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Neohumanism or how to educate in love

Introduction

Sunrise International Preschool is a small institution located in Hellerup, close to Copenhagen the capital of Denmark. Our house is divided in two groups with a total of 35 children from ages comprehended between 14 months and 5 years old. Also, our team is composed of five teachers who, with the students, offer more than twenty nationalities building an international environment. It was founded in 1980 by a group of families who were inspired by the Neo-humanistic education as a playhouse in the area of Østerbro, in Copenhagen. Additionally, as a result of developing and receiving a higher number of students in 2004 it moved to a larger building in its actual location in the area of Hellerup. The school offers neohumanistic education, sharing this pedagogy with several institutions presented in more than fifty countries. Just in Europe this philosophy is present in Finland, The United Kingdom, Romania, Albania, The Netherlands, Iceland, Malta and ours in Denmark.

History and values

Neo-humanism is part of a global network called "Ananda Marka Gurukula", who is present in different educational levels like teacher formation or higher education like institutes and universities around the world. This organization was founded in 1955 by Shrii Prabhat Rainjan Sarkar, who wanted to guide humanity in the path of self-realization through the adaptation of Tantra Yoga into a scientific and rational philosophy. Eventually some schools who followed these values were founded in his home country, India. However, it was in 1982 when he propounded and publish the philosophy of Neohumanism determining the beginning of its international development.

This pedagogy is also based on several values of humanism but applied in a more expanded and wider range. Despite considering it as a starting point, Neo humanism also mentions some of their limitations like separating humans from the rest of creation or the limitation in terms of sentiment (Jacobson, 2020). Shrii PR Sarkar in its work *Neo humanism: The Liberation of Intellect*, defines this idea of growing from humanism:

“When the underlying spirit of humanism is extended to everything animate and inanimate, in this universe, I have designated this as Neohumanism. This Neohumanism will elevate humanism to universalism, the cult of love for all created being of this universe.”

This love for all created beings can be observed in children in a wide variety of expressions, all of them driven by the innate curiosity of the human being. Some examples of this idea that have been appreciated in our school are:

- Walls: whenever they bump against the wall or the door even if they start crying, one of the first things they do is say sorry to it.
- Whales: one of the themes is the ocean so we have been playing sounds of whales and dolphins and reading stories about them. When it is time for free play and they are asked what do they want to do they want to listen to the whales while being focused on reading a book about them. They say they are trying to talk more with them.
- Forest trip: when we go to the forest that is 10 minutes walking from the school it takes us more than half an hour. We will stop every few minutes because they will find an insect, plant or object that will catch their attention and we will start to discuss about it.

In other words, one key element of Neohumanism is relationships, with us and with the rest of the world. In order to achieve this objective of guiding humanity towards universalism a vast awareness of the world is required. If we express values that are shallow without depth we will generate humans with the same characteristics, that are the reason of most of the conflicts throughout our history (Bussey, 2012). This awareness needs to be offered in a multidimensional approach, considering all the living beings like plants, animals, and other humans. For accomplishing the two first dimensions at our institution we focused on analyse what surrounds the child. Some examples are cultivating their own plants, providing magnifying glasses for observing the garden and forest. However, these methods can only be used for the nature that is closer to us. When we want to explore realities that are further from them in space or time our main resources are literacy and new technologies. Storytelling has a very important role in our daily routine, since it enables us to explore a wider range of realities, like sea creatures, dinosaurs, arctic animals... Thanks to the progress of new technologies we are able to visit several places to see or listen to them. For example, by using Google Earth we look for penguins in the South Pole, or study all the different life forms present in the Great Coral Reef.

On the other hand, when we aim at becoming aware of the human dimension, interculturalism and being an international institution are decisive. It is necessary to consider the difference between multicultural and intercultural education. In the first case the diversity of cultures in our society simply co-exists. However, when pursuing intercultural education there is an effort in cultivating a deeper understanding and respect for the variety of cultures in order to generate inclusion (Zambet, 2017). This last concept is closer to the core values of love and respect for everybody, and everything offered by this pedagogy. In Neohumanistic institutions this characteristic offers a double function.

