, is born of ignorance and fear. Tolerance for differences comes with familiarity and direct experience; for we tend to fear what we do not know or understand. As Montessori pointed out, the elementary child is sensitive to, interested and curious about other cultures, be they in other countries or other counties! It is important to help children develop an understanding of that which is different in looks; culture, life style, and belief, for positive or prejudicial attitudes are easily formed at this stage in development.

An enduring and vastly important feature of the Montessori system is the mixed-age grouping, differences in ability, maturity, size, and background are routine. Accommodation is made for varying learning styles and temperaments by allowing a multitude of choices in work and projects. Children are free to move through the room and make choices about when, where, and how they will work. Children work individually or cooperatively in small groups. At times the teacher gives specific lessons or directs the process; but more often than not, the children must use each other as resources or search for answers on their own. Many levels of activity permeate the room. This variety of activity alone creates a climate conducive to accepting diversity.

In the classroom community, differences are celebrated as gifts to the group. Each person has something to offer and putting others down to enhance our own importance is not acceptable. When we are secure in our own sense of self, it is easier to accept others.

In an atmosphere of open acceptance, a different perspective or varying attitude can be the source of new learning for many. A positive, accepting attitude towards individual quirks, varying temperaments, different perspectives, physical handicaps, and varying cultural values must be modeled by the adults and reinforced in the children. We must carefully guide one another toward recognizing the errors of generalized and stereotyping. Opportunities to experience diversity and work cooperatively must be planned in work and in play. Then we can embrace our differences with genuine interest and true tolerance.

In reality we are called upon to associate with many people at many levels. If our classrooms can more closely approximate that reality, children will learn to appreciate the vast differences that are intrinsic to a pluralistic society and multicultural world.

Community Service Projects

Or community service program serves as a wonderful vehicle for addressing some of these basic issues. The community service projects have grown out of our basic belief that we seek to assist children in developing individually, so that they can contribute collectively to the further development of the world. As children begin to make connections between their own world and the larger outside world beyond immediate family and friends, we have a unique opportunity to teach them how to give. As privileged members of a wealthy society, we have much to learn about the rest of the world or city that does not have the benefits of our affluence. Being able to help and provide for others allows children to feel empowered to make a positive difference. This is the sensitive period for the development of a moral mentality. The elementary child comes to understand the concept of justice and sees the relationship between his own acts and the needs of others. Values are defined and clarified as the conscience reaches a new level of awareness. We are privileged to assist children in the most important stage of their moral education.

Each year we adopt several projects that are relevant to current issues in the world. In a very real way we are able

to bring the outside world into our classroom and into our hearts. In the past, we have sent material aids to war refugees and arriving families in Africa; visited, performed for, and written to the elderly; "adopted" an overseas child in poverty; sponsored a local family; recycled school wide; and donated books to underprivileged schools in the inner city. Each year we discuss the issues with the class and choose projects based on individual interest and current world needs. It is easy to see the academic benefits as well. Children must use their acquired skills in almost every academic area in order to make the projects work. Learning is truly integrated across the academic and affective curricula.

At the beginning of every academic year we formulate projects in our various class meetings. Once a project is developed, we brainstorm ways to publicize and raise funds for its successful execution or implementation. Small committees are formed to do the specific work of each task. The children develop posters and flyers that are posted in the school and the local surrounding area. They also write letters to parents, the newspaper, and other student to inform them of our work and solicit their help.

We have also devised a fundraising strategy that involves the whole school. Several times a year the elementary class plans, prepares, and serves lunch to the entire school. After numerous years of successful operation, we now schedule on the yearly school calendar: Pizza Day in the fall, Hearty Soup Day in the winter, and Hot Dog Day in the spring. The school body anticipates these special days and looks forward to buying lunch at school, at least three times a year. The elementary children are responsible for the total execution of these fundraisers and the class is regardless with the net profits. Proceeds are used for class projects, programs, or charities. Once again, the academic and effective curriculums are integrated as children learn to work as a team for the benefit of the greater good.

