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Teaching peace concept to children

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Abstract

This paper discusses teaching peace concepts to children by creating a peaceful classroom environment and teaching children conflict resolution and social responsibility for themselves, others and the world. These were discussed under creating a peaceful learning atmosphere, setting up a peace center, teaching peaceful resolution and integrating peace concepts in the curriculum. Some of the recommendations made were that teachers and parents should learn to live in harmony to serve as models to children and that steps in teaching children conflict resolution should be learned and understood by teachers of young children, parents and other adults' responsible for the education of children. This is to enable them inculcate the practice in children.

Keywords: peace education; teaching and children

Introduction

One of the most valuable, commendable and worthwhile attitude every nation of the world needs and desires among its citizens is living in peace. This is because the root of any national development according to ^[1] is based on peace. Where there is peace there is love, harmony, unity, order and relatively security. This is congruent with ^[2] assertion that peace reflects that secured state that frees individuals and group of people from fears and dangers of losing their human rights such as life, liberty and property. This is also supported by ^[3]. According to him, peace can be understood not only as the absence of war or violence, but also as a positive presence including the presence of well- being, social justice, gender equality, human rights and basic needs for all. In other words, peace connotes a relative condition of security and social harmony.

The security threats worldwide today should therefore, be a food for thought for peace loving citizens and the peace keeping committee of United Nations. War, violence, terrorisms and formation of various violent movements and sects are indexes of dangerous threats to peaceful communal living. One of the common features on television today is incessant acts of violence in terms of riots, strikes, protests, war and attacks of different shades and dimensions. Most times, in all these hundreds of innocent citizens are killed, wounded, mimed or rendered useless and hopeless in life.

In Nigeria today, one of the major national problem that needs to be tackled urgently is the problem of insecurity, kidnapping, armed robber, car snatching, wanton destruction of properties and killing are now the order of the day. Presently with the emergence of dangerous insurgency movements such as Boko Haran in the North, one wonders where Nigeria, as a nation, is heading to. Thousands of innocent citizens have been sent to their graves prematurely, valuable propriety burnt and people killed mercilessly with impunity and so far no tangible or effective solution is on ground to put this wanton killing to stop.

One big danger about these incessant crises and acts of violence in our mist is that our children are watching and learning and may assume that it is a way of life; that violence is an apparently viable way to resolve problems. This is in keeping with ^[4] observation that children who witnessed or grew up under war situations have high warring tendencies than children who grew up without experiencing war situations. As parents, teachers of young children and guardians, therefore, it is our responsibility to create a culture of peace by living in harmony with one another in order to serve as models to our children. Children should be educated on the concepts, values and the dynamics of peaceful living. They should be taught to work together to solve problems; exploring their environment and sharing one another's discoveries ^[5]. They need to be taught to celebrate the diverse ways in which they can satisfy their common needs. For example, in Nigeria, our children need to be taught that in spite of their different tribes and tongues, that they are one. In other words, children need to understand peace concepts and imbibe the practice of peace.

Teaching peace concept to young children involves two major components; creating a peaceful classroom environment and teaching children conflict resolution and social responsibility for themselves, others and the world. This paper therefore discusses how peace concepts can be taught to children. This will be discussed under the following headings: creating a peaceful learning environment, setting up a peace center and integrating peace concepts in the curriculum.

Create a Peaceful Atmosphere

In order to create a peaceful learning environment, teachers should first establish an atmosphere in which adults’ model and facilitate peaceful interactions. Teachers maintain a climate of caring tolerance and mutual respect at all times, among children, staff, families and visitors. Adults and children should model communication skills, conflict resolution, tolerance and honesty. Children in the group are expected to be generous to each other, to exhibit empathy and to be increasingly aware of how their behaviors affect others.

Learning materials and activities are free from gender, racial, age and other stereotypes. Caring adults build on typical everyday incidents (disagreements about turns on equipment, for example) to promote appropriate peacemaking skills such as communication, accepting no for an answer, standing up for what is fair, and taking turns. Children develop a sense of understanding about and empathy for others when they engage in meaningful community projects for example collect items for a toy or food drive, make cards or sing for nursing home residents or children in the hospital.

Families are an important ally in the peace learning process. Teachers should talk with parents or guardians about how their children use their positive social skills and are learning to respect people. They should also encourage families to observe children at play or use videotape representative classroom intentions to show during conferences or meeting. Information about conflict resolution, anti – bias activities and other topics when exchanging information about children’s progress should be included.

In addition to incorporating peace into daily routine, some teachers may set up a peace centre in which children can read, listen to music and practice their conflict resolution strategies. These are a few suggestions about how to set up such a centre.

1. Designate a comfortable space in the classroom. Decorate it with the children’s words and artwork depicting their ideas about peace. Post pictures of children engaged in activities at the Peace Centre. Choose soothing music from a variety of cultures. “Peace is the World Smiling” is one such recording.^[6] Select children’s books in which the character model peaceful behaviors.
2. Display pictures and posters that depict human diversity. Hang them at children’s eye level. Look for active, contemporary, positive pictures of people of various ages, from many cultures, with a range of capacities. Catalog travel brochures, and magazines are excellent source.
3. Set a few positive rules about expectations for children’s behavior in the group, such as “We use our words to solve problems”.
4. Have a log that children fill in each time they use center. Activities to blogged could be at the center to resolve problems, read, write or chat. For children who are still learning to read, use symbols to denote each activity.
5. Create a “Getting Along” World Bank for your readers.

