

Moral Classroom, Moral Children: Creating a Constructivist Atmosphere in Early Education

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CHAPTER 4

ESTABLISHING A CONSTRUCTIVIST SOCIOMORAL ATMOSPHERE

A moral classroom begins with the teacher's attitude of respect for children, for their interest, feelings, values, and ideas. This respect is expressed in the classroom's organization, in activities, and in the teacher's interactions with children.

Classroom Organization

The overarching objective of constructivist education is to promote children's development. This objective leads to organizing the classroom for children's needs, peer interaction, and responsibility.

Organizing to Meet Children's Needs

Organizing to meet children's needs includes consideration of physiological, emotional, and intellectual needs.

Physiological Needs

In chapter 1, we describe different attitudes toward children's physical needs for eating, toileting, and resting. It seems obvious that adults should meet children's physical needs. However, we have observed rather callous disregard for these needs on the part of some teachers and schools. Perhaps part of the reason this occurs is that school rules and facilities sometimes make it difficult and inconvenient for teachers to respond to young children's physical needs. Perhaps part of the reason is that schools may not be meeting teachers' needs. Nevertheless, failure to meet children's physical needs creates an abusive situation. The sociomoral atmosphere of the constructivist classroom is characterized by physical comfort.

Emotional Needs

In many schools where children's physical needs are met, emotional needs may be overlooked. We discuss in chapter 3 the unfortunate effects of heteronomy of all aspects of children's development. The Drill Sergeant may be considered an emotionally abusive teacher. The Manager may be considered an emotionally absent teacher. The Mentor is not only emotionally present and available to children, she continually takes children's feelings into account and tries to help them construct a more stable system of feelings and ways of coping with difficult feelings.

Respecting children requires communicating acceptance and affection. It requires providing an environment that encourages and supports children's expressions of feelings, interests, and values. This means accepting the child's right to feel anger and sadness as well as positive feelings.

Children in a moral classroom feel ownership of it. The classroom does not belong just to the teacher. It belongs to the children as well. The moral classroom does not express just the teacher's personality. Walls are full of children's artwork and writing, and their projects are displayed. Of course, the teacher also contributes to the physical environment, but one does not see, for example, the totally teacher-made, elaborate bulletin board displays that so many elementary teachers feel regularly obligated to make. The feeling of classroom ownership is similar to how we feel about our own homes. We feel at home because we have organized it for our safety, security, comfort, pleasure, and convenience. The objects in our home belong to us and we are free to use them for our purposes. So it is in the moral classroom. Children feel safe, secure, and comfortable. They find pleasure and purposes to pursue.

Intellectual Needs

Children have intellectual needs for activities that stimulate their interests and provide content that inspires them to figure out how to do something. Respect for children's intellectual needs leads to recognizing that young children must be physically active and emotionally engaged. Therefore, meeting children's intellectual needs is bound up with meeting their physical and emotional needs. The sociomoral atmosphere is an intellectually engaging atmosphere. The theoretical foundation of activities, discussed later in this chapter, further addresses concerns about meeting children's intellectual needs.

Organizing for Peer Interaction

The child's need to be active includes a need to be interactive. The constructivist teacher promotes peer interaction by organizing the program so interpersonal engagement occurs naturally.

Activity time offers extensive opportunities for peer interaction. Some activities, such as pretend play and group games, especially motivate children to engage with one another and figure out how to cooperate. In physical-knowledge activities, children experiment, observe others' experiments, and exchange ideas. Similarly, art, blockbuilding, and writing can be contexts for peer collaboration. In all these activities, children are free to choose not only their activities but also their playmates.

Organizing for peer interaction at grouptime, the constructivist teacher encourages children to talk with each other, not just with the teacher. Exchanges among children occur at grouptime when children try to help an individual solve a problem, when differences of opinion arise, and when a problem for the group as a whole is addressed.

We caution against over-organizing peer interaction. Teachers sometimes try to promote general community by assigning rotating play or work partners. This approach lessens children's motivation and activity and, in our view, is not respectful of children's feelings. Community cannot be purchased at the price of individuals' initiative and friendships. Such coercion will operate against the establishment of children's feelings of ownership of the classroom. Children should have the freedom to choose their playmates.

In early childhood, children are still constructing their feelings, ideas, and values concerning friendship. Even very young children can develop attachments to other children that have all the characteristics of friendship. Two-year-olds can be observed to have stable preferences for play partners, to watchfully anticipate their arrival, to miss them and feel sad when they are absent, and to express special compassion for them.