The work is one again divided into committees. The planning committee finalizes the menu, writes the grocery list, and does the shopping. Publicity gets the word out via flyers or bulletins to all classes and tallies the orders. The finance committee does all the bookkeeping. In our own ledger book, we list the names and amounts paid from every class. The moneys are collected, counted, and listed for deposit. Expenses are also recorded and the final profit is calculated and reported back to the whole group. On the actual day of the event, everyone is involved in the cooking and serving. For the elementary child, it is practical life exemplified.

Realism

Communities are steeped in realism. When we learn to accept each other's strengths and weaknesses, when we nurture each other's growth and heal each other's words, we see the world as it is and as it is meant to be. Because there are multiple views and problems are evaluated from many perspectives, the decisions made by the group are always more realistic than those that come from any single perspective. As Peck points out, when there are many frames of references, nothing is likely to be left out. Conclusions are more often well rounded and stem from the wisdom of collective body.

In a recent class meeting the children brought forward a problem that had caused some annoyance in the room. Our adopted class cat was relatively new. As he was becoming comfortable with us, we were learning how to be with him. One of the older students felt that some children were causing disruption during the day when they tried to pick up and pet our rather large, long-haired feline friend. Other students objected and a discussion followed regarding when disruptions really did occur and when it was *not* a problem to give special attention to the cat. The group examined the issue of focused attention and further discussed when and where it was necessary to maintain. They decided that it was important to give their undivided attention to the large group or small group directed lessons, but when they worked individually or with a friend they had more flexibility and leeway for stroking or holding the cat. The solution was obvious by that point and the guidelines were quickly established regarding how we would all behave toward our pet.

Because the problem was defined and then resolved by the whole group, a realistic solution came to light which everyone could agree upon and commit to. It would have been far less productive and much less effective if the adults alone had imposed a set of rules or regulations on the children. Because the children themselves owned and recognized the problem and then created the solutions, they could be completely invested in its successful resolution.

Classroom Economy

In order to encourage a more realistic understanding of the world, we encourage children to experience the effects of a true economic system. Montessori knew that elementary children were fascinated by money. She felt that they should understand its usefulness and its place in the society as a means to justifiable ends. For most of our society, money is earned from daily work. Our efforts are rewarded with the means to acquire basic items such as food, clothing and shelter. Monetary resources also provide additional privileges, items, and other necessities. It is a major part of the reality of our society.

It is our belief that children should come to understand and develop a healthy, realistic respect for money, but that we have the added responsibility to teach them not be become slaves to it. We live in a highly consumer –oriented society, and we are conditioned to want more than we will ever really need. Many people seem to misunderstand the real meaning of money in their lives and become addicted or enslaved to it. We assume the position that money should be integrated into our lives, and its use should

mirror our values and purposes. In order for children to understand these complicated dynamics, they must be given firsthand experience with its use. Children in our classroom have the opportunity to earn their own money and experience its use in an economic system devised for our own unique community.

The care and maintenance of our classroom are part of the reality of living together in community. In the classroom community we endeavor to share all the realities of life, and daily chores are part of that reality. The classroom environment belongs to all of us, and we must each do our part to clean and care for it. Since we benefit from the privilege of using the resources of the class, we are charged with the responsibility to maintain it. Just as we share power in community, so, too, we share responsibilities. We hope that this experience will generalize to other areas of their lives, including our fragile planet home, and that they will fully realize their responsibility as stewards of the earth. There are many lessons in this alone, but we have found that we can also connect these lessons to the world of work and money.

At the beginning of the year, when the children have begun to explore the resources of the room, we discuss what jobs are needed to care for our small community. Together we list all the jobs needed to keep our classroom looking neat and clean and running smoothly. We generally end up with a list of daily jobs such as putting up the chairs, vacuuming, doing the dishes, cleaning the bathroom, sweeping the floor, scrubbing the tables, emptying the trash, cleaning out the cat litter, and sharpening the pencils. We also formulate weekly jobs such as cleaning out the refrigerator and refilling the paint bottles. Each job is then assigned a monetary value. For the most part, all the jobs pay the same amount, generally 10 cents; but sometimes the more difficult or unappealing jobs, such as cleaning the cat litter, pay a little more.

