

An Introduction to P.R. Sarkar's Theories on Early Childhood Education

By Niiti Gannon and Ketana Bardwell

To introduce Sarkar's contribution to the theoretical field of early childhood education, first one needs a brief understanding of a characteristically different approach in deistical eastern thought and western concepts. Traditionally, the East concentrated on the subjective approach holding intuition and self knowledge in high esteem. Under this influence, an individual developed a conscience, ethics and possibly reached the height of spirituality. The West favoured an analytical approach. Consequently, most progress occurred primarily in the fields of economics, technology, and science. Today Western attitudes and thoughts predominate throughout most of the world. Under its influence, education is preoccupied with cognitive and physical development.

Sarkar recognized the value of both classical eastern subjective approach and current analytical western thought in the field of education. He envisioned a blending of the two approaches to give a more balanced theory. Educators inspired by Sarkar's ideas find there is well-rounded development in the physical, mental and spiritual spheres. No one area develops in isolation as each area is dependent on the other. Sarkar summarized this thought by stating that morality, spirituality and humanity, and a blending of Occidental (western) extroversial science and oriental (eastern) introversive philosophy is the very foundation of his system of education.

Other Educational Theorists

In the West there is an enormous amount of information on the subject of child development. During the past century western research has fundamentally changed the understanding of how children learn and grow. Most educators recognize conditions such as a variety of experiences, nutrition, nurturing relationships, stimulating environments, and hereditary factors as important to children's growth. Extensive experiments on the brain revealed there were functional differences in the two hemispheres of the brain. The brain's **left** hemisphere controls abstract thinking, verbal and logic functions. Largely, the right hemisphere involves perceptual, spatial, creative and intuitive abilities. Other recent research on the brain by Leslie Hart suggests that a sense of physical and psychological safety in school is necessary for children to use the higher level functions of the neo-cortex.

Within the myriad of research and educational ideas, most educators widely accept and use four major theoretical approaches. No single approach encompasses **all** aspects of development and they differ widely in their views from each other. Following is a brief description of each of the four approaches:

Psychodynamic Theory

Psychodynamic theory formulated by Sigmund Freud focused on the inner process and on emotional development. His work was the basis for other contributors like Erick Erikson's work described a series of stages of social and emotional development. He saw in each stage of development a continuum with healthy development at one end and self-defeating attitudes at the other. Psychodynamic theories influence educators to be aware of child's emotional development and encourage a child's creative expression

relationships, and the importance of the psychological state of the adults who work with young children.

Cognitive Development Theory

in contrast to the Psychodynamic theorists, cognitive theorists focused on the intellectual aspects of development. The most accredited pioneer was Jean Piaget. He stressed that cognitive development occurred as a result of the child's interaction with the social and physical environment. As a result of this interaction, the child goes through predictable stages. He insisted that children are striving to construct their understanding of the world through direct experience and interactions, and should have ample opportunities to explore and manipulate materials. Piaget created a focal point and methodology for the study of children's cognitive development.

Other cognitive theorists centred on more specific areas, such as language acquisition. The ideas of L.S. Vygotsky have contributed to the emphasis on the social origins of language and thought. He believed early communicative interactions with adults when internalized became the foundations of speech and thinking in young children. He said that it is not only important to see what children can do by themselves, as was Piaget's focus, but also look at what they can do with an adult's assistance. Vygotsky's zone of

proximal development believed what the child can do in cooperation today, is what they can do alone tomorrow. He believed that educators aim at the 'ripening function'.

Behaviourist Theory

governed by the same principles at all ages. primarily a stimulus /response drive. Reinforcement techniques are important to the educators who accept this theory.

Human Potential Theory

On the other hand Human Potential Theorists such as Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow and Arthur Combs saw that the other theories did not address human potential for consciousness, love, creativity and the desire to know the unknown. Their studies aim at how to support the young child's healthy and positive development. This school of thought has caused programs to focus on the whole child and to support programs that maintain positive relationships between teachers and students based on mutual respect.

