

Candide Teaching Method Including Animal Intelligence

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Abstract.

For six years, we practiced the Candide innovative teaching method including *purring therapy* founded by Michèle BOURTON in our independent school group Candide in France. About fifteen cats took part in the life of the 6 to 15-year-old students and played their role of therapists circulating in the classrooms looking for hugs or a cozy cushion. While respecting the freedom of the animals who chose to come and go as they pleased, we noticed significant changes in students' behavior and academic performances. Children felt reassured by the presence of cats, they no longer dreaded coming to school, they no longer felt stress. It was this intense experience that led us to create our new association: Candide International, an NGO that works to help design schools that integrate Candide teaching method including animal intelligence in the most needy countries. Indeed, our awareness of the importance of animal mediation and communication has deeply engaged us in the education programs of the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) proposed by UNESCO. We create schools within animal reserve or animal sanctuaries (mainly in Africa). The goal is to introduce children to the animals in their environment in order to enable them to acquire solid notions, to love passionately and to communicate intensely with wildlife in order to foster the development of autonomous and sustainable adult behaviors.

Keywords: animals; apprenticeships; autonomy; innovative; sustainable development

1. Introduction

In september 2013, Michèle BOURTON opened her first independent school group named “Candide” in the south of France.

She founded the Candide teaching method linked to purring therapy, a method which makes it possible to integrate cats in classrooms in order to foster stress reduction and a sense of well-being in children.

The amazing findings we have made concerning the benefits of purring therapy have been related in the book written by Michèle BOURTON entitled “from truancy to a school with cats”. And these findings have led us to more innovation.

Why should not we extend this experiment to any kind of animal intelligence? What would happen if school curricula included in-depth knowledge of animals with the aim of loving them and learning how to communicate with them?

2. Cats in school and in middle school, what a funny idea!

In November 2013, Brioche, a beautiful black and white long hair, starts school after Halloween holidays with the first twenty-three pupils to attend the school group Candide in Provence.

This new non-contract private school group created by Michèle BOURTON gradually integrates one, then two, then four...then fifteen cats in 2018 altogether with its seventy-five young learners. She seems to make no difference between humans and animals. She loves them so much that everybody can enjoy comfort in a convivial and colourful school in their own ways. The desire to learn is naturally back in the company of the felines just as happy to lounge in suspended hammocks as to play with some toy provided for them.

In Candide, animals and humans are on an equal footing. Animals have to be protected, respected, and they should not be instrumentalised. They choose if they want to interact with a person and should never be forced to do so.

Michèle BOURTON grew up with cats who saved her when she suffered from child abuse and torture from her mother. When she was a child, faced with silent inaction from social services, she received visits from “her” cats. She knew how to communicate with beyond words in a cat language they were the only ones to understand.

As an adult, she has always lived with cats and it seemed natural to her when she opened her own school, to have a few cats for the pleasure to keep living next to them.

However, she did not expect the love she had received from them in her childhood to have such an impact on her young pupils and bring them so much.

The observations and results of this experiment have already been published but here are the outlines necessary to the good understanding of what follows:

- The presence of cats has a direct impact on anxiety and stress reduction in children. For example, Nathalie told us her stomach did not hurt anymore when she went to school in the morning because she knew she was to find Mickey there and that he would be waiting for her in front of the entrance of the school for hugs.
- Cats do change the perception children have of themselves, making them valuable, kind and more confident as animals do not judge them. They accept us as we are, as a whole, with our qualities and defects. Yann told us that at last, he had found himself useful and capable of doing something good since he attended school in Candide because he could understand his favourite feline Crousty and anticipate his needs.
- The feeling of well-being fosters learners’ fulfillment and enhance their school performances. Mathilda told us one day that when she did not understand a question in an exercise, she took some time to pet Brioche with relaxed her and she could refocus and find the answer.
- The empathy triggered by the presence of the cats and the love children develop for them are transferable to their pairs. Pierrick thus learnt to temper his restlessness so as to preserve the calm the animals and his friends needed.

3. Today’s assessment on the benefits of purring therapy and animal mediation

The effects of purring therapy have been well known since the 1950s, yet it’s professor J.Y GAUCHET who invented the word purring therapy in France to refer to the soothing and therapeutic virtues of cat purring.

At a physiological level we know that:

- It boosts oxytocin (the happiness and attachment hormone).
- It decreases heartbeat.
- It acts on insulin and cortisol variations
- It lowers blood pressure.
- It decreases the use of painkillers.

At a neuropsychological and emotional balance level, the presence of cats :

- Increases motivation in children, aged or sick people and disabled people and it enables them to perform more precise tasks more quickly.
- Increases cognitive performance
- Allows better attentional focus.

Scientific studies on the subject of animal mediation (also called zootherapy or animal-assisted therapy) also began in the 1950s. It refers to all unconventional therapeutic methods that use proximity to domestic animals or companion to a human with mental, physical or social disorders to reduce stress and / or the consequences of medical treatment or post-operative problems. It was Jérôme MICHALON who, in 2014, put forward the term "care through animal contact".

Cross-checking all these scientific studies, we could notice with interest that what had been observed with cats was the same as what had been observed with other animals.

However, though animals can be a wonderful emotional mediator or catalytic in medical or paramedical environments (occupational therapists, speech therapists), their presence in schools had never been imposed as in the Candide school group.