At the beginning of each week jobs are assigned or chosen using several methods. Assignments can be rotated alphabetically, by age, birthday, etc., or children can choose jobs randomly from a job jar or by picking a number that determine the order in which they can choose from the job cards that are laid out in circle. It is also possible to allow them to choose the number of jobs they would like to do and therefore how much they can earn. This can be a lesson in time management! As jobs are completed, a daily list or chart is kept of the jobs done. At the end of the week, everyone is paid based on the work they have accomplished. They are paid only for the days that they completed their jobs.

Because we want children to learn about the monetary system in our own country, we use plastic coins that closely resemble the coins and dollar bills used in the U.S. (If we were doing an in-depth study of another country, we could use coins from that country so that they would come to learn about other systems.) The money is kept in our "bank" and at times the older students take the role of banker. Once again, we have found that opportunities abound for teaching academic skills within the contest of the affective curriculum and vice-versa. As children are "paid," we create on-the-spot money problem based on their individual level and need. Every payday presents additional opportunity for reinforcement of numerous mathematical skills.

Children experience a real sense of accomplishment when they receive their own money. Individual coin holders, purses, or banks can be an outgrowth in the art area, but we usually start by giving the children a simple baby food jar for keeping their money in their desk or cubby.

Of course, the logical consequence of not doing their job is not getting paid. In a truly concrete form, children learn about the consequences of not meeting commitments and responsibilities without feeling put down or punished. It is simply the accepted, matter-of-fact reality of the world.

When the children have saved $1, they are invited to open a bank account in the classroom bank. A student banker is available to open their account. Records of individual accounts are kept in a separate bank ledger, and the 10% interest they earn is calculated weekly. We hope to teach children about money and the value of saving it.

Children also have the opportunity to spend their money at the class store. Once a week we open the store and children are able to use their funds to purchase small items that are kept in stock by the class shopkeeper Fancy or holiday pencils, markers, ballpoint pens, erasers, notepads, stickers, key chains, bookmarkers, postcards, and inexpensive books are available for purchase. All the items are appealing but practical and useful in the classroom community. The students eagerly look forward to the opening of the class store and are always delighted with their special purchases. It is interesting and encouraging to note that not everyone makes purchases each week.

Prices are set to correspond with their income potential. Prices may range from $.30 for a sticker to $2 for a four-color pen. Most of the items can be stocked from the free items that come with Troll or Scholastic book orders very month. Occasionally someone donates a special trinket or particular item from home or travels, or we find something special at the local dollar store. We encourage children to set a goal for themselves and save for that particular purchase. When they have accumulated the amount they need, they can withdraw it from their account in the bank.

The money earned in the class is also spent for buying back "lost" items that wind up in the lost-and-found box, or renting a homework pad or message folder when it has been forgotten. If assignment papers have to be replaced, they are required to buy the second copy, and if someone else has to do their job because the community can no longer afford to have it go undone, they must pay that person from their own earnings. There are also fines levied for not bringing back library books on time or for bringing in assignments or necessary paperwork. If, because of disruptive or inappropriate behavior, they require someone's instructional or tutorial time before or after school or during free time, they can be held responsible for paying the instructor for his time.

This logical approach to the realities of classroom life frees the teacher from assuming the role of disciplinarian and makes the community regulate its own behavior. If these problems develop in the class, it is the community that decides how it should be handled and what the consequences will be. As their concept of just reality develops, children become quite adept at helping to establish reasonable time limits for themselves. Intrinsically, they understand the need for limit-setting; with firsthand experience, they internalize its value. In this way they learn the basic truths about the necessary balance between nurturing and reasonable limit-setting. The use of an economic system is a practical and instructional vehicle for implementation.