We caution against trying to break up special attachments among children. Sometimes teachers are concerned about cliques that form. We understand and agree with concerns about children's feeling left out when excluded from a group's play. However, children's attachments are important to them and mark progress in social development. Stability in preferences reflects conservation of values that is necessary for moral development. Therefore, we suggest that teachers encourage children's special friendships.

If a problem of exclusion and hurt feelings arises, this can be addressed in a variety of ways. It can be a topic for discussion at grouptime as a general hypothetical issue

without naming personalities involved. If a child is very upset, the teacher can explore the problem in a private discussion at first. Sometimes it is helpful to suggest that the parents of the excluded child invite a classmate to their home or to share a special occasion. We have seen overnight friendships bloom after such a shared experience. Sometimes it is helpful to coach the excluded child on how to enter into others' play. Sometimes it helps for the excluded child to bring a special game to share with classmates. It is not necessary to mandate that children must play with certain others.

To organize for peer interaction is also to set the stage for inevitable conflicts. Viewing conflict and its resolution as part of the curriculum, constructivist teachers take advantage of incidents of conflict, as discussed in chapter 5. In a conflictual situation, children have the opportunity to realize the other's differing perspective. They are motivated to figure out how to resolve the problem.

Organizing for Child Responsibility

When children feel ownership of the classroom, the stage is set for cultivating feelings of responsibility. The moral classroom is organized so children can take responsibility. Adults often underestimate the amount of responsibility children are willing and eager to accept.

Since children use the materials and furnishing in the classroom, they are able to observe what happens when these are not cared for. When the caps are not replaced on colored markers, they dry up and cannot be used. When the tables are not cleared and wiped, there is no clean space to put lunch. When materials are not put where they belong, children cannot find them. When events such as these occur, the teacher can take advantage of the opportunity for group discussion about how to resolve the problems. We discuss in chapters 6 and 12 various ways in which teachers can share responsibility with children through rotation of daily duties and privileges.

Similarly, feelings of responsibility for the social environment can be cultivated. From the beginning, the constructivist teacher shares with children the responsibility for making rules, as discussed in chapter 7. When children feel ownership of the rules, they are more likely to follow them and remind others to follow them.

When cooperation breaks down, children have the opportunity to understand why they need rules that everyone respects. With teacher guidance, children can discuss their problems and decide what kind of community they want to live in.

It is not always easy to have confidence in children's potential competence. Some educators feel that the overarching objective is for children to learn to follow directions. "Self-regulation," in fact, sometimes is used to refer to compliance with

adult demands. This is not the constructivist view. We hope the stories in this book encourage teachers' confidence in children's possibility for being self-regulating.

Activities

Respect for children leads to the definition of constructivist education active. Specifically, constructivist education:

1. Engages the child's interest
2. Inspires active experimentation with all its necessary groping and error
3. Fosters cooperation between adults and children and among children themselves

We discuss below how interest, experimentation, and cooperation are important for the sociomoral atmosphere.

Engaging Interest

By interest we refer to the child's positive emotional engagement in classroom activities. Such interest is crucial to the constructivist sociomoral atmosphere because it reflects respect for the child's point of view. We address why interest is important in a constructivist classroom and give some examples of how teachers appeal to children's interests.

Why Interest is Important

Piaget (1954/1981, 1969/1979) referred to interest as the "fuel" of the constructive process. Adults' interest are generally consciously defined and ordered in priorities. Adults are thus often capable of constructive effort even when their interest is at a low level and they feel the pressure of some kind of coercion. Even for adults, however, the absence of interest can prevent effective effort. When our interest is thoroughly engaged, our efforts are most productive. This condition is even more necessary for young children whose interests are yet relatively undifferentiated. According to Piaget, interest is central to the actions by which the child constructs knowledge, intelligence, and morality. Without interest, the child would never make the constructive effort to make sense out of experience. Without interest in what is new to him or her, the child would never modify reasoning or values. Interest is a kind of regulator that frees up or stops the investment of energy in an object, person, or event. Thus, methods aimed at promoting the constructive process must arouse the child's spontaneous interest that is inherent in constructive activity.