4. How the Candide International NGO was born?

Welcoming cats (and no other animals) in our school seemed the easiest and the safest thing to do, but the effects their presence produced on pupils kept us wondering whether cats were the only animal able to benefit children at a behavioural level and in their academic skills? Would we have the same results, the same spectacular changes if other animals were to be introduced? We even noticed that being in contact with these animals everyday made the children feel like adopting an animal at home, which is what lots of families did indeed!

Scientific research confirmed that generally speaking animals, domestic animals for most of them, were all gifted with such benefits for Man. We go one step further, stating that all the animals of our environment, whether they are pets or wild animals, bring such effects to Man. We are sure that pupils will grow up and become autonomous and responsible if they learn to know the animals of their environment, develop their love for them and know how to communicate with them.

It is essential to have a good understanding of the scope of this commitment which largely outreaches the field of the animal world to include the plant kingdom and of course human species. We could observe a small group of children explaining other children that they needed to be careful when playing in the school yard to avoid damaging the plants because they were living beings for example. We could also see Madeline who felt so much empathy for her classmate that she anticipated her needs and gave her her rubber or ink cartridges for example even before Juliette asked for them.

The Candide International NGO was thus created in March 2018 so as to diffuse the Candide teaching method linked to animal intelligence and concretely proposes school construction projects in reserves or wildlife sanctuaries in the countries that request us to do so, in Africa in particular. The challenge of preserving nature along with the need for the peoples to become reliably and significantly autonomous (all of this thanks to strict quality education) has become our battle around the world and leads great leaders to turn to the innovation our actions offer. Our programs are conditioned by UN values, which initiates the 17 SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) to enable the different nations to act on the biggest challenges of this world by 2030.

The Candide International NGO falls within the SDG 4 (for quality education) and the SDG 15 (for the preservation of earthly life).

5. What if we could communicate with animals? What would it change?

5.2 Définition of animal communication

Animal communication includes all the exchanges of informations between individuals from the moment it was provided to the moment it was received. Extra specific information implies individuals from different species (source Wikipedia).

In the United-States, Laila DEL MONTE, a specialist in animal communication is a pioneer in Europe. She explains that this speechless language is carried out “from spirit to spirit” as animals are conscious beings. She adds up by saying that this learning (animal communication) should be part of Education. “I think it is essential to understand their languages and their consciousness to decrease the lack of understanding that can exist between animals and humans. The meeting with animal consciousness will also make it possible to improve the living conditions of animals on our planet.” We do think it will also make it possible to improve human beings’ living conditions!

5.2 A change in vision

Animals do no longer appear as beings devoid of physical or psycho-emotional feelings. In Candide, we teach our pupils how these living beings have to be respected with all their individuality and the features linked to their species.

Thus, humans no longer position themselves as leaders and have an equal relationship with animals, in which mutual benefits can take place for the good of the former and the latter.

The veterinarians working for the Chimpanzee Conservation Center in Guinea did not hesitate to call on two female animal communicators to better understand their residents and provide them with the most appropriate conditions for their evolution. In fact, the results are incredible! Vets explain that some chimpanzees want to stay in the Conservation Center for their own good while others will want to return to the forest. In this venture on special communication the changes in the way the animals behave guide the caregivers and show them how well they have understood the chimpanzees.

Finally, Man becomes more human when getting rid of his all-powerful relationship with animals.

5.3 Man cannot hurt a living being he considers as his equal

Animals have feelings and we can learn how to decode their behaviour to understand them better and thus live harmoniously with them.

In Africa for example, most children know nothing about their environment. This lack of information triggers absconding and fear compartments. Animals are strangers that must be destroyed because they are harmful. Poaching and all the other sorts of violence towards animals comes from this misinformation.

5.3 Man transposes what he learns with animals to the realm of the living

Animal communication makes man more sensitive to the realm of the living as a whole. Man, sensitised on animal welfare, cannot deny the links of interdependence between the different ecosystems. Such awareness will spontaneously lead him to feel like protecting Nature!

6 Why choose to build a school in a game reserve or a wildlife sanctuary: the exemple of Benin

The Candide International NGO really believes that Education can immerse the learners in their natural environment. Discovering, learning, recognising animal so as to overcome the barriers of distrust and violence is what we want. We know that animals can generate the seeds of empathy and brotherhood in man. We create schools in wildlife parks for children to become the determined custodians of Life thanks to love. Our role is to guide these pupils towards the ultimate relationship leading to communication from being to being whatever the species.

Today, we are achieving the project of building a primary school for children aged five to twelve in Benin in the W national park in the north of the country. Benin has been undergoing strong growth for a few years and has prioritised Education for a better access to schooling as well as quality education. It adheres to values of the United Nations and to those of Candide International, the latter advocates high quality education along with better trained teachers.

In addition, Candide International NGO puts weekly scientific modules forward for learners to become familiar with their environment, discovering and life experimentation with wild animals and pets.

The classes shuld include a limited number of pupils if we want to foster individual achievement thanks to peer helping and teachers.

Lastly, so as not create any inequalities between children, the Candide teaching method assigns no homework as homework is done in the classroom with the teachers.

7 Conclusion

Hoping to see a cleaner, more stable and more peaceful planet blossom one day, where species will be able to live together in good cooperation the ones with the others without any supremacy or domination, Candide International NGO takes its parts in joint responsibility and innovates for Education to be the most valuable vector of development.

Thus, the young adults will participate, invent and produce. They will be well prepared to face the biggest challenges of humanity and will be capable of finding keys to face them.

We keep moving forward every day with this huge faith in Man's innate goodness to enable us to live on a peaceful, sustainable Earth.

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