Title of Lesson: Teaching in the Shared Way of Gandhi and Montessori

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Grade Level/ Subject Areas: Kindergarten – third grade
Class Size: All class sizes
Time/ Duration of Lesson: Year round

Goals/ Objectives of Lesson:
To create a classroom environment that reflects the shared principles of Montessori and Gandhi:

1. Self-reflection:
   a. The student will be able to perform each activity in the quiet corner: the individual silence game, shared silence, yoga cards, maze walk, symbol gaze, picture concentration, sleeping baby, watching snow melt, weighted blanked (burrito and taco pose).
   b. The student will create a poster about himself or herself. He/she will write and/or dictate 10 facts about themselves (age, siblings, name, eye color, likes, dislikes, etc.)

2. Self-control and independence:
   a. The student will show self-control by walking a maze in the classroom, walking the circle, walking around work and floor mats, using the peace corner during conflicts.

3. Awareness of surroundings:
   b. The student will be able to verbally say three ways of being a good steward of the earth (recycle, reuse, reduce.)
   c. The student will be able to perform class-sustaining jobs: sweeping, vacuuming, dusting, plant care, table washing, chair washing, and expert jobs.
   d. The student will state three ways to maintain healthy bodies in our classroom and perform three activities consistently: nose blowing, hand washing, coughing.

4. Awareness of others:
   a. The student will be able to say each person’s name in class by December.
   b. The student will be able to say one fact about each classmate by December.
   c. The student will be able to set up the human Venn diagram and place four classmates using three criteria correctly in the Venn diagram (eye color, skin color, clothing.)

Lesson Abstract:
The following lesson plans are a place for all teachers to begin to offer young children the means to develop self-reflection, self-control and independence, awareness of environment and awareness of others. Both Gandhi and Montessori have set forth that the child learns through the senses and that the training and focus of the senses is crucial for the child to develop their capacities of observation: “…the sensory functions through which, receiving sensations from his environment, he lays the foundations of his intelligence by a continual exercise of observation, comparison and judgment. In this way he gradually comes to be acquainted with his environment and to develop his intelligence.” (Montessori, 1914)
Lesson Content:

Mahatma Gandhi and Maria Montessori lived during the same time period, each living their own life experiences in their different countries. Gandhi was experiencing injustice at the hand of racial prejudice and Montessori at the hand of gender prejudice. These incidents and their reaction to them have formed many of their thoughts on education. Interestingly, they both came to surprisingly similar if not the same conclusion on how to teach a child. In 1938, Gandhi visited the Montessori Teacher Training College in India. Montessori addressed the audience: “It seemed to me that this venerable being (Gandhi) might greatly aid the teacher whom I am preparing. The teacher should be openhearted and generous, should change his own soul that he may come forth from the harsh world of adults, that world full of obstacles thwarting the life of humanity. May his meeting with our teachers aid us in the spiritual defense of the child in humanity.” (Montessori speech, 1931) Gandhi’s speech to the teacher’s included: “…but I also saw that there also human nature was struggling to express itself. I see the same thing here and it was a matter of inexpressible joy to me that from their childhood the children were brought to understand the virtue of silence, my whole heart went out of to the millions of the children of the semi-starved villages of India, and I asked myself as my heart went out to those children, ‘Is it possible for me to give them those lessons to those children?”(Gandhi speech given 1931, Published 1938)

Gandhi and Montessori came to their thoughts on education through their life experiences and life experiments.

Gandhi as a very young lawyer was employed by a group that sent him to South Africa. It was here that Gandhi had his first brutal and systematic run in with prejudice aimed at him and his fellow Indians. Through many experiences and observation he began to see his people as a group who had lost hope, self-respect and self-control. Gandhi knew in his heart that the people themselves were the ones who had to change. They had to shed their complacency in order to be treated as and feel as equals and to create a society that could live harmoniously. This is one of the foundational educational aspects Gandhi proposes: the human (child or adult) must build an internal foundation of independence in order to seek out experiences to learn and grow. This harmony was not to be won through violence. In fact it was not to be won at all but to be developed by bringing to light the conditions under which people were living (self-awareness and awareness of others), empowering change from within the communities (control and independence) and by creating their own change of heart to include love and inner understanding through self-reflection. Teaching/developing these concepts early when the child is just entering socialization will allow the child to move forward with an understanding of how to use their education.