Contemplation

The structured gathering of the class for purposeful meetings is representative of yet another characteristic of community: contemplation. As the children learn to function as a group, they examine not only themselves as individual members, but the class as a whole living unit. Once again, as children are validated as individuals, they can become part of something larger than themselves. As they are led to an awareness of their own unique individuality, they recognize and are at peace with their own inner world. They become in tune with their own emotions and begin to recognize how they affect behavior. As they learn to communicate this knowledge effectively to one another, understanding, tolerance, love, and acceptance develop between them. To this end the teacher must act as a guide and facilitator by creating opportunities and lessons that lead to the mastery of this work. Time must be set aside for this, as it is for any other subject.

As children understand themselves individually, they begin to see how they can contribute collectively. As the class begins to develop its own identity, community is born. The community, however, must also endeavor to examine itself, for self-examination is the key to insight, which is the key to wisdom (Peck, 1987). When things get off-base or problems develop which cause the group to slip out of community, the time for reflection and self-examination becomes crucial. It is incredibly gratifying to watch a student request a class meeting to discuss an issue which as caused hurt or pain within the group (such as name-calling on the playground or unequal sharing of jobs) or a particular problem which has plagued the room and disturbed the peace. There is a desire to maintain harmony even if the process of resolution and healing is sometimes long and laborious. They recognize that the time is well spent. As the children become thoughtful of themselves, they learn to become thoughtful of the group, just as Peck describes.

One way that we try to develop the ability to be contemplative is to expose children to the richness of silence. In the quiet stillness of the silence games, relaxation exercises, or guided visualizations, children begin to probe the depths of their own inner world. Like the dancer who achieves perfect balance on pointed toes by being full centered, the children achieve balance by centering their thoughts and feelings in silent stillness.

I often use the image of light as a way to get them focused. In a soft quiet voice, I encourage them to imagine a tiny pinpoint of light in the center of their bodies. The light can be many things: energy, love, peace, friendship. As they imagine the light expanding and filling up their bodies, the children begin to relax and grow calm and peaceful. By constructing such techniques, we are allowing children to explore the inner recesses of their own spiritual worlds. Such knowledge allows them to contemplate the connections and relationship between their inner world and the larger world outside. Insight then comes from the well-spring of the soul.

Peaceful Resolution of Conflict

The peaceful atmosphere of community does not guarantee the absence of conflict, for conflict is a

natural part of life. Without conflict there would be no change, no learning, and no growth. Conflict must be viewed as an opportunity to explore new issues and old problems. When we examine conflicts carefully, we often find the root of a particular problem. There are many opportunities for individual growth as we explore and expose the issues underlying specific conflicts that erupt in the classroom. Repeated patterns of behavior often come to light in repetitive conflicts, and helping children identify their own issues gives them the remarkable opportunity for growth and healing.

In the elementary class, many problems are a function of developmental needs, learning to share resources, and occasionally, a clash of values. If we teach children to recognize and understand conflict, they will be better equipped to deal with it in a positive, functional manner. The concepts of conflict and peace can be explored in a myriad of ways through a number of academic areas. William Kreidler (1984, 1990), among others, has written several excellent books that explore these topics in great depth. They offer specific ideas for lessons and activities that can be incorporated into any classroom and adapted to any group. As stated before, these concepts and specific skills must be isolated and taught in the same careful manner that we teach any of the academic skills.

Group Problem-Solving

Teaching the basic process of problem-solving is easily accomplished in the format of the class meeting. When children bring problems to the group, the adult can guide them through the steps necessary for finding solutions. As the issue is explored, all sides of the problem begin to appear. It is helpful to record or restate so that everyone is clear about identifying the real problem or set of problems.

When children have been encouraged to accept each other's perspectives and to seek a variety of ideas, they will show amazing creativity when brainstorming for solutions. Because they have experienced the reality of logical consequences, they are able to see cause and effect when considering the consequences of solicited solutions. The unrealistic or unworkable solutions can be quickly discarded and the most practical solutions will become more obvious. Sometimes consensus comes quickly and sometimes it is more laborious. Once the group members have decided on a solution, they must plan for its implementation. After an agreed-upon time, the resolution is evaluated. At times the initial plan does not work out and a different solution must then be tried.

Experience with group problem-solving enables children to become proficient in the process. As they see it modeled again and again, it is internalized and becomes a strategy available to them when faced with the dilemma of dealing with personal conflict.