The first and more discernible is offer our students a wider perspective of the world around them and all the cultures, nationalities, religions, and ethnicities that cohabit it. We try to achieve this expanded view with varied resources and dynamics, I will explain some of them from those who are applied on a daily basis to events and activities that occur on specific moments of the year. The most used resource is literacy, our school offers a wide range of books that are rotating everyday and tell stories from around the world. Some examples are:

- *“Dragon Dance”* by Joan Holub and Benrei Huang
- *“Just a minute”* by Yuyi Morales
- *“Lighting a Lamp. A Divali Story”* by Jonny Zucker and Jan Barger
- *“Mama Panya’s Pancakes. A village tale from Kenya”* by Mary and Rich Chamberin and Julia Cairns
- *“My first Ramadan”, “My First Kwanza”* by Karen Katz
- *“Rebecca’s Passover”* by Adèle Geras and Sheila Moxley

Apart of having stories about some cultures or religions in particular, we also offer stories whose characters vary from one another, in their skin tone, language, nationality, body shape... Actually, this type is especially interesting for our students because they can identify easier themselves and their friends all together living the same adventure. Some of these books are:

- *“All kinds of Families”* by Rachel Fuller
- *“All kinds of People”* by Emma Damon
- *“Children around the world”* by Donata Montanari
- *“Is There Really a Human RACE?”* By Jamie Lee Curtis and Laura Cornell
- *“Say Hello”* by Rachel Isadora
- *“We’re all wonders”* by R.J. Palacio

Another method developed for supporting this diversity is just talking about it. Asking where they come from or how to say some words in their mother tongue seems to have a double positive result. For the one who is being asked is a way to show interest towards their culture and feel valued, and for the rest is always very interesting to hear a different language besides English, they even incorporate these other words in their vocabulary. In our institution these respect and interest towards others can be appreciated in all the groups. For example, the group of two and three years old they all know where everybody, including the teachers, come from. In the

group of older children, they are able also to use expressions in different languages, especially how to say hello. During the themes worked throughout the year we also incorporate the cultures presented in our school for encouraging the learning process by offering a more personal relation with what it is being learnt. For example, when studying the oceans since we have children who are from Australia, we had especial activities about the Great Coral Reef. In addition to the dynamics mentioned above every year we held in November the culture month. There we focus on the world and its cultures and nationalities becoming the principal element of our daily routine. Some of the activities developed during that period are:

- Identifying different countries in the world map
- Art around the world: we chose an artist from a different country, this year was Antoni Gaudí, from Spain and we see their work and try to recreate it
- Comparing the climate on each country, especially the differences between where we live in Denmark, and where we come from.
- Food that my family cooks
- Legends, myths, and stories that we read in my country
- Magic carpet: we travel around the world to visit the countries where they come from, and we ask how we say hello and what do they do (usually they say something related to food)
- My mummy or daddy come to talks about my country
- The tree of flags

At the end of the month, we celebrate the “Culture Day” where all the families are invited to prepare activities and bring food from their home country. Sadly, due to the Corona virus we have not been able to celebrate it in the last years.

Although the project is focused on the children and their families, teachers also have an important role in these themes. For example, some of our teachers are from Argentina and Spain so they taught some dances and words from their home countries. This year we had interns working with us, one of them was Muslim so it was very interesting to observe how our students will ask her about her hijab, or even ask her why and how she prays.

Several of the activities mentioned above allow the child to develop an introspective analysis based on the question “where do I come from?”, and at the same time it permits to compare themselves with other cultures in order to broaden their world view. By doing this they will eventually have a deeper understanding of themselves, showing the second main benefit of intercultural education. This introspective analysis is always accompanied with their daily dose of meditation, one of the pillars of Neo humanism. There are several benefits of meditation in early ages, besides what is mentioned above. It also helps the child to understand better their feelings, as well as managing their stress by learning breathing techniques (Avadhuta, 2020; Jacobson, 2020).

Circle of Love Curriculum

As a consequent product from the idea of devotion towards all created beings, in neohumanistic education its curriculum is based on the "Circle of Love". In other words, all the elements and aspects learnt will somehow be incrustrated in the cycle of creation. All this curriculum is enclosed in a sequence of themes that progress during the scholar year. These academic units are usually related to the environment, so we reinforce the idea of parting from the child's perspective. For example, most of our themes are connected with the seasons of the year so our students can explore deeply the changes that are happening around them. Each academic unit offers a multidimensional approach by combining several aspects like physical, emotional, intellectual, intuitive, imaginative, and spiritual. Having the child as the centre of their own learning experience is one of the main values of Neohumanism and the method we are employing for that is learning through guided discovery. As its own name says it consist of preparing different situations that allow the child to explore and research its own knowledge, so it will be only limited by their imagination. For example, in winter (theme Ice Age) we will offer them snow and ice so they can play with it. Just by themselves the two years old discovered several characteristics of it like colour, shape, smell, taste, temperature...

