

Positive effects of peer relationships in middle childhood with or without disabilities

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Abstract

The manuscript was a study on positive effects of peer relationship in middle childhood. It was conducted at Shitali basic school in Chilubi Island in Zambia. The positive effects discovered through this study were the development of social skills, intimacy relationship, sense of belonging, motivation, leadership, cooperation, learning different roles of life, learn rules and obey them, develop language and communication skill, physical development, being competitive, develop self-concept, self-identity and self-esteem, they compare themselves with others, opening up new perspective in life and cognitive development.

Keywords: Peer, relationship, middle childhood, Children and Development

1. Introduction

Positive effects are constructive changes produced by action of relationships those effects which are even observed later in life. Peer means equal (Papalia *et al.* 1998). Relationships are experiences of good rapport. According to Joyce (1991) ^[2] relationships are defined as similarities connecting persons. Middle age is the age between middle childhood and adolescence with age ranging from 6 to 12 years. Middle childhood is period a peer assumes central importance among other things such as physical, cognitive and psychological. Children at this period develop completely in all realms of life.

2. Discussion of Findings

Positive effects of peer groups and relationships

Peer groups are formed naturally among children who live near one another usually close in age, as boys or girls. The group can be either of the opposite sex or same sex for those having common interest (Papalia *et al.* 1998). Peer relationships or peer experiences of good rapport have several developmental effects or positive effects as follows as reported by respondents.

Peer relationship brings about the development of social skills. For instance; the child learn to relate well with others, show interest in others, children are affectionate to others through giving them companionships, they are friendly which is expressed through hugging, playing games together and sharing of things such as food, toys and clothes. Children interact with others, develop relationships with family, friends, and teachers, they cooperate, and respond to the feelings of others. Researchers view was that, if the social skill is developed during the middle age it becomes a strong foundation for the future in which these children will find themselves relating well with others in communities and their places of work.

Another positive effect is that it brings about the development of intimacy relationships such as being empathetic (Joyce, 1991) ^[2]. As narrated by respondents that, children learn to put themselves in their friends' position in good and bad times. They learn to form close relationships promote or enhance it. For example, a child was seen doing something that holds good relationship and increase the quality of relationship such

as sharing food or staying with a friend in difficult times and giving of shoes, clothes to others who had no shoes or few clothes. It was also reported that, children learn that being a friend is a way to have a friend. The researchers supported this finding because this kind of intimacy is helpful and leads to true and health friendship.

The respondents also stated that, peer relationship help children gain the sense of belonging. This is where children learn to feel to be part of the group. The researchers understanding was that this feeling of being part of the group can later help them feel to be part of their families, school, communities and society at large.

It was also narrated that, peer relationship bring about motivation (David, 1995) ^[1]. For instance, the respondents reported that, as children were playing the game of winners and losers which is locally called "icidunu" they only stopped this game after achieving their goal of having one group being a winner and the other one a loser according to the number of points set by themselves. This is a game where one group will hide in different places and the other group had to find all of them within the time they have agreed upon. The researchers' view was that through games such as this children feel motivated to be with others.

The other effect of peer relationship is leadership (David, 1995) ^[1]. The children were observed choosing a leader among themselves when playing. They were also giving turns to each other to be leaders let say for a particular situation or day. They were seen being well-organized, doing backward planning, were visionary with a holistic view, were problem finders and able to see problems from multiple perspectives and able to adapt to new situations. They were able to manipulate systems, highly responsible and were counted on by their friends. They were able to focus on-task or were focused. They were self-confident and persuasive communicators. They had a cooperative attitude and worked well in groups. They were observed participating in most social activities and enjoying being around with other people. They influenced the behavior of others and were recognized as a leader by peers and they were respected and liked by others. They were seen to be able to be aware of verbal and nonverbal cues and the sophisticated interpersonal skills. They were

emotionally stable and were willing to take risks for the group. (Davis & Rimm, 1994). The researchers understanding was that, this finding of developing leadership skill among children of the middle age through peer relationship is of great value and need to be supported at all cost.

Another effect of peer relationships was that, children learn to co-operate. Children were seen work together as reported by respondents. For example, children were seen taking turns when digging in the garden and when they were killed the rat, they were seen dug the rat up until they located it and killed it. The searchers were in support of the finding because cooperation is an important which need to be developed early in one's life and use is later for the good of oneself and society.