Mediation

There are times, however, when it is beneficial to have a third party help by mediating for the individuals in conflict. When the conflict causes such intense emotions that the disputants are unable to think clearly, or when trust has broken down and it is clear that the individuals themselves cannot find a resolution, a third party is often required to bridge the gap. The mediator's main task is to help the parties communicate with one another about the real issues, identify the immediate problems, and work out solutions that are acceptable to each of the disputants.

In the classroom this can take two forms. Mediators can be either adults or children, but in either case some training in the process is required. Mediators must be skilled listeners and adept at facilitating the problem-solving process. It is important to remember that the mediator is not the authority who decides how the problem will be resolved, but rather facilitates and guides the process so that the disputants themselves solve their own problem. In this way children feel empowered and competent in the being able to solve their own problems. As children go through the mediation process, they learn the skills needed for nonviolent, successful resolution of conflict.

The teacher may approach the task in a more informal way, without the use of a specific formula that is generally taught to peer mediators, but the sequence is the same. Mediations are always conducted on a voluntary basis and peer mediators are instructed never to intervene in a physical confrontation.

There are four basic steps to the mediation process.

Step One: Introduction and Setting the Ground Rules. If the mediator is unknown to the disputants, they need to introduce themselves and establish that they want help with resolving their conflict. Disputants are informed that the process is confidential and they are asked to agree to four basic guidelines or rules. They must first agree to listen to each other without interrupting. They must also agree not to put down the other party or engage in name-calling. Being as honest as they can is a requirement, and they must also commit to work hard at solving the problems.

Step Two: Defining the Problem. The mediator assesses the situation and decides which disputant will speak first. The first disputant is asked to tell what happened from his/her perspective and to tell how he/she feels about it. The mediator must restate both feeling and content so that everyone understands the viewpoint. The process is repeated for the second disputant. In this way each perspective is heard and understood. When both persons have had their turn, they may be asked for additional information if necessary. Sometimes just hearing the other person's viewpoint and understanding how he/she felt about it eases the way for a quick resolution.

Skilled mediators chart the positions and then help disputants identify their common interests. Once the disputants have found a common meeting ground, the issue can be reframed based on common interests and values. At this point the disputants are ready to search for solutions.

Step Three: Finding Solutions. The mediator is now in a position to ask the disputants to brainstorm for solutions to their problem. Each disputant is asked to think about what he could do to resolve the parts of the problem for which he is responsible. Each disputant must agree to the solutions and all parts of the problem must be solved. The mediator must allow the process to continue until everyone is satisfied with the final solutions.

Step Four: Final Agreement and Plans for Implementation. In the final stage, the mediator restates the solutions to be sure that all parties are agreeing to the fame thing. Disputants are also encouraged to think about what they could do to keep the problem from happening again or what they might do if it does happen again. When the disputants feel confident that the problem has been successfully resolved, they are congratulated for their hard work and asked to let their friends know that they have solved their problem In some cases they are also asked to sign a mediation agreement form that list the details of the resolution and each party's responsibilities.

Peer mediators are usually asked to keep a record of their mediations on specific forms and are required to wear some apparel that designates their position in the class, in the halls, or on the playground. They generally meet with other mediators on a regular basis to discuss any problems and update skills.

In a classroom that has achieved community, mediations can take place spontaneously with almost any class member acting as mediator, if children have been trained in the techniques of mediation and peaceful conflict resolution. Anyone can request mediation and it can also be more formally scheduled if necessary. There may be a designated place for mediations such as the "problem table," or they can take place in any quiet area, at any given time.

Ideally children can learn to solve most of their conflicts without the use of a mediator. If we have taught children the methods for solving problems, we have given them the tools to solve their conflicts constructively. In community, when children have learned how to listen to each other and how not to reject each other, they can, as Peck (1987) points out, learn to fight gracefully, without physical or emotional bloodshed. Resolving conflicts can sometimes be a struggle, but they can be resolved without destruction or violence. Great wisdom is learned when children experience the resolution of conflict by struggling together; rather than against each other.