Gandhi felt that just knowing the ABC’s was not enough: “What is the meaning of education? If it simply means a knowledge of letters, it is merely an instrument, and an instrument may well be used or abused.” (Gandhi, 100) The mind, will and spirit must be trained as well.

Let us look for a moment at Montessori and make a connection between her educational thoughts and Gandhi’s.

Maria Montessori was the first woman Doctor in Italy. She earned this right after years of struggle against a male dominated society. After her graduation she was charged with caring for the inmates of the insane asylum. This turned into her training ground for her discovery of the human mind and how to tap it’s potential. She once watched children play with crumbs on the floor in a room that was filled with nothing but still they sought out in their environment
Montessori wondered if these ‘idiots’ actually had potential given the right environment, tools and guidance (Standing, 28). Montessori was invited to open a school for the ‘idiot and feeble minded.’ This was her first Casa De Bambini. Her in-depth and scientific observations began here and developed into a psychological and educational approach that is now the largest method of teaching children in the world today. The foundation of her teaching philosophy was to meet the needs of the child. Through their actions and interactions with the meticulously prepared environment the child shows what their needs, interests and readiness skills are.

Montessori was not just struck by the educational needs of the child, but by the emotional and spiritual needs as well. In fact, she believed that the children could only learn once he or she mastered self-control through self-awareness and reflection. Children could only be social beings if they had an understanding of self and a budding awareness of others (Montessori 173). Her belief was that the child needed: a well-prepared teacher (one who had given up ego or the reward of authority), a well-prepared environment (one that matched a child’s physical stature, had work that spoke to the developing need of the child, and that was connected to nature as a learning tool) and finally, the freedom to create themselves from within—not defined from without.

Both Gandhi and Montessori had a shared approach to teaching, learning, and living. Each believed that the person needed a supportive environment in which to create him or herself. “Education is not an aim in itself but, rather, an instrument and that type of education alone can be called real education which helps us in building sound character.” (Gandhi, 3)

Creating oneself is the work of the child. Guiding the work of the child to be the human of the future is the work of the teacher. These few principles of self-development are also the task of the teacher to build within themselves. Only the prepared teacher can walk the path with a child.

The following lesson plans are a place for all teachers to begin to offer the child the means to develop self-reflection, self-control and independence, awareness of environment and awareness of others by offering specific lessons and activities.

First, create activities to enhance self-reflection. For most children their parents were their primary source of information before coming to school. When asked a question, Mom or dad had the answer. Kindergarten is the time for the child to have the freedom to explore in a prepared environment.

Second, create activities to develop self-control and independence. The child will develop self-control of the senses, the body and the mind. This does not mean he/she turns into an adult idea of a robot, following direction and being “good” but rather has the power to direct their actions to fulfill their goals. A child that does not have the power of self must struggle to interact with the environment and process information. The development of self-control comes with freedom leading to independence. In the prepared environment, the child is free to choose their path of interest with the guidance of the teacher. The teacher creates activities that will provide situations for experimentation of control and independence.

Third, allow the child to experience their world and create an awareness of their surroundings through observation. The child has an impact through his/her interactions and non-interactions. Observing those impacts is where the child moves from self inside to self in the world.

Finally, prepare activities for the child to build an awareness of others. In the delicate transition from internal ego to external social being, the child needs lots of practice. He/she
needs the opportunity to compare, contrast and study others around them in a thoughtful way.

**Alaska State Content Standards:**

**Reading**
- K 1.6.1 Following simple two-step oral directions to complete a task.
- K 1.9.1 Expressing own opinion about material read/heard.
- K 1.10.1 Making relevant connections between text and personal experiences.

**Writing:**
- K 1.1.1 Writing personal ideas using drawings, symbols, letters or words.
- K 1.1.2 Dictating or writing words, phrases or sentences related to a single topic.
- K 1.2.1 Writing to express ideas for self and others.

**Math:**
- K G-2 Describing objects using three attributes such as size, color and shape.
- K S&P Constructing real graphs using concrete objects or pictographs with support.
- K S&P-4 Making simple predictions using events or repeated observations.

**Guiding Questions:**
- How can we learn to control our bodies?
- How can we take care of our classroom and global communities?
- How can we take care of others?
- How are we the same and different?