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION Theories OF P.R. SARKAR Neo-Humanist Education

P~R. Sarkar made a significant impact on education. He redefined the boundaries of education itself by applying a larger framework based on philosophy of N~humanism. Neo~humanism is the love and respect for all people, extended to include all living beings, animate and inanimate. Neo~humanist education is the concerned effort to develop the highest human potential of every child. This translates into an emphasis on the whole child physical, mental and spiritual - and infusing the child with love so that they grow into people who care to improve the world in which they live

In analysing the innumerable theories and philosophies, N~humanism warns against dogmatism. It supports the idea of being eclectic while at the same time providing a measuring stick to discern the quality and bearing of an idea. When judging a new idea,

Sarkar advises weighing the pros and cons and then applying the result against its welfare to all beings The base of Neo~humanism is universal benevolence.

Goal of Education

Sarkar had a dear purpose and goal of education. He envisioned its goal not as success and prestige, but the full development of human potentialities and the development of a compassionate outlook. This is not dissimilar to the Human Potential Theorists, but Sarkar sees human beings as much more subtle and expanded. He emphasized the development of the whole child. The real meaning of education is trilateral development - simultaneous development in the physical, mental and spiritual realms of human existence. This development should enhance the integration of the human personality. By this, dormant human potential will be awakened and properly utilized.

Today, education is often seen as merely a means to secure employment. It may be a means for success in the economic and material spheres; however, too much emphasis on this outlook leaves personal gain as the end product of education. Although this approach can give many accomplishments, alone this motive holds the seeds of many forms of corruption. Greed and the desire for self-gain are often at the root of social decay. Education for only individual success may omit ethics and benevolence.

Others may believe the goal of education is for the accumulation of knowledge for its own sake. This can lead to selfishness and intellectualism. Without a clear goal that embraces a benign attitude, education may not necessarily benefit society or individuals. The goal of Neo-humanism recognizes that society will only truly prosper if its members have a spirit of care and concern for all.

Spirituality

In Neo-humanist education, spirituality does not refer to religious teachings or doctrines. It is helping a person realize that there is something beyond this mundane and super-mundane existence. As Sarkar said, "Proper education enables one to stand against the influence of the physical environment and awaken the psychic urge to attain a higher life. That is, the ideological goal." (1) Sarkar defined ideology as the description of 'Idea' and 'Idea' stands for the beginning of all vibrations. This is a theoretical stance at the limits of the mind where Sarkar says the realm of pure Consciousness exists. Although 'Idea' is beyond comprehension, it is usually expressed through an 'ideology'.

The effort to identify with an Idea beyond the mind changes the significance of the world. In this regard, Nobel laureate of literature, Rabindranath Tagore, said, "I felt dearly what

was needed was not any particular material object, not wealth, or comfort or power, but our awakening to full consciousness in soul freedom, the freedom of the self in God, where we have no enmity with those who must fight. no competition with those who must make money, where we are beyond all attacks and above all insults (2)

True spiritual development needs the regular practice of a proper meditative method. Self-reflection, a belief in the existence of a greater good, and the desire to make an inner connection with that greatness are important ingredients of meditation. Teaching spirituality in schools begins with encouraging the children to develop the power of

missing text

not have the maturity to practice real meditation, they can learn to begin to keep a quiet **time** and turn their thoughts inward. They may do some simple visualization and centering games that eventually aid meditation. There is no assurance that a child will think on love or similar ideas that leads to true meditation. By keeping a regular quiet time, they will develop an internal awareness leading towards spiritual development.

Universal love

Neo-humanist education encompasses some ideas shared by other theorists. For example, the Human Potential Theorists discussed the importance of love and mutual respect. However, Sarkar expands this idea **to** include all forms **of** life. The significance of each individual as well **as** the interconnectedness of each child with all of creation is important. He mentioned that education is not only for human beings but all beings.

The attitude children develop towards people, animals and other beings influences their whole life. It will determine how they interrelate with society and the choices they make. For example, Dr. Stephen Keller of Yale University found that children who abuse animals have a much higher likelihood of becoming violent criminals. Evidence suggests that people who learned to care for others and animals as children, are more responsible and empathetic as they mature. Young children need encouragement and guidance towards caring for and loving the world around them. An understanding of the spirit **of** Neo-humanism gives children a foundation to become a responsible, caring and beneficial members of society.