The Spirit and Joy of Community

If community is a place where we can fight gracefully, it is also a place where we can rejoice and have fun together. It is a place where we can delight in each other's company, share good times and hard times, struggle with issues when necessary, but come out whole, healed, and healthy. It is a place imbued with real spirit. The spirit of community resides in the collective soul of the group that works and plays cooperatively rather than competitively. Gone is the competitiveness of "Me first," I've got to win," and to beat you is to feel good and secure about myself and I'll do it at anyone's expense. In its place are the peace and tranquility of helping one another, of assisting in the process of each other's birth into real humanness.

The peacefulness of community pervades the room in such a tangible way that you can almost feel it. You can hear it in the silence. You can hear it in quiet words spoken tenderly and the laughter, loud and lively. It echoes in singing and shouts of glee, when children run free and unencumbered. You can see it in the genuine affection expressed toward one another—in the arm around a shoulder, gentle pat on the back, or a warm embrace. You can watch it in smiling faces and dancing eyes. It touches you in the deepest recesses of your being. When you enter a real classroom community, you know you have entered a special place; a place of real joy; a place where the creative spirit is alive and well, growing deeper and richer each day.

The spirit of community is the essence of all that is whole and holy in the human condition. It is true peace and real love. It is something that must be recognized as a fragile gift to be cherished and protected. It can be quickly lost if we do not guard the conditions of community, if we do not work at establishing their existence in our rooms and in our hearts.

Cooking Snacks and Meals

For most of our human history the occasion of breaking bread together, of sharing in a meal, has been looked upon as important and necessary to build bonds and establishing relationships. It is part of our social customs around the world. When we can take delight in the company of good friends and good food, we can come to know and enjoy each other well.

In our class we make cooking and eating an important part of our daily community life. They are occasions to work on skills in both academic and affective areas. The organization of daily snack is an outgrowth of the Practical Life curriculum. In three "crews" the children plan, set up, and clean up snack each day. Crews are rotated weekly so that everyone shares the load.

The planning crew members research and write the menu and grocery list. It is recorded in a snack notebook so that we cut down on duplication of menu and food contributions. They send home food request or do the shopping at the grocery store across the street. The set-up crew arranges and prepares the snack as an individual activity in the room. They write the directions, if necessary, or set up the *Cook and Learn* cards or charts. At the end of the day, the clean-up crew puts away the leftover food and cleans up the dishes and the table.

At lunchtime the children use placemats. On some of the special lunch days, cloth napkins are used, which are then washed and ironed as part of Practical Life work in the classroom. Sometimes we combine our lunches for a shared buffet and sometimes we cook a special feast to celebrate holidays, birthday, or something special in our studies. On occasion, we eat by candlelight and soft music. Always we work together on preparation, serving, and cleaning up.

A special lunch is also prepared as part of each child's birthday celebration. The menu is selected by the child and her family provides the ingredients. The class works together to prepare and serve the meal, headed by the birthday honoree. It is the birthday child's gift to the class and our gift to him/her.

Camping

One of the most joyful experiences in our classroom community is camping. An integral part of our elementary class curriculum revolves around our camping program. As a way of making learning applicable to real life, integrating skills, and building community, we set aside time for camping twice a year. The process and program have evolved over the last 10 years; we have used a variety of sites, gone for different periods of time, using various kinds of equipment. At present we are lucky enough to have found a 300-acre church camp which has been willing to let us rent their "pioneer unit" in the fall and the spring of each year. We have been going to this special place for years and it feels like our second home.

Our first trip in the fall of each year is a unique opportunity to bond as a new group, and we stress the importance of each child attending. We plan the trip in the first 2 weeks of school. It gives the children an immediate focus and an occasion for fun and excitement. They work together to plan the menus, establish a budget, do the shopping, pack the equipment, schedule the activities, and determine the work committees. They must read maps, write letters, and compute costs. They must use all their skills, their imagination, and their courage. They reach out to each other both literally and figuratively.