Teaching Children Conflict Resolution

In teaching children how to resolve conflict with others, the four steps that should be followed accordingly according to ^[7] are as shown in the table below. All the four steps should be explained as children resolve their disagreements. At first, and nearly always with children, an adult should be there to ensure that children follow each step. Children soon learn to use these strategies independently. This democratic conflict resolution process can also be used by adults.

Steps in Teaching Children Conflict Resolution

This is described in a table form below:

Step	Action
1. Tell us what happened.	Allow each child to explain the problem.
2. Summarize. Summarize what they say.	Include each child’s point of view.
3. What could you do about this problem.	Ask children for possible solutions. Consider all possibilities. You may say, ‘I wonder if there is another way to handle this problem,’ but don’t suggest any solution.
4. Help the children choose a solution	Do not give any hint of what you think they should do. It is their decision.

Source: From Helping Children Love Themselves and Others: A Professional Handbook For Family Day Care (p.26), by J. McCracken (ed.), 1990, Washington, DC: The Children’s Foundation.

The program rules and conflict resolution steps should be posted so that adults are aware of what is expected. Explain their purposes. Encourage families to implement similar positive childrearing strategies. Suggest word that the children can use to express their feelings and or describe actions so they can communicate more effectively. Offer substitute words for hurtful language (hate, stupid) such as angry or confused.

Integrate Peace Concepts in the Curriculum

Peace concepts are effectively taught only when they make sense to children and are embedded within the curriculum and classroom routines. Teaching peace to children is a daily process, rather than a special week or a project. The following ideas describe how peace concept can be incorporated into traditional academic areas, all of which are integrated in a developmental early curriculum.

1. **Social Studies:** broaden children’s true understanding about the uniqueness and similarities among individuals, families, communities, states and countries around the world. Make sure information is accurate and about real people. Ask community volunteers to share aspects of their heritage, such as artifacts or family photos. Ensure that children realize all people, including culture. Regularly incorporate authentic ethnic foods and real clothing into the pretend play area. Engage children in appropriate ways to solve current social problems in the community, such as writing letters about trash on the playground. Children learn about the democratic process when they vote on meaningful issues ^[1] build consensus in small group and use negotiation skills.

2. **History / News:** Read children's stories that recognize and celebrate people who work to establish human rights and a better life for others. Select such books often. Talk with children about people they know who are working for peace and justice – neighbors, educators, decision makers in the community. Invite these people to describe their work to children. The chief librarian, for example might explain how he talks with people and writes letters to ask for donation to buy new books.
3. **Music and Oral Traditions:** Music from any time periods and culture can be integrated into discussion about geography and social studies. Find out what children know about a topic, and then build on that information. In what states or country do children's friends and relatives live? What area have they heard about the news? To what kind of music do they listen? Choose authentic music, family and news from many different styles. Select some games, and finger plays that promote the value of understanding and helping others. Learn the words to songs in several languages, including singing.
4. **Authentic Literature:** Books can greatly enhance children's knowledge of others. Look for accurate, balanced and portrayals of diverse people. Limit the number of books that deal only with holiday or often a tourist approach – make sure children gain a more realistic perspective of daily life. Choose children's book that portray children and adult engaging in friendly peaceful behaviors. Extend children literature experience providing hand on activities that enable them to gain fuller understanding of the situation portrayed.
5. **Visual Arts:** Art experience that relate to taking care of the earth or that come from different cultures and promote children's social responsibility and their understanding of others perspective. Show children painting and weaving, for example and talk with them about the pieces. Provide children with the necessary materials and tools and demonstrate new techniques. Then encourage them to represent their own ideas and concepts.
6. **Natural Science:** Science activities concerning recycling, reforestation and taking care of sea animals and ocean could be included as children discover the process of erosion, decomposition of waste and animal life. Or follow up on children's understanding about human similarities and differences in skin color, hair texture and teeth.
7. **Number Concept:** Math could incorporate studies of the classroom population such as helping children create graphics of classmate's food preferences, or other characteristics. Prepare ethnic foods using favorite recipes provided by families in the program. Children make a shopping list for measure, money and many other concepts could be explored.

Teachers have daily opportunities to increase children's abilities to communicate, respect each other, resolve conflict and accept social responsibility – skills they will carry into adulthood, inclusion of peace – making skills in the curriculum is important as learning to read and write.

Conclusions

Teaching peace concepts to children brings about an enduring culture of peace in the society. The teacher can do this by creating a peaceful classroom environment and teaching

children conflict resolution and social responsibility for themselves, others and the world as well as integrating peace concepts in the curriculum. In other words, the environment and curriculum can be shaped in ways that enable children to learn positive concepts about how people can live in harmony.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made:

1. Parents and Teachers and other significant figures should learn to live in peace and harmony to serve as model to children.
2. Steps in conflict resolution should be studied and understood by adults in order to help them inculcate the practice in children.
3. Teachers should learn to integrate peace concepts in their daily teaching experience with children to help them understand the importance of living in peace and harmony with each other.

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