

How to help a child become the Good Person within, through encouragement and a democratic approach

by Aysegül Acar-Dreyer

I am writing regarding the Washington Post article 'Conservatives Ascendant in Charles (County, MD) Schools' of September 16, 2005. Here are two excerpts from that article that prompted me to write this:

"Margaret Young, chairwoman of the (Southern MD) Charles County Board of Education, has at times taught her children at home in Waldorf (MD) using a Christian-based curriculum. She says she wants teachers to stop assigning books that contain profanity and what she believes are immoral messages" and,

"Public schools, (Mark J. Crawford) said, should be teaching students humility and to distinguish between right and wrong". ["Crawford's beliefs were shaped by his family and religious schooling, including his studies at Jerry Falwell's evangelical Liberty University in Lynchburg, VA."]

I would certainly hope that all schools, as well as families, would be teaching children good values and I would highly recommend that Ms. Young and Mr. Crawford, as well as all educators and parents, read about and practice Adlerian child psychology principles at home and in school. There is currently much work being done across the nation on Character Education (see for example Prof. Marvin W. Berkowitz's work, as well as <http://www.character.org/>). One thing I've learned is that few parents want to punish the child but are very good at it, and most parents want to encourage the child but few know how to do it right. Therefore attending a positive parenting class would be very helpful to most families.

Positive Parenting and Positive Teaching based on Adlerian philosophy (see for example Jane Nelsen's work on Positive Discipline) instill in children as well as in adults, good values and social skills such as empathy, mutual respect, peaceful conflict resolution, cooperation, responsibility for one's actions through the use of encouragement and democratic principles. **A truly democratic society has to start with a democratic family and a peaceful world has to start with a peaceful home.**

What I found so appealing in the Adlerian approach is that it encourages the child to do the right thing, how to be responsible, kind, etc. **because it IS the right thing to do; not because of a reward, a bribe or, a promise - be it a toy, candy or acceptance into heaven... The motivation then lies within the person.**

Schools and parents may also want to look into the Montessori philosophy. The Montessori way approaches the child as a "whole", and so, in the classroom, grace, kindness, responsibility for one's actions, respect for one's fellow human beings, respect for life, nature as well as one's physical environment, self-motivation, practical life skills, peaceful conflict resolution, as well as academic knowledge are taught and emphasized. Maria Montessori believed that the purpose of education was to cultivate the child's own natural desire to learn. For a primer I recommend the book *The Montessori Way: An Education For Life* by Tim Seldin and Paul Epstein. Rather than being elitist (as some critiques claim), this is truly a democratic approach. These quotes by Maria Montessori may give you a clearer picture of the Montessori way:

"Establishing lasting peace is the work of education; all politics can do is keep us out of war."

"The greatest sign of success for a teacher... is to be able to say, "The children are now working as if I did not exist."

"Never help a child with a task at which he feels he can succeed. These words reveal the child's inner needs: "Help me to do it alone."

"Free the child's potential, and you will transform him into the world."

"Discipline must come through liberty... We do not consider an individual disciplined only when he has been rendered as artificially silent as a mute and as immovable as a paralytic. He is an individual annihilated, not disciplined."

"The first idea the child must acquire is that of the difference between good and evil"

"Our aim is not only to make the child understand, and still less to force him to memorize, but so **to touch his imagination as to enthuse** him to his innermost core."

"Education should no longer be mostly imparting of knowledge, but must take a new path, seeking **the release of human potentialities**. It is not enough for the teacher to love the child. She must first **love and understand the universe**."

"The first duty of an education is to stir up life, but **leave it free to develop**."

The Montessori approach to the spiritual side of the child is summarized in this paragraph:

"One of our fundamental aims is the inspiration of the child's heart. While Montessori does not teach religion, we do present the great moral and spiritual themes, such as love, kindness, joy, and confidence in the fundamental goodness of life **in simple ways that encourage the child to begin the journey toward being fully alive and fully human.** Everything is intended to nurture within the child **a sense of joy and appreciation of life.**" (from www.montessori.org)

"Families (that apply Adlerian principles) are characterized by positive energy and a sense of purpose and inspire their members with courage, spirit, and hope, **empowering them to contribute to others, to their community, and to the larger society.**" (From PEP <http://www.parentencouragement.org/>)

"Adler believed that within each person there is an innate capacity for learning to be socially motivated, for caring about others beyond the self. (He referred to) this capacity as social interest or community feeling. Since this is only a capacity, not yet developed in the child, Adler emphasized the importance of social education in the family, in school and in the community" (Barbara Fairfield, LCMFT)

Adlerian principles strengthen democracy since moral character is the foundation for a truly Democratic society: "The mission of Classical Adlerian psychology is to encourage the development of psychologically healthy and cooperative individuals, couples, and families, in order to effectively pursue the ideals of social equality and democratic living, it balances the equally important needs for individual optimal development and social responsibility." (Henry T. Stein, Ph.D. Director, Alfred Adler Institute of San Francisco <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/hstein/>)

If these are not good family values I don't know what is... Forget Superman: The Adlerian and the Montessori approach can help a child become the good person within, in other words, a "Mensch".

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"Words are sacred. They deserve respect. If you get the right ones, in the right order, you can nudge the world a little." -- Tom Stoppard

"You should know at least three languages...  
think and dream in at least three languages..."  
B.R. Eyüboğlu ~ Turkish artist & poet (1913-1975)

[www.ParentEncouragement.org](http://www.ParentEncouragement.org)

Usborne books for children: [www.ubah.com/R1476](http://www.ubah.com/R1476)

[www.montessori.org](http://www.montessori.org)

[www.alfredadler.org](http://www.alfredadler.org)

Jacques Prevert's poetry: <http://xtream.online.fr/Prevert/indexeng.html>