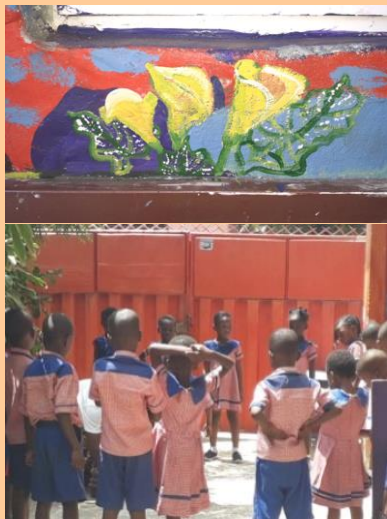


30th ANIVERSARYOF LOTUS CHILDREN CENTER, Accra - Ghana



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Celebrating the 30th Anniversary of Lotus Children's Center

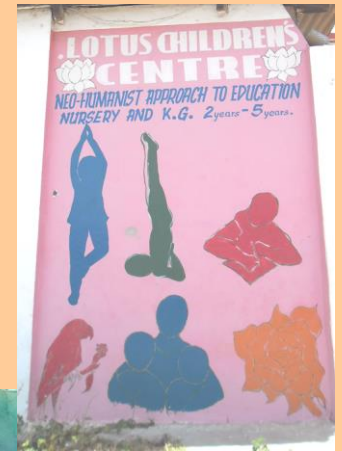
- *What is the need for such a Holistic Early Childhood Center?*

Introduction

To give access to high-quality education and simultaneously offer shelter to disadvantaged girls, AMURT-EL has started Lotus Children's Center at Soko- a remote area in Accra, Ghana. The center provides opportunities for a better life for the community children by awakening their intellectual and artistic potentialities and guiding them towards a healthy and fulfilled life.

The center is located in the surroundings of the Sukula's slum, where many parents struggle each day to guarantee food for their families. Knowledge is power - so by offering a holistic education to their children, we help building the necessary base for future generations. It is for the youth to break the circle of economic deprivation in which they find themselves.

The center was named *Lotus Children's Center*, for the Lotus symbolizes purity. This flower grows in muddy ponds, yet all dirt simply rolls off its petals. Similarly, we educate in such a way that, despite whatever backgrounds our children come from, they will be able to raise above negative influences and shine in the world.



“If one receives the fundamentals of education in the formative period of one's life, one will keep oneself alright in the teeth of the greatest trials and tribulations in life.

This is why more stress is to be laid on kindergarten schools.

Such schools are the first phase of making human beings.”

Shrii P. R. Sarkar

(founder of AMURT-EL and propounder of Neohumanism Education)

History

The Home

The Center was founded by the AMURTEL **missionary sisters** who have dedicated their lives to the service of God by serving the suffering humanity. Since the 80's, these nuns visit different impoverished villages of Ghana to render relief work, such as arranging mass feedings, distributing clothing, medical camps, or establishing community clinics and schools in remote areas, etc.

Pictured above: the Center in its early days

These nuns - affectionately called “*Didis*”(sisters), were touched to witness the difficult living conditions there.

Often females are denied education which impacted negatively in their families in diverse ways.

On the urge to help, the Didis worked hard to expand their small office's into a Home so that at least some of these girls could get shelter and education under their care. Thus in 1992, AMURTEL established the Lotus Children Home .

And since then the home has provide all-around care for girls who have been abandoned by their relatives or belong to families that are unable to take care of them.

Pioneer Didi Ananda Bhaktidhara at our AMURTEL clinic

attending to a child suffering of mal-nourishment



This project is one of the many non-profit AMURTEL's local projects around the world.

AMURTEL is a global NGO recognized by UNICEF for its outstanding services to the distressed.

The home has provided a positive and loving environment for seventeen girls in total, being that five of them graduated in the university.

Pictured below: Gloria Kalyani was a Child from our home

who graduated as a nurse



“There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women improves.

A bird can't fly with only one wing.”