It surprises many people to learn that constructivist education for cognitive development focuses equally on affectivity. This "Piagetian" principle was elaborated well before Piaget by John Dewey (1913/1975), who argued that the aim of education is increase in ability to put forth effort. Dewey cautioned, however, that some kinds of efforts are uneducative. These are efforts in tasks that involve nothing but sheer strain and external motivation for keeping at them. Such tasks he described as not only uneducative, but miseducative. They are miseducative because they deaden and stupefy, leading to a confused and dulled state of mind that always results when action is carried out without a sense of personal purpose. They are also miseducative because they lead to dependence on the external pressure of the taskmaster. When the child's interest and motivation lie in avoiding punishment or getting reward from the teacher, it is thus focused outside the task itself. Dewey said we should not look for motives external to activities, but for motives in activities. When teachers have to look for artificial ways to motivate children, something is seriously wrong.

Interest in activity is at the heart of constructivist education. Both Dewey and Piaget recommended that we start from the active powers of children. In what ways can young children be mentally active? The general answer to this question is that young children are motivated to be mentally active in the context of physical activity. For Piaget, intelligence originates in infancy in action that is simultaneously mental and physical. Mental development is in large part a matter of gradually freeing mental activity from physical activity. For many years in childhood, however, physical activity continues to be closely associated with and necessary for mental activity.

Examples of Appealing to Children's Interests

Active education does not occur in a classroom where children sit at desks in isolation from one another, doing paperwork. A constructivist classroom is one in which many different activities go on simultaneously. These activities include those long associated with the child-development tradition in early education (for example, painting and other art activities, blocks and other construction activities, and pretend play). In addition, constructivist teachers add physical-knowledge activities (DeVries & Kohlberg, 1987/1990; Kamii & DeVries, 1978/1993) and group games (DeVries & Kohlberg, 1987/1990; Kamii & DeVries, 1980).

At the HDLS at the University of Houston, teachers routinely consult children about curriculum content. For example, Peige Fuller asked her Investigator class (3 1/2 to 4 1/2-year olds) at group-time what they wanted to know about. The list generated by the children then provided the content for the rest of the semester. Here is a partial list of topics: space men, breaking glass, moms and dads, going to college, apples, washing your hands, dinosaurs, and flower girls. In an interview (June 1992), Peige explained her thinking:

The challenges were to respect children's desires and somehow to make constructivist activities from the topics. The teacher has in mind, too, some things she wants to get into the curriculum, things she wants children to know about in the world. Being a facilitator means that you're looking at the things they want to know about and trying to figure out how to bring activities that will jump from their idea and create opportunities for disequilibrium - interpersonal and cognitive. Constructivist teachers understand that that's where the real learning happens.

I learned as a teacher by involving children in their learning from the beginning. It takes teachers who respect children's ideas and who know how to raise them to a new plane. It's a matter of thinking about what things to pull in - investigations, places to go, arguments and struggles we could have. That's where the excitement of early education is - the excitement of being with your kids to figure out your curriculum. You make the commitment to be the best facilitator of their learning that you can be. Then you find out what they want to know about. And then you have these really hard planning meetings where you figure out what all there is in the world that you can bring into the topics.

Taking children's interest seriously led Peige to many unexpected experiences. We recount a few of these in order to illustrate the rewards of following children's interests.

Breaking glass. Peige said, "We were very concerned about this topic when we first heard it. In retrospect, it was the easiest do." The study of breaking glass was expanded into a unit on safety. Of course, children were not allowed to break glass. Peige explained to them that would be unsafe and that she could not let children be hurt. Instead, children watched as a teacher did this in a safe way (in a box covered with a towel). Peige explained that children just wanted to see what happened with glass broke. She speculated that they learned when adults "freak out" and say to be careful when children handle glass.

Flower girls. This was perhaps the most challenging topic to elaborate into something that not only led to new knowledge but reasoning and understanding. As the Assistant Director was planning her wedding, she invited to group time where she talked about loving relationships, getting married, and starting a family. Children had a chance to think about what it means to form a family, and, of course, they asked if she was going to get babies. She replied, "Yes someday" and added that children make families even more special. In other group times, the group talked about the many different kinds of families represented in the classroom. Children learned about family names and began to write initials of last names after first names. The dress-up center was appropriately organized. Peige comments:

For me, the flower girl part was not the major focus, but for the two or three who thought this was important, it was a chance to explore that fantasy. Maybe it was a reality in their lives, a special time they wanted to relive, when they felt sort of grownup and fancy. Feeling fancy is a neat thing to do even if being prissy isn't.