View of the child

All theorists, except the Behaviorists, recognize the importance of early childhood. It is the most formative period of human life. Sarkar believed, One is molded in one's childhood. If one received the fundamentals of education in the formative period of life, one will keep oneself all right in the teeth of the heaviest odds in life. A bamboo, when green, can be shaped or bent in any way you like. Once it ripens, any attempt to reshape it will break it. That's why, more stress is to be laid on Kindergarten schools. That is the first phase of human-making." (3)

P.R. Sarkar saw young children's minds as naturally integrated. They feel their physical, mental and spiritual self as part of a unified whole. Most researchers agree that at birth infants do not know what is not part of them and what is. For example, infants discover gradually that the mother and they are not one body. Throughout early childhood, children are more likely to see similarities between things than differences. Children are more eager to point out objects of the same color than of a different color. Some theorists like Piaget describe young children as being egocentric. Non-humanists tend to believe young children feel everything is a part of themselves. They are the center of the universe because they feel connected and dependent on other living beings. This explains children's natural tendency to show mutual affection. Children appreciate simplicity and an open-heart, without any hesitation.

How one views the young child is crucial to the whole education system. Is the child a blank screen for a teacher to fill or a cocoon awaiting birth into a butterfly? Sarkar theorizes that young children are in an extremely subtle period. They have access to extracerebral memory. In the case of a child, since the crude experiences are relatively surface in the child's subtle mind. As a result, the accumulated experiences of the child's previous life can easily be recollected." (4)

'This extracerebral memory begins to fade after five years. The more one advances in age, the more the new environment leaves its impressions in the child's mind. The more a child

sees new things before his or her eyes, the more restless they become to know each and every object of this world. Hence, the child asks a multitude of questions - it seems there is no end to their inquisitiveness. The more they receive the answers to their questions, the more their mind gets acquainted with the mundane world. The experiences of the causal mind then begin and become reflected in the dream state. As a result, the vibrations of the causal mind cannot come to the surface any more. Hence, the more the child advances in age, the more they forget their past life." (5)

This is a natural progression. Neo-humanist educators support the young child's effort to gain his or her identity and place in the world. The acknowledgment of the child's subtleties helps greatly to mold the methods of educators.

Fantasy

In recognizing the young child's subtleties, the importance of the use of imaginative fantasy arises in early childhood education. The psychodynamic theorist appreciated the use of fantasy, but used it particularly as an indicator of a child's unconscious mind. Neo-humanist educators see fantasy as an important part of a young child as it fills the mind of a child regularly. There is not a definite difference between the unconscious and conscious mind of a young child.

Neo-humanist educators nurture the child's creative potentials to teach what is real and what is not. By continuing to foster the child's imagination throughout their childhood,

Ne~humanist educators help the child to develop a greater army of expressive abilities and higher thought. As Sarkar emphasized, ~he child's mind is filled with fanciful imagery, and so the literature will also have to soar in the sky of imagination with outstretched wings. What is more important is to carry the child's mind along in the current of joy and in the process to acquaint the child with the world in an easy and simple manner." (6)

Play

For centuries, writers have said play holds an important role in child development. In the last fifteen years, hundreds of articles discussed the significance of children's play. Almost all modern theorists agree on the importance of play. It is increasingly becoming a common point of agreement for most educators. P. R. Sarkar said, "Children are inclined towards play, so the thirst for knowledge in children can be awakened through the medium of play. And through this alone children may be taught. Children also

natural~ like fantasies and stories. Love of play and stories are liked equally by a child, and so should be utilized to the fullest advantage. (7)

Cognitive Development

Regarding cognitive development, Sarkar stressed four aspects. First involves arousing

each child's sense of curiosity and wonder. "The thirst for knowledge must be awakened." (8) Developing the mind goes far beyond an understanding of math, science and language. Mere intelligence is not enough. An educator's aim is to motivate a child to desire to assimilate the entire universe.

Second, he emphasized that instruction be based on fact and free from narrowisms. For a child to obtain their full cognitive potential, their learning needs to be broad-based and concise. Instruction must not be shadowed by racism, sexism or nationalism.