Shrii P. R. Sarkar

The Preschool

When the children are young, it is time to build the necessary base for their **integral development**.

Upon researching and examining numerous early childhood facilities in the surrounding area, it has been noted that the majority of schools had a minimum of educational resources.

Often these schools are managed by teachers who mostly ignored the advice of modern educationalists on how to teach young children. Instead, teachers often used tactics of fear in the classroom (such as beating with cane). In an attempt to fill this gap and spread psychological methods of education, teach creatively and inculcate good habits in the children of our community, an experimental preschool started in the year of 1992 .

The preschool aims to help the pupils to reach their full potential and to prepare them to be confident, compassionate citizens who can contribute to Ghanaian and global society.

The preschool provides access to a rich curriculum that fulfills the Ghanaian National Curriculum and also imparts important extra-curricular activities to develop motor skills and coordination.

We work with small class sizes; as young children need extra attention.

Since its beginning, an average of 60 students attends the school regularly.

A small tuition fee of 10\$/month is collected to keep the school and staff but most of our students do not afford even that.

Thus the project strives to find sponsors for their scholarship and also pay the staff properly.

We educate the child as a whole by making him/her physically fit, mentally strong, and spiritually elevated. Thus, the center serves delicious pure vegetarian meals that nourish the body, mind and soul. Parents testify that the children become healthier, calmer and focused once they start schooling with us.

"Education is that which liberates" Shrii P. R. Sarkar

*Pictured bellow: Didi,
Staff and some of our students*



Neo-humanism: A Holistic Approach of Education

The Lotus Children's Center education is based on the holistic philosophy of Neo-humanism which stands for: *"the practice of love for all humanity, without neglecting the plants, animals and the inanimate world"*. Prabhat Rainjan Sarkar has proposed this philosophy so that pupils can grow above the predominant materialistic thinking as they learn the importance of existential value over the utilitarian value.



We guide the child to expand her love by observing nature, working in the garden, discussing simple wonders, enjoying the beauty of diversity; and translating it into art. This process starts right from nursery with more sensory-oriented activities, which help the child to bond with the elements, such as the sky; water; plants; animals; etc. As pupils grow older and move to Kindergarten, they learn more about science along with ethics, and the educator expounds universal ideas such as of a Happy Earth versus a Sad Earth, Pure Air versus Dirty Air, humans as being protectors of nature, etc. This approach prepares the grounds to the future adult to make better choices in the future.



Pictures of various Neo-humanistic activities at Lotus Children's Center

"If the idea of the universe be presented to the child in the right way, it will do more for him than just arouse his interest, for it will create in him admiration and wonder, a feeling loftier than any interest and more satisfying.

The child's mind then will no longer wander, but becomes fixed and can work.

The knowledge he then acquires is organized and systematic;

his intelligence becomes whole and complete because of the vision of the whole that has been presented to him, and his interest spreads to all, for all are linked and have their place in the universe on which his mind is centred....

A great curiosity arises, which can never be satiated; so will last through a lifetime."

Maria Montessori

Neo-humanism in Action

Neo-humanism reminds us of the interconnection among all things created and teaches one to embrace the diversity of peoples, animals, plants, even the inanimate things — as a whole. By working along interactive activities, we help the children to absorb ecological concepts and understand that they can make a difference in the world.

When studying water bodies for example, we bring the children to observe the nearby polluted river;

Afterwards we show them pictures of rivers that are clean, and how animals, plants and people benefit of it.

We let them contemplate if our river could also be clean. What could be done to bring a change?

They also learn that although young, they can make a difference

When learning about the different kinds of animals, pupils are introduced to the importance of forests, the interdependence in ecosystems and about endangered species. They contemplate how they can contribute to improve the local flora and fauna. They may choose to feed the birds or plant a tree.

Pictured in the right, the artistic environment in which the children learn.

Pictured below staff/students making crafts from discarded material.