During the exploration of this theme, an argument arose as to whether boys could be flower girls. Peige comments, "We didn't see why someone couldn't have a flower boy if they wanted to, so all the little boys got to wear lace and flowers and all the sparkly stuff, too."

Washing hands. This curriculum suggestion came from a boy who was mystified as to why his parents and teachers told him to wash his hands so often. We are reminded of the story told by the first author's mother about the child who, when asked to wash his hands before cooking said, "I don't need to. I already had a bath this morning." Peige reflected that although children talked about germs, they had to take their existence on faith. She engaged the help of a mother, a microbiologist, who provided petrie dishes. Peige thought of the occasions when adults tell children to cover their mouths as well as to wash their hands. After children played in sand, Peige took fingernail clippings from them for one dish. After children washed their hands, she took more nail clippings for another dish. At group time one dish was passed around for everyone to cough on, without covering their mouths. With another, children covered their mouths and coughed. To get the effect of an uncovered sneeze, one child suggested using a Q-tip to take mucous from her nose. One dish was merely exposed to air. All dishes were labeled and discussed so that children would be clear about what they were doing. The mother took the dishes to a warm and moist place in her lab. When she brought them back 2 days later, dramatic results were visible to the naked eye. One container had become so toxic that it had to be sealed and returned to the lab for disposal! Children remembered what they had done and discussed the findings in group time. During activities, they examined the dishes closely. This project made germs observable and more real to children.

Encouraging Experimentation

By experimentation, we refer to the child's actions on physical objects, together with observations of the reactions of the objects to these actions as well as new actions informed by previous observations.

Why Experimentation Is Important

Freedom to experiment with objects is an important part of the constructivist sociomoral atmosphere because it reflects the teacher's general attitude toward the

child's interests and ways of knowing. This includes recognition of the importance of children's errors to their construction of knowledge. Up to the age of 7 years, child thought is dominated by the physical, material, observable aspects of experience. The child's main interest in objects is what happens when he or she acts on them. In infancy and early childhood, especially, children construct knowledge of the physical world by acting on it. In the course of experimenting, according to Piaget, the child constructs not only physical knowledge but also intellectual power - intelligence itself.

The reactions of adults to children's experimentation are crucial to the sociomoral atmosphere. If experimentation is viewed as misbehavior, it may be punished. It is easy to squelch a child's experimental attitude. The challenge for the constructivist teacher is how to foster it.

Examples of Classroom Experimentation

In a constructivist classroom, the teacher actively promotes experimental attitudes among children. In a sink-and-float activity in the kindergarten of the HDLS, for example, Coreen Samuel encourages children's curiosity by providing objects that might arouse feelings of contradiction between children's expectations and observations of objects. She asks questions and makes comments such as "What is going to happen? Is it going to float?" She calls children's attention to individual experiments: "Let's see what happens when _____ tries _____." Experimental children are heard saying, "Let's see what this does." "Let me show you something." "Let's test these." "Try these." They announce their discoveries with pleasure and, frequently, surprise, indicating conscious reflection on a problem. The teacher capitalizes particularly on surprise, as this indicates contradiction between children's expectation and observation. For example, S seems surprised that a medium-sized wooden truck (with metal axles and rubber tires) partially submerged while a larger wooden schoolbus floats. Coreen (T) suggests further experimentation and comparison, and nudges S to think about why these results occur.

S: Watch this. Look, Coreen, it [wooden truck] sank.

T: I wonder, how about a big one?

S: (Puts large wooden school bus in the water; she looks at Coreen with a surprised expression.)

T: Oh my gosh, look at that! I never saw a schoolbus float before.

S: And this one sank (holds up truck).

T: How could this one have sunk? And this [truck] is even smaller.

S: Because it's small.

T: It's smaller, and this one is bigger. Is this (schoolbus) heavier? Let's feel it. Which one do you think is heavier?

S: This [bus]

T: How come this one is floating?

S: (Drops tiny wooden car in water; it floats) How do little bitty things float if they're little?

T: You thought that only big things float?

S: Yeah, but the little cars floats.

T: Pretty strange.

S: (Gets cardboard paper towel roll) It's gonna float. Look at it. It's floating like a snake!

T: How about that! Look at this toothpick. What do you think is going to happen?

S: (Drops toothpick in water and sees that it floats)

In this activity, S does not resolve the feeling of contradiction between her expectation based on the ideal that only big things float and her observation that small things also float. However, her puzzlement is the foundation for further experimentation, reflection, and eventual resolution of her contradiction.

