

What Can Montessorians Do In Light of Recent Societal Unrest?

Much has been written and said in the last week about the violence in Charlottesville including posts from both AMS and AMI.

I write in response to the Montessori commentaries.

In the case of the confrontation at Charlottesville or the shooting of Republican congressmen at a ball field or terrorist attacks in the US and abroad, it would serve us well to remember the purpose of our work.

We Montessorians, regardless of our own personal political views, are here to serve as guides to the unfolding of the individual. We are to model for that child what it is to be an autonomous, benevolent member of the community in which we live as well as the cosmic view of membership in the human race.

However tempting, it is not our office to impose our politics on this child (nor each other); indeed it is counterproductive. Dr. Montessori said it herself when she reminded us that

"Anger is the principle defect, but it is cloaked by pride which lends it a certain dignity that can even demand respect." (*Secret of Childhood*)

Thus how to guide the children in our care in light of horrific events?

First it is to shield them from adult events inappropriate for their developmental level. And then to be prudent about what to discuss and how to discuss it among children in the second and third plane.

<http://www.pdonohueshortridge.com/AandE/Protecting.pdf>

But further and more importantly ...

...what we do everyday in the prepared environment is how we change the world, one child at a time.

With the youngest children, this includes providing them with an emotionally and physically safe environment within which they are free to adapt to the world around them, including imprinting the adult's modeling of optimism and curiosity.

Gradually, into the toddler and early childhood years, our guidance expands to include fostering the child's developing autonomy while at the same time how to live in a community. Montessori is brilliant if we implement it, including long work cycles, protection of concentration, and Guides as enlightened generalists who connect the child with just the right self-correcting material at the propitious moment.

Woven into the daily routine are classroom ground rules plus lessons in grace and courtesy, also opportunities for the child to become aware of his inner life such as walking on the line and the silence game. And of course conflict resolution strategies.

Once into the second and third planes, he takes increasing ownership of his life including his education. His expanding agency includes developing his life's philosophy and purpose. He engages in the outer world and for this he needs special skills. How to understand the others' point of view expands beyond classmates and into the wider world such as current events and politics.

Here is where we are to introduce formal lessons in conflict resolution, and more fundamentally, how to analyze a particular event. For this he needs not only an historical understanding but also skills in differentiating objective reality from opinion, assertion and political bait. How to do this? Formal debates!

The debater defines terms, undergirds his argument with facts and actually listens to his opponent without interrupting, then is able to respond cogently. Would that those activists out on the ramparts been able to utilize these skills.

Evaluating one's visceral response to an event while at the same time possessing the ability to critically analyze what happened and what I think about it is a life skill that needs training just like any other life skill.

Thus when the young person sees people throwing urine on each other, screaming vile epithets and running down crowds of people with vehicles, he is able to drill down to the facts to consider what he thinks about it. And increasingly possesses the ability to determine what he will say and perhaps do about it.

Thus he becomes an adult, on his own, with us as his champion.

This is how we Montessorians do it: We guide rather than impose. We exemplify rather than demand. We come to the work as complete humans in service to the development of those we serve. Decisions about how and when to participate in the wider world come from within each emerging adult, not from us lecturing the child and each other about what one ought to think. We are not the arbiters of another's life values, we Montessorians are in service to the spirit of MAN.

Our purpose after all is to manifest the ideal of humanity for the children in our care. pds

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