Another progressive example is the Recycling activity. One of the biggest problems in our city- Accra, is the lack of sanitation. There is no public garbage collection and most people in the local community can't afford to pay for a private garbage collection service. Thus they have no option but to burn it, which makes the air very heavy with toxins. As there are not public dust bins, much of the waste goes unto the gutters, which often chocks, causing floods in the rainy seasons. As if that was not enough, other countries have made Africa a damp place for their garbage!

The practice of recycling is not well known at the moment, although it certainly can help in this situation. When we show the children that they can make diverse things as crafts and toys with their garbage, we pass the subtle message that "Garbage is not useless!"

"All entities are radiant, because He (God) is radiance itself. It is due to His radiance that all objects are radiant." BABA



Pictured above, the polluted river in our community;



The need for a Neo-humanistic Education

Nowadays, most of the educational trends are restricted to humanism;

viewing nature only as an economical resource.

Such a limited approach of education reflects in society in a harmful way,

resulting in the predominance of citizens who lack concern about preserving the world they live in.

As a result, only a few educated people use their knowledge and expertise to contribute for a better world; as for example, creating more sustainable ways of life that ensure the balance of the ecosystem on the planet.

Indeed, in the prevailing educational systems all around the globe, even humans are seen as a mere resource to contribute to economic growth.

Schools often impart knowledge in such a way that it eliminates critical thinking and devaluate differences among people through standardization of teaching.

Nowdays there is an excessive focus on skills that are productive to the big corporations, and as a result, many talents are lost. Schooling seems boring and monotonous ...

In most of the “undeveloped” nations, after one concludes schooling, s/he is often bounded to look for an occupation that would fulfill his/her financial needs and economic expectations. It brings frustration and lack of motivation in performing the work.



It would be of great benefit for society and individual, if people would be given opportunities to choose their professional career based on their personal vocations. Developing and making use of one's own attributes brings the feeling of individual fulfillment and happiness. Thus from early childhood the teacher is to discover and encourage the individual talents latent in each student.



For an outright change in society, education should help to create moral and dedicated leaders

As well build a general socio-consciousness amongst the masses. At moment, it is possible that the education prevalent in Ghana doesn't encourage the creation of intellectuals as it overstresses in the results of examinations. During the school life of a student, the child and the family are often more concerned about the examinations scores to achieve than the quality of education provided.



It is then expected that good marks would be the key for success in a competitive society.

The goal of schooling degenerates to merely attain good results in evaluations.



However, we see that this limited understanding of education makes people averse to study once they are not under the pressure of evaluations. Therefore, society gets an increased number of alienated and anti-social citizens. Instead, education should prepare individuals to become assets to society.



"The constitution is to be framed keeping in view four fundamental objectives: a) extending needed security to flora and fauna; b) guaranteeing the purchasing power as the constitutional right of citizen; c) guarantee...-To preserve and to promote indigenous education, cultural legacy and ensure unhindered spiritual practice; d) giving priority to cardinal values over the customary laws and practices." P.R. Sarkar on PROUT

What do we really want to achieve by sending our children to school?

Loving parents send their children to school hoping that education would help them to have a **bright future and so be happy**. But, how much is that feasible in a world of social divisions and economic disparities? When people feel unsafe? When so many are opting to become criminals due to pressures of poverty? And when corruption impregnates all fields of social structures...

Thus, if we are responsible parents, we also should see that our children grows into citizens that **contribute in making the world a better place to live**. Certainly, we can't ignore our "big family" – people, animals and plants, while looking after the success of our "small family", our intimate ones.

Photos of the Lotus Children, both from Children Home and School

We are to find out how to live together more harmoniously by adopting constructive values ourselves. Education should prepare the students to make the best use of their capacities to the welfare of all.

To bring this shift, we come to the question: - *What are the educational needs for constructing a better world?*

P. R. Sarkar, the propounder of Neohumanism philosophy, has said:

*"Building anything on humanistic lines requires
a foundation of real love for humanity.*

*A truly benevolent society will never come into being
under the leadership of those who are solely concerned with profit and loss.*



Where love is paramount,
the question of personal loss or gain does not arise.
The basic ingredient for building a healthy society is simply genuine love.”