This example illustrates that children's expectations can surprise us. Thus the teacher, too, continues to construct knowledge about how children reason and modify their reasoning.

Coreen supports children's ideas, even when wrong, and calls others' attention to them. For example, when T hypothesizes that a piece of Styrofoam floats because it has a hole in it, Coreen repeats, "T says if it has a hole in here, it doesn't sink." Then Coreen tries to challenge children's reasoning by observing. "This (plastic strawberry basket) sinks, but it has holes in it." Later, when other children notice that wooden things seem to float, she calls attention to the partially submerged truck with metal axles and rubber wheels, saying, "What's different about this one?" A child says, "Cause it's carved." He refers to the fact that the truck is made from a single piece of wood. When one group of children concludes that metal sinks and wood floats, Coreen introduces a wooden ruler with a metal edge and ask for predictions.

We would like to point out that Coreen does not avoid including objects having properties of both sinkers and floaters in sink-and-float experiences. While some observations lead to clear conclusion according to classifications by material, others do not. Coreen does not try to protect children from the ambiguities of the real world.

Promoting Cooperation

By cooperation, we refer to operating in relation to another's behaviors, desires, feelings, ideas, and other psychological states. Piaget talked about the cognitive and moral importance of decentering from awareness of a single perspective. Cooperation

is not possible unless children decenter to think about the perspective of the other. Cooperation, with its implicit reciprocity, is critical to the sociomoral atmosphere.

Why Cooperation is Important

Cooperation requires coordination of points of view, a progressive adjustment in understanding the other, accepting initiatives, or reciprocating proposed modifications or counterproposals. The necessity for coordination becomes clear when children act in contradictory ways or openly disagree. The desire to play together arises from children's friendly relations, their socioaffective bonds. The habit of playing together makes possible more complex forms of cooperation. The motivation to cooperate and resolve problems when interactions break down is stronger between friends than nonfriends.

The desire to share one's thoughts with another leads to efforts to understand and make oneself understood. The feeling of understanding another and being understood can create the conditions for the development of friendship. Frequently in children's play, what they are most interested in is not so much the content but the social interaction. Experiences in cooperation provide the foundation and context for developing interpersonal understanding and thinking about issues of fairness and justice.

In the absence of external organization, children who play together must construct agreements on what to do. In pretend play, the meaning of symbols must be shared. In games, children confront the need to agree on rules. In blockbuilding together, children must agree on what to do and who performs various parts of the work. Cooperation is therefore important for intellectual as well as social and moral development.

Examples of Classroom Cooperation

A classroom organized to promote interest and experimentation also invites cooperation. Children who want to use the blocks may decide to work together on a structure. In pretend play, children can develop complex shared symbols as they coordinate their roles and ideas. Cooking the class snack can be organized so two cooks need to agree on what to cook and how to divide the responsibilities.

Some activities such as group games require cooperation. Consider, for example, the case of two 5-year-old friends who play checkers together frequently over the course of a year. This progressive adjustment of points of view is clear as they simultaneously construct rules along with interpersonal understanding. In the beginning, they do not know all the classic rules and unconsciously modify the game.

For example, K decides the checkers can move diagonally any number of spaces, as long as the path is clear, like the bishop in chess. J thinks he can jump over two spaces in order to capture an opposing checker. K decides they can move backwards.

In a constructivist classroom, the teacher cooperates with children. He or she invites their ideas on what to learn and facilitates exploration, experimentation, investigation, and invention. The constructivist teacher cooperates with children by consulting them and often acting as companion, as a player in games, and as a fellow experimenter.

The Teacher's Role

As we indicated in chapter 1, the teacher's relations with children are crucial to the sociomoral atmosphere. It is not too much to say that these relations determine the nature of the interpersonal atmosphere. The constructivist teacher attempts to cooperate with children and foster cooperation among children themselves.

Cooperating with Children

When people talk about cooperation between adults and children, they often mean children's compliance with adult demands. This is not what we mean. Rather, we mean the teacher's relations of reciprocity with children. These arise from respect for children as people and respect for the nature of their development. The general principle of teaching is that the teacher minimizes authority as much as practical and possible (see chapter 3 for the rationale). Cooperation is important for the sociomoral atmosphere because it reflects respect for the equality of class members - equality in rights and responsibilities.