The Circle of Love is considered as a form of holistic education whose main objective is to help the child through its harmonious development in several aspects like body, emotions, and cognitive skills. By employing the principles of yoga, it stimulates the growth of a healthy, integrated and happy human (Pelanda & Perozzo, 2011). The main technique we employ is included in the Morning Circle. It is composed by morning songs, action songs, exercises, warm ups and stretches, yoga, marching or parade movements, Sanskrit slokas reciting, Prabhat Samgiita, Kiirtan, meditation (Anandarama, 2020). The rest of our routine is composed of a mix of outdoors and indoors activities focusing on exploring and discover their own interest by preparing different corners (Rolfe, 2005). When we want to introduce new elements to them for exploring, storytelling is key. However, even in this type of activities they have literally the main role, we always design the storytelling in a way that allows them to actively participate in it. By doing this we improve their learning process and their acquisition of new concepts (Tamminga, 2022)

Teachers

Teachers role in Neohumanist education is focused on offering inspiration, installing moral values and creating a learning environment that will enable the children to express themselves and develop fully. In neohumanism the learning process, especially in early ages, is considered as spontaneous scientists who collect data and test their several hypothesis that eventually will make them generate their own conclusion (Devapriya, 2009). Far from the traditional passive role that has been

given to them, children under the neohumanistic education play an active role on creating their own knowledge. As a consequence, teachers tend to have a more passive role, like a supporter towards their students. These roles can be appreciated on our institution at all ages. For example, this autumn, the group of two and three years old realized that the leaves of the trees were changing colours, but they did not understand why. They ask the teachers and their families, but they did not know either. One of them propose the first hypothesis, someone was painting them, after some debate they decided that it was actually a dinosaur who was coming at night to paint the leaves at the school garden. They wanted to verify this, so they tried to paint some leaves by themselves to see if they look the same. The teachers gave them the materials and they paint them, but they realized that those leaves do not look the same. After several hypothesis and experiments they discover the seasons and autumn with the help of the elder kids. Teachers in a neohumanistic school are expected to be closer to a supporter and a consultor. But they are also required to display some specific characteristics that will help the development of their students, such as:

- Developing relationships based on mutual affection
- Showing respect and engendering it in others
- Being a role model for their students
- Promoting love and passion for learning
- Being perceptive and intuitive in discovering the needs and talents of each child
- Showing kindness, generosity, patience, humility and selflessness
- Inspiring students

Conclusion and final recommendations

Neohumanism despite being a pedagogy present in several countries around the world and being known internationally for more than forty years, apparently does not have any sort of traditional literature. This lack of research and data collection can be the essential negative point of it. The number of students and size of the institution varies in each country, offering a vast range of possibilities for analysis in order to stablish a deeper and contrasted theoretical framework. Consequently, comparing results is a complex function that is not being addressed in our institution, limiting its evaluation. Throughout this article we have shown some of the several positive aspects from this pedagogy, proving to be potentially a key element to consider in order to prevent future conflicts. However, a deeper and wider research should take place concerning this pedagogy and its beneficial consequences in an individual and collective level.

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to show how we are educating in love and respect at Sunrise International Preschool through neohumanistic pedagogy. Consequently, this article is mainly focused on describing different experiences and values pursued at this institution in order to

illustrate this concept of “educating in love”. However, a theory part composed by its values, origins and history will be also included as an introductory approach to the neohumanistic pedagogy, without really deepening into them due to the broadness and complexity that it holds. Our institution is located in Hellerup, Denmark. As an effect of our international characteristic respect and love for other cultures is a key aspect in our daily routine, beginning by selflove. These concepts applied on a bigger scale, can be determinant to prevent and avoid any form of violence or conflict presented in our society.

Key words: *neohumanism, education in love, intercultural education, preschoolers*

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