A proper philosophy of education can build that so needy foundation.

At present, we are leaving to the new generation a heavy load of dealing with the environmental challenges and threatening ecological imbalances.

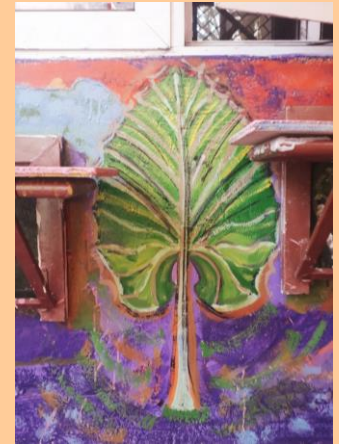
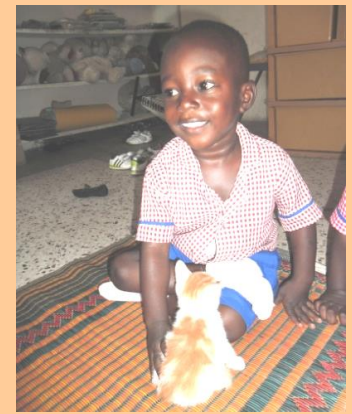
If they are to overcome that, we have now to guide the youth in new ways of thinking which do not reinforce the utilitarian and self-seeking pleasure mentalities.

For example, competitive mentality is to be replaced by coordinated cooperation.

Only opening the path for new ideas can reverse the negative consequences of years nature and destroying ecosystems. For a long time now, global society has neglected the human other species that live together with us in this planet.

In order to build a healthy relationship with nature, we need to adopt balanced lifestyles that preserve our forests, rivers and oceans, etc. Therefore, we are to give a new dimension to the educational philosophies of Progressivism and Critical Pedagogy by expanding the concern for the human specie unto love and respect for the whole creation.

*In the photos above: Students interacting with animals,
children practicing cooperative games,
and expanding their love through meditation in the nature.
The aesthetics on the school walls call the students to love nature .*



“The school is the ground for the development of society and needs to reflect what we want that society to be like”

KAtheleen Kesson, A.M. Gurukula publications

- ***How to ensure happiness and a bright future for our children?***

Only academic education is not enough to equip an individual towards a healthy and happy life.

Would we be satisfied if our child achieves success in her career, has stability in the economic sphere but is an unhappy person? We see a rise of psychic diseases such as depression, anxiety, stress in the global society, especially in wealthy countries. Thus we should reflect – how much can one have a fulfilled existence depending solely on social status and material possessions?

Certainly a healthy body and a healthy environment counts much for inner balance, but **a sound and balanced mind is essential in the quest for happiness.**

Not only mundane knowledge should be cultivated in schools, but inner knowledge as well.

Developing one's assets and working out on one's weaknesses;

learning how to control one's behavior and emotions,;

expanding narrow sentiments, such as tribalism, into higher, universal ones;

all these help one to discover the happiness within, and keep positive at all times.

Therefore, training a child in character building is the base for happiness

All around the world, hundreds of neohumanist (NHE) centers are imparting ethics that not only facilitate people to live and work together but also guide them to inner control and happiness.

- At Lotus, educators get regular training on those ethical principles so that themselves can become better persons, and guide their students as well. These NH Centers are functioning under Gurukul - the educational wing of Ananda Marga Pracaraka Samgha (AMPS). AMPS is the mother organization of AMURT-EL.

“The question (for individuality) is no longer ‘What should I be?’ but rather ‘How should I be?’

... An individual in the modern sense is someone who can observe his or her own observing.”
Luhmann, 1998



- *How does Lotus Children's Center teach ethics for the children?*

In Accra, morality is rarely imparted in schools or religious centers. Consequently, corruption is accepted as a natural thing, so very often people cheat on others for money. We choose the most needed values in our actual society, for example, to minimize cheating, we build on trustworthiness.

Lotus children learn those values starting in the very first activity of the day – the morning assembly (*photo*).