We conceptualize the ways constructivist teachers cooperate with children in terms of what teachers try to do. They try (1) to understand children's reasoning, and (2) to facilitate children's construction and knowledge.

Understanding Children's Reasoning

Knowledge of Piaget's research and theory on the preoperational stage of development helps teachers to understand young children's reasoning. We do not attempt a review of that work here but offer a few guidelines and examples that may ease the inexperienced constructivist teacher into a habit of observing and listening to children.

This habit is characterized by taking seriously what children say. For example, when a child says, "The Weatherman made it rain today," the teacher recognizes this is a real belief and not just a cute remark. Similarly, the teacher assesses the intuitive nature of an idea expressed by a child on a walk. As the group turns around to return to school,

shadows are no longer behind but in front of them. "How come your shadow is in front of you now?" The answer: "The wind blew it." The teacher realizes that the child is not able to think about spatial and causal relations among light, object, and shadow. Similarly, when a child insists that a classmate bumped his block structure on purpose, the teacher recognizes that the child does not and perhaps cannot appreciate that actions may not reflect intentions.

The constructivist teacher does not assume that children think like adults. Rather than making assumptions about what children know and how they reason, the teacher honestly inquires as to what children think and is prepared for surprises.

Facilitating Children's Constructions

Understanding children's reasoning provides the basis for facilitating development. To help children construct knowledge and intelligence, the constructivist teacher engages with children to introduce a new element of food for thought. In a shadows activity, for example, Coreen Samuel observes that B, a kindergarten boy in the HDLS, has figured out that moving back from the screen results in a bigger and bigger shadow. Wondering whether B has taken the light source into account, she asks, "How big can you make it? Make it as big as you can." B responds by moving back and back until he is behind the slide projector serving as light source. "What happened to the elephant shadow? I don't see it any more." B is startled by the unexpected result and waves the elephant in the dark. Seeing no shadow, he moves forward, but out of the path of light. Waving the elephant from side to side, B accidentally catches the light and glimpses the shadow. This leads him to move into the full path of the light. "There it is!" Coreen again asks, "So how big can you make it?" B again backs up, still unconscious of the light source, and loses the shadow again. "Darn!" He waves the elephant around, places it on top of and beside the projector, and finally recreates the shadow by going back to stand in the place where he saw it last. Over the course of the year, Coreen continues to create situations that challenge B to experiment further with shadows. Making shadows on the ceiling is a particularly exciting situation in which B tests various hypotheses and gradually coordinates the light-object and object-screen relations.

In a group game, the constructivist teacher often takes part as a player alongside children. In this position, he or she can think aloud and thereby help children become more conscious of rules and strategies. For example, in a game of checkers, a student intern in the HDLS says, "If I move that one here, it would be safe, but if I move it here, you'd jump me, so I think I'll move it here so it will be safe." Children thus are challenged to think ahead and reason about possible moves on the part of the opponent.

Many other examples given throughout this book illustrate how the constructivist teacher cooperates with children by taking seriously their particular reasoning and constructions of knowledge.

Fostering Cooperation Among Children

Because so much peer interaction occurs in a constructivist classroom, relations among children comprise an important part of the sociomoral atmosphere. The constructivist goal is for children to construct emotional balance and coping abilities, interpersonal understanding, and social and moral values. All these goals are approached through the teacher's work with children in the interpersonal context of peer interactions.

Promoting Construction of Emotional Balance and Coping Abilities

Construction of emotional balance is a continual effort on the part of young children who are emotionally labile. They have not yet constructed personality characteristics and coping competencies. This is in large part due to intellectual limitations in thinking about perspectives and complexities of self-other interactions and relationships. The child who does not differentiate action from intentions will be angered at every accidental encroachment of his or her rights. Emotional balance comes about gradually as children learn to withhold judgment and question their own interpretations of others, realizing that they need to find out what others' intentions are. Some adults do not learn this very well, jumping to conclusions that are really projections of their own attitudes. The constructivist teacher assists children in the process of achieving emotional balance and mental health by facilitating the development of self-knowledge and interpersonal understanding.