**Materials Needed:**
- 1 shelf
- Each activity on the shelf will need a tray or basket
- For the silence game: one-Minute sand hour glass, 1 sign “silent” written in gold glitter
- For symbol gaze: different objects representing calm peace
- For Picture gaze: variety of posters with calm or abstract pictures
- For sleeping baby: one baby doll in a basket with small blanket
- For snow watching: one tray with a cup, bowl, sponge
- Yoga cards (found in many book stores)
- Weighted blanket: a blanket with sand or beans sewed into pockets
- For self-poster: poster board for each child in your class, writing tool
- For the Human Venn diagram; two large hula hoops or string tied in a circle

**Lesson Context:**

One of Gandhi’s and Montessori’s guiding principles was that people (children included) needed to be able to make choices. For children in a classroom setting this can be difficult especially if teaching in a tradition of teacher directed learning. However, one shelf, the peace corner, can be the beginning to creating an environment of responsibility, independence and peace. Any activity that increases concentration, body awareness and a centered feeling will be appropriate for this shelf.

These activities can be an integral part of any classroom management method.

**Teaching Activities:**

**INDIVIDUAL SILENCE GAME:**
Teacher note: This is not to be used to calm a class down; this is done for focusing and increasing concentration skills for the children and for body awareness. Do this activity as a class before putting it on the shelf for individual work.

Materials:
One-minute hourglass.
Five-minute hourglass.
Ten-minute hourglass.
Black paper with the word ‘silence’ in gold glitter

Procedure:
When the class is in a circle with legs crossed and hands resting on their knees put the silence sign up (in the middle of circle, leaning on a board, or taped to a board) where everyone can see without moving.

Place the one-minute hourglass in the middle where everyone can see it without moving.

Wait for the class to be silent.

When the class is silent turn the hourglass over slowly. Take a deep breath and slowly let it out. Repeat your large breaths until the children begin to copy you.

If a child talks, giggles, etc, turn the timer on its side and wait for silence again. Repeating your breathing.

In the beginning, judge how long you can go for success in sitting silent and still. You may want to start with 30 seconds and increase your time always keeping the success of silence in mind.

After the class has been introduced to this activity place it on a tray on the quiet corner shelf. On a small tray place a small silence sign and an hourglass timer. The child will be able to independently choose this work.

Ultimately children will do the quiet activity without a timer and will stop when they are ready.

PEACE CORNER CONFLICT RESOLUTION:
Teacher Note: Model this in group first without a conflict then as one arises use it as an opportunity to model for the children how to discuss problems.

Materials:
Designate one area of the room that is set aside for only conflict resolution.

In a basket have an object available for the children to hold (a silk flower, a wooden sun, a polished rock) and a squishy ball.

Procedure:
When two children are having an issue they will go to the peace corner with the peace rose. They decide who will talk first. If they begin to fight about who goes first or they cannot abide by the rules have them do the shared silence game before.

If they require a third party to help as another child to assist them (This should be a child whom
you have coached on how to assist in a conflict. They will know when they need your help.)
The first child holds the rose and is the talker. The other child holds the squishy ball and is the
listener. The rose is the only person who can talk. He/she says what he/she sees as the issue
and how he/she is feeling.
The rose is exchanged and the other person is the talker. They state the problem and their
feelings. The children exchange until they feel they have expressed everything they need to.
The rose is now the solver rose. The person with the rose states ideas of what to do next (often
just the sharing of feelings is enough). The rose is again passed until a shared agreement is
accomplished.

**HUMAN VENN DIAGRAM:**

**Materials:**
- Two large hula-hoops or two large strings tied together.

**Procedure:**
1. Place the hula-hoops on the floor overlapping. There should be a space in the middle
   where they overlap and space on each side where they do not.
2. Ask three children wearing jeans to stand in the middle space.
3. Ask two children wearing dresses to stand on one side.
4. Ask two children wearing shorts to stand on the other side.
5. Have a discussion asking, “Why did I have the children in the middle be together?” Keep
talking until the children come up with the idea that each child had something in common.
Then ask, “Why did I not put these children together.” Again keep talking until the children
become aware of the similarities and differences. Try to refrain from giving them the answer.
6. Ask a child to arrange different children and see if the class can guess the similarities and
differences.
7. Introduce the concept and word Venn diagram.
8. Place this activity available for children to use independently.

**Assessment/ Evaluation:**
The students will be evaluated by their performance of activities, their verbal statements of
understanding and the products they create.

**Extension Activities/ Enrichment:**
-Add Chinese meditation balls to the quiet game. The child tries to stay so still the bell is silent.
  (This is of course after working with the bells making their noise.)
-Add hourglasses of different times to the quiet game.
-Shared silence is doing the quiet game with a friend.

**Bibliography:**