After greetings, our pupils recite universal principles such as:

"I use my words with benevolence".

Here, one is advising oneself to cultivate benevolence. Auto-suggestion is psychologically proven to be effective in children as adults as well. Morality is defined to the children as "doing good for you and for others".

Next, the educator may explain that when we are benevolent, we choose the right use of the words keeping in view the welfare of others. The researcher-educator Noddings has said:

"To have as our educational goal the production of caring, competent, loving, and lovable people is not anti-intellectual. Rather, it demonstrates respect for the full range of human talents."

Above: Moral auto-suggestions painted on school wall for the benefit of the community

Unfortunately, cheating and deceiving are so rampant in Ghanaian society that aggression is even seen as a valuable attribute, as, being from a poor stricken environment, people often have to struggle to survive.

However, the ability to remain calm improves assertiveness, proves to be much more helpful than aggressiveness.

When being assertive one feels confident and controls stress and anger; while when acting aggressively, one loses peace of mind and easily lost the mental balance resulting in anger - which is harmful to the physical and mental health.

"...sharing such themes [on caring] can connect us person-to-person. When teachers discuss themes of care, they may become real persons to their students and so enable them to construct new knowledge. "

Teaching themes of care, Noddings



Other activities on ethics in Lotus...

Pupils daily listen to a moral story that inspires them to cultivate a special attribute. It could be “*Positive outlook*” – for example.

Through questions and discussion, the educator stimulates critical thinking and open-mindedness.

The educator would, for example, stress in the joy of being thankful, even in adverse situations. Afterwards, pupils express what they learned artistically, using dramatization or other kinds of fine arts. It could be also a practical activity; such as picking garbage off the ground when teaching about cleanliness.

Time to time a drama with moral values is selected to present to the community.

It works as subtle messages that impart the beauty of moral values to the public.

Educative stories are a very direct way to reach a community where many are illiterate.

During the school day, whenever opportunities appear, the educator is attentive to remind the children, about the moral principles they have been learning.

It could be during a conflict, or someone who needed help, etc.

The application of morality is somehow dynamic, something to be adjusted in different situations in life.

Picture above: Parents participating in an end of year event where the children Performed a drama as part of their culminating project

Note that, in our holistic system of education, ethics are not limited to benefit only humans but other beings too.

They learn that Kindliness should extend to all creatures.



In the Circle of morning,
the children have the “quiet time” to prepare themselves for the day
by finding their inner peace.

As they feel calm, this daily practice improves
their concentration and focus, opening their receptivity to learning.

They also do yoga and brain gym exercises to improve fitness
And develop their motor coordination. These practices
benefit most the children who are agitated,
as it brings the balance between body and mind.

REINFORCING THE LOVE FOR ONE’S ROOTS

In order to love others, we need first to love ourselves. There are activities that
cultivate the love for their cultural roots such as traditional dances.

At same time, pupils are encouraged to accept people of different ethnics,
religious creeds, etc, as part of their “big” family. Ethnic conflicts are rampant in Africa.

They learn about other children’s cultures
as they pretend to travel around the world
to enjoy the different people, their traditional
garments, dances, songs, cousine and friendship.

In this way, we build the ground that, will help the individual to embrace others’ sorrows and happiness as their own.



***“The ultimate aim of Neo-humanism philosophy is to create a happy and harmonious human society
free from the prejudices of race, tribe or creed.” P. R. Sarkar***

We ask your support...

*The Lotus Children's Centre isn't a large organization,
rather a humble one - and 100% child-focused!*

*Thus, we do need support to keep Lotus' staff, its
infrastructure, and costs concerning on help the children.*

Your kind donations will go fully towards the children Lotus helps.

*We also need help to support our new building – “Path of Joy Children
Center” located in another neglected area of Ghana.*

*Its Community Library has been functioning since 2015 and
this year we would be inaugurating a Primary School.*

Volunteers are most welcome.

Thank you !

Didi Ananda Gunamaya

Director

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