The constructivist teacher fosters the development of self-knowledge by helping children reflect on their feelings and reaction tendencies. When children become upset, the teacher can ask children what happened to make them upset. Sympathetically, the teacher can acknowledge children's feelings, letting them know that how they feel is recognized. In the case of an issue with another child, the teacher uses conflict mediation techniques discussed in the following chapter. If the child comes to school upset with a parent, the teacher can listen and perhaps help the child figure out how to talk to the parent about the problem. If the child continues to be upset or is upset about something that cannot be changed, the constructivist teacher tries to help the child let go of and master the difficult feelings by suggesting, "Sometimes you can make yourself feel better. Is there something you can do to make yourself feel better?" When a child seems to be in a destructive spiral of anger or self-pity, it sometimes helps to say, "You can decide to feel bad, or you can decide to feel

better." consider the following interaction between Peige Fuller (T) and a 4-year-old who has been in her class just a few days.

C: (Cries)

T: So, are these tears because something is upsetting you? What makes you sad?

C: I want my mommy.

T: Right. Did something in our classroom happen that made you very sad?

C: (Nods)

T: What happened?

C: I just want my mommy.

T: You just want your mommy? I see that you got your paper towel. Would you like to eat some snack?

C: (Shakes head)

T: No, okay. You know what you could do that would be a big help to us would be for you to have a seat here and help us to clean up some Legos. That would be a very big help. (She holds C in her lap while they pick Legos from the floor and put them in a container.)(Later, C is still crying.)

T: (Stoops down to C's level, hold his hands in hers, and looks into his eyes.)

C, I have to tell you this. You are making a choice to be very, very, very sad. If you would like to stop crying, that would be okay. We would know that you miss your mommy. But if you stop crying, you can make a choice to meet some new friends and play some fun stuff.

C: (Crying) But I miss my mommy.

T: She will pick you up this afternoon, but she can't pick you up now.

The construct of emotional balance and coping abilities is important for the construction of interpersonal understanding.

Promoting Construction of Interpersonal Understanding

Construction of interpersonal understanding is a process of decentering to think about the other's point of view and to figure out how to coordinate it with one's own through negotiation. We discuss in chapter 2 the developmental levels in negotiation strategies as well as shared experiences. As children come to be interested in the psychological states of others and in developing friendships, they construct a repertoire of different types of negotiation strategies and shared experiences of which they are capable. The constructivist teacher facilitates this construction by using advanced strategies, sometimes suggesting them in the context of conflicts, and generally supporting children's efforts to negotiate. For example, the constructivist teacher refers children to other children for help in activities and states children's different points of view in the context of conflict.

Shure and Spivack (1978) provide excellent examples of how to intervene in children's conflicts and how not to intervene. Because these reflect our principles of teaching so well, we reproduce them here. In the following instances, a mother intervenes in conflicts between her son and his playmate. The first example illustrates what not to do when the mother observes her child grabbing a toy. The reader may notice that mother's interventions are mainly level 1 interpersonal understanding, as discussed in chapter 2.

Mother: Why did you snatch that truck from John?

Child: 'Cause it's my turn!

M: Give it back, James.

C: I don't what to. It's mine.

M: Why don't you play with your cars?

C: I want my firetruck!

M: You should either play together or take turns. Grabbing is not nice.

C: But I want my truck now!

M: Children must learn to share, John will get mad and he won't be your friend.

C: But, Mom, he won't give it to me!

M: You can't go around grabbing things. Would you like it if he did that to you?

C: No.

M: Tell him you're sorry. (p. 32)

After training in Shure's Interpersonal Cognitive Problem Solving skills, another mother interacts in the following way when grabbing is observed. The reader will notice that the mother's interventions this time are level 2 interpersonal understanding.

Mother: What happened? What's the matter?

Child: He's got my racing car. He won't give it back.

M: Why do you have to have it back now?

C: 'Cause he's had a long turn.

Shure comments that the mother learned that her son had shared his toy, a fact that leads the mother to a different view of the problem than if she had immediately demanded that he share.

M: How, do you think your friend feels when you grab toys?

C: Mad, but I don't care, it's mine!

M: What did your friend do when you grabbed the toy?

C: He hit me but I want my toy!

M: How did that make you feel?

C: Mad.

M: You're mad and your friend is mad, and he hit you. Can you think of a different way to get your toy back so you both won't be mad and so John won't hit you?

C: I could ask him.

M: And what might happen then?

C: He'll say no.

M: He might say no. What else can you think of doing so your friend will give you back your racing car?

C: I could let him have my MatchBox cars.

M: You thought of two different ways. (pp. 36-37)

These examples illustrate how the adult can promote cooperation among children by facilitating reflection on interpersonal feelings, consequences, and strategies. As children become more competent in interpersonal understanding and action, the sociomoral atmosphere changes accordingly.