Third, he encouraged sensori-motor exploration to enhance their cognitive development. Sarkar agreed with other theorists that active interaction and manipulation of their environment aids concrete cognitive development.

Lastly, Sarkar stressed the importance of a balanced mind for both the teacher and students. He believed that a fundamental of education is that teachers and students should have a balanced mind, unaffected, unassailed by unimportant entities" (9) Often unwanted outside distractions triumph over a child's ability to learn. With today's overwhelming amount of information, only an ordered and organized mind can fully appreciate and use this vast amount of knowledge. Developing a balanced mind helps the child make effective choices based on what is important and what is not

Morality

More than the psychodynamic theorists, Sarkar emphasized morality as an essential part of early childhood development. By the age of five years, Sarkar said children form their moral outlook. Ethical development includes values and pro-social development. It involves many of the same aspects as social development, and also includes a child learning to empathize with others, gain a feeling of service to other living beings and be a better person internally.

Neo-humanist educators encourage and model ten universal ethical concepts. These are;

Non-harming	-	Clean and Clear
Truthfulness		Happy Hearted
Non-stealing		Helpful

Universal Love

Inspirational Study

Simple living

Meditation and inner self-improvement

Sarkar believed adult's loving behavior and good role modelling were the most effective ways of helping children develop their morality. Children are constantly watching adults for cues on what to do and how to act. Only if teachers truly live these concepts can they be real models for the children. Sarkar could not accentuate enough the importance of morality. "In our education system, emphasis should be given to moral education and the inculcation of idealism-not only philosophy and traditions. At all levels the practice of morality should be the most important subject in the syllabus (10) Educators

Sarkar's theories extended beyond the many aspects of child development. They also included the education and character of those who teach. His view stated that only an understanding of education theories was not enough. "Those who have acquired academic qualifications do not have an automatic right to become teachers. Teachers must possess such qualities as integrity, strength of character, righteousness, a sense of social service, unselfishness, and inspiring personality and leadership capacity." (11) Other theorists generally do not outline the qualifications of the teacher. Although, the importance of relationships was a vital part of other theorists like those of Vygotsky and Human Potential theorists to Sarkar the teacher's character was paramount. If they merely speak the words and do not embody the spirit, the child will only learn hypocrisy.

Sarkar further expanded his views on the teacher by stating that teachers: "must be given the right to formulate educational policies." (12) As teachers are those who have expertise in the field of education they are the best candidates to formulate school policies. Unfortunately, political powers often control policies and funding. Too many times, schools fall prey to special interest groups and factionalism within these powers. Under such circumstances, it is difficult for teachers to work with a greater ideal in view. Freed from pressure from various interest groups, teachers can find new solutions and better methods to improve the education system. They can work without hindrance towards a higher ideal.

Conclusion

Sarkar actively developed his educational philosophy over the last twenty years of his life. Much of his work is still in the process of translating and publishing. Consequently,

Although, many Ananda Marga schools have begun to implement his theories in various Countries, as his ideas become more available they will spread.

While P.R. Sarkar's educational theories have common features with other theorists, there are exciting new dimensions and a broadened meaning of education. Especially significant is his view of the child as more subtle and with tremendous potential. Under the framework of Neo-humanist education, he encompassed all aspects of child development, placing an added emphasis on spirituality and morality. Sarkar believed human development was not only for individual gain but for the welfare of all.

Within each child is a treasure of physical, mental and spiritual potential awaiting discovery. P.R. Sarkar clearly developed comprehensive theories for early childhood education. By understanding the magnitude of his theories, educators can truly fulfill their enormous responsibility and awaken the thirst for knowledge in the student's mind.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

The authors, Av. Anandanivedita Ac. and Ketana J. Bardwell, have a combined
experience of twenty four years in early childhood education. Av. Anandanivedita has
opened and directed preschools in the Philippines, Malaysia and Guam. In Australia,
Ketana taught primary school and developed and directed a toddler's play group. Today
they run a successful preschool in Guam. Previously, Av. Anandanivedita wrote the
education book, For Universal Minds-- Ananda Marga Education. Together they
authored the teacher guide books, Who Am I? and I Can Draw the Sun.