In camp they are responsible for cooking and cleaning up after each meal. They live, work, and play together in the glory of the outdoors, under the umbrella of community in the making. We leave on a Wednesday morning and return the following Saturday. The parents and siblings of our children and any other school family are invited to join us for dinner and campfire on Friday night. They are encouraged to spend the night and join us for our final hike on Saturday morning. It has been a wonderful way to include the whole school body and introduce them to the camping program and our elementary class community. It never fails that they are delighted and impressed.

The spring trip is the culminating event of the year and brings together all the work the children have mastered in a glorious fun-filled week. We generally schedule the trip right after Memorial Day and leave on the Tuesday we return from the holiday. Once again, we seek to expand our community by asking others to join us on the final Friday night. This time we invite the rising "Ks" who are planning to join our class in the subsequent fall. This gives them and their parents an opportunity to see and experience a taste of the joys that await them. Throughout the year we do fundraising to offset the cost, and the children see it as a goal attained and well deserved. It is a final celebration of our unique classroom community and the total integration of our yearlong studies.

The camping program has become a cornerstone in our academic and affective curricula. It is the single most important application of learning that we do all year. For this reason it has become a requirement of the elementary program. Long after the children have forgotten the details of the stories they read or wrote and the math problems they solved, they will remember the incredible lessons learned on these trips. More than once we have witnessed the transformation from "I can't" to "I did."

The children are required to make a heavy investment in time, energy, and personal commitment to community building. The academic skills learned in the classroom are applied to real life in the camping program. The children see a reason for learning to read directions, figure out a map, write letters, tie knots, list, plan, organize, and compute. Socially and emotionally they are challenged to grow, to give and to receive within the supportive context of community.

At times they are "gentled" through their fears and anxieties in the quiet of the night alone in their bunks, in the steep descent down the mountainside, or the long hike through the blue trail. They are asked to take risks and be challenged, both physically and emotionally. Always they are successful in their endeavors, and always they grow. They emerge from these experiences more confident and competent, with a deeper sense of self and the ability to reach out to others. The independence we afford them and the responsibility we bestow upon them sends the very real message that they are capable and trustworthy. They believe in themselves and their abilities because they have done. To provide this kind of experience is to validate their work in the classroom, as a community, throughout the entire year.

Camping allows children to see their own place in a natural world, not as masters of the environment but rather as links in the chain of Life that is far greater than the "little affairs of man." As our environment continues to deteriorate under the thoughtless and selfish acts of human "civilization," it becomes essential for children to experience the wonder and fragility of our planet home. When children deeply connect with the outside world, they begin to understand their own inked world. "As above, so below. As within, so without." As Joseph Cornell (1979) states so beautifully in *Sharing Nature with Children,* "When we learn to see and understand the world around us, we humans become the pinnacle of nature's accomplishments; for through man, nature is able to view and appreciate itself in the fullest, most vividly aware of all." This is the lesson we hope to learn together in our community.

Commitment

Because children remain in a Montessori class for at least 3 years, they are afforded the luxury of time. Time allows for the necessary commitment that Peck (1987) sees as an important criterion for building community. Real relationship takes time to develop, and only when children remain with the same teacher and the same peers for an extended period can they come to know each other well. Witnessing real growth along every dimension is only possible over a period of several years. The relationships forged between class members become deep and enduring. They can truly go beyond the superficial. Relationships are based on mutual respect and everyone is encouraged to be nurtured and to nurture each other. In order to build community in the classroom, the adults must be committed to the Fundamental concepts and beliefs about its process and procedures. They must believe in the possibility of peace and the reality of community. For many, it is difficult to believe in something they have not experienced, but trusting in the potential and striving for its attainment is well worth the effort. Is it idealistic? Yes. Is it impossible? No!

If you can imagine it, you can create it. It can begin with you. Remember that Montessori said, "The real preparation for education is the study of one's self. The training of the teacher who is to help life is something far more than the learning of ideas. It includes the training of character; it is a preparation of the spirit." Once you have experienced community, you will seek it in all the other places of your life. You will long for it and strive to recreate it wherever you can. You will become the peacemaker. This is our goal for the children and our hope for the world.

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