Promoting Construction of Moral Values

Construction of moral values is a gradual process of building respect for others. Children do not develop respect for others unless they are respected. The teacher's expression of respect for children goes a long way toward establishing the foundation for construction of self-respect and respect for others. Respect for others rests on intellectual and emotional decentering to consider others' points of view. Through countless situations in which children experience sympathy, community, and clashes with others, the child constructs ideas of reciprocity among person.

As recommended by Kohlberg (Power, Higgins, & Kohlberg, 1989) in his Just Community approach to adolescent moral education, the constructivist teacher facilitates construction of moral values by upholding fairness, submitting social and moral issues to children for discussion, and capitalizing on the issues that arise in the life of the classroom. Children in constructivist classrooms know that the group is a resource for solving social and moral problems. The group takes on moral authority to which children contribute and to which they feel commitment.

We generally recommend that the teacher not initiate group discussion of problems between two children. However, when many children are concerned about an individual's behavior, group discussion may be fruitful. For example, in our Lab School kindergarten, children come in one day from early morning outside time with a concern about H's behavior on the playground. N enters the classroom, saying, "We need to discuss the problem of H." The teacher, Coreen Samuel asks if it is for the whole group or if it is something to do at activity time. N is too angry to wait, and other children join in her complaint. N explains, "H was hurting and tearing up my

picture, and he threw me down on the hard platform slide." H denies this, saying he didn't remember pushing N down. N accuses, "Yes, you did! You're just lying so you can get out of the problem." Other children support N's story, and A (age 5 years) argues eloquently and passionately about the implications beyond this particular incident. She says.

I think what we should do about it is let H know how we feel. These problems are really important because if we don't help these problems, they're not going to get any better and kids won't be taught very well and when they grow up, they're prob'ly not gonna' know - If we go on letting people hurt, people will learn to hurt. If we don't stop this, then people will learn to hurt when they grow up. And I don't think that's a very good ideal to leave these problems in front of us and not go ahead and help these problems.

The teacher follows up, "N, A said she saw the same thing with her eyes. She had a suggestion. Maybe you need to tell H how you feel about that. Do you want to talk to H since it's yours and his problem?" N says to H, "H, I don't like that when you push me down and try to tear my paper up." Other children also express concern about getting hurt on the playground. Coreen remarks, "It seems like the playground is not a fun place to be anymore." She asks, "What can those children do when they're having this kind of lack of control?" A again acts as the moral spokesperson:

We should tell them how we feel. Everybody in the world has feelings. It's like I said, they'll grow up and hurt other people, and I'm not sure we can help it when they're all grown up. That's just the way they've learned and there's no other way they've learned.

Coreen emphasized decentering, "What we try and tell children to do is to think of other people's feelings. Even the teachers do it. If you're really upset, then we think about what you might be feeling, and we try to help you." J offers, "It's not fun when you're fighting all the time." A once again speaks:

You know, we're the big class, and we're trying to teach the little kids by our actions. I'm not sure if we're really showing them how a big kid should act - and then they're going to do the same thing when they're in our kindergarten class.

Coreen says, "Let's see what H has to say. Maybe he can help control himself. What can you do to make the playground a better place? It's no fun any more." H replies, "I can not hit." Coreen asks how he is going to work toward not doing that. Then H shows that he heard A's plea, yet assimilated it to Kohlberg's level 1 heteronomous morality motivated by fear of punishment (see chapter 9):

Well, I think what the same thing A said. Like if you hurt someone and then when you grow up, you'll learn that hitting is what you should do, and if you hit, then you'll get into trouble.

At this point, the teacher might ask, "Is there any other reason not to hit? In order to make an opportunity for children to reflect beyond the level of avoiding punishment.

In this example, we see a feeling among the children of moral concern and responsibility that even goes beyond the immediate problem situation to long-term effects on the kindergarten children themselves as well as the younger children whom they influence.

Summary

A constructivist sociomoral classroom atmosphere is based on the teacher's attitude of respect for children's interests, feelings, values, and ideas. The classroom is organized to meet children's physical, emotional, and intellectual needs. It is organized for peer interaction and child responsibility. Activities appeal to children's interests, experimentation, and cooperation. The teacher's role is to cooperate with children by trying to understand their reasoning and facilitating the constructive process. The teacher's role is also to foster cooperation among children by promoting their construction of emotional balance and coping abilities, interpersonal understanding, and moral values.

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