The other effect of peer relationships to children of the middle age is that they learn to play different roles (Joyce, 1991) [2]. Children were observed playing different roles. For instance the researcher observed them playing the game of fantasy and they gave each other the role or gave each other the chance to choose which role to occupy such as being a mother, father, child, grandmother, grandfather, singer, driver, dancer, nurse, teacher, pastor, dog, cock, lion and they were seen behaving accordingly. The researchers understanding was that knowing the roles to play early in life may leads to overcoming the role conflict which come about as a result of not knowing once role either at home, community, places of work or in society.

Additionally, the effect of peer relationship is that children learn rules and obey them. For instance respondents narrated that, when children are playing the game of touch they do set up their rules. For example, if the child loses, he or she has to be beaten and others will only stop beating him or her when the child touches an object such as a doorframe, chair, a shirt and the like. The researchers were of the view that when children learn these simple rules and abide by them, it becomes easy to understand other rules set up in the families, schools, communities, country and at international level in their life.

The other effect of peer relationship which was reported by respondents was the learning of the language and communication skill. These are skills of passing messages to others. Communication is the exchange of information and ideas. It involves sending, transmitting and receiving, encoding and decoding messages. It is an interactive process requiring at least two parties, each playing the dual roles of sender and receiver. Three elements are needed to qualify a communication: a sender, receiver and message. Language is a common system used by a group of people for giving meaning to sounds, words, gestures, and other symbols to enable communication with one another. Lahey (1988) defines language as a "*code whereby ideas about the world are expressed through a conventional system of arbitrary signals for communication*". Human language is unique in being a symbolic communication system that is learned instead of biologically inherited. In terms of language the children were observed learning the skill of speaking, using body language and gestures, communicating, and understanding what others were saying. Quality of communication among these peers were observed by respondents and this was done through touch, eye contact, tone of the voice, expressions of feeling which helped them greatly. The researchers' point of view was that, learning of language and communication skills leads to language and communication skill development which may

overcome language and communication disorder.

The respondents stated that, as children play together the effect of peer relationship was that, they do develop physically. For instance, children were seen playing football or netball together and other physical games together. As they were running around while doing the physical games the effect was physical development. The researchers supported this finding because the physical activity may have led to the development of gross motor skills and these are large groups of muscles used for sitting, standing, walking, running, keeping balance, and changing positions. Physical activities could have also contributed to the development of children's fine motor skills such as having the ability of using hands for eating, drawing, dressing, playing, writing, and do many other fine motor skills.

The other response was that, children benefit from peer relationship with the skills such as being non-competitive as well as competitive. For instance the children were observed expressing happiness when others not of his or her group won the game as a non-competitive skill. Children were also reported using the following phrases such as "this is just a game I am happy you have won". Then children were also observed by researchers having stiff completion among themselves during the following activities such as debating, dancing competitions, singing competitions, reading competitions and whoever won was awarded something and in this way they developed competitive skill necessary for their survival in life. The researchers' view was that, the two skills of are necessary for human and if only used in the positive way.

Another response was that, children do develop self-concept, self-esteem and self-identity through peer relationship. Self-concept, self-esteem and self-identity do help children learn the total picture about themselves in terms of their abilities, traits such as being good at playing football, being a good speaker, being a thief, being a fighter. For instance in terms of self-esteem children learn to feel worth for example by eight years of age the child is able to say I am good towards others, I have self-confidence and I can dance, the child is also willing to explore or is curious. The researchers' point of view was that, self-awareness is necessary in order for children to be responsible in all that happens in their lives without blaming others as early as possible in their life. It is also necessary in order for children to stand firm and have self-direction in their life's situations whether bad or good.

Another benefit of peer relationship was cognitive development as discovered by respondents. For instance children were seen playing the game of chess together and the likelihood was the development of the thinking skills which includes learning, understanding, problem-solving, reasoning, and remembering. The researchers were in support of this discovery because it brings about the development of the skill necessary for their academic work.

The other benefit of peer relationship was reported that children compare themselves with others and obtain more realistic gauge of their abilities with others. For example children were observed to have benefited from variety of activities with peers. For instance when children were playing together they were accorded the chance to test values they previously accepted without questioning against those values which their fellow peers have which helped them decide and keep some values which others discarded. Children also learnt

on how to get along in society for example on how to adjust their needs to those of others, when to stand firm and when to be flexible. The researchers view was that, when children compare themselves with others in order to obtain more realistic gauge of their abilities with others, it helps the children to develop their abilities to the maximum capacity.

The respondents finally said that, peer relationship open new perspectives to children. The examples given were as follows: for instance children move away from parental influence and are at their best when they are with friends, they have a comprehensive picture as they compared the way they relate in their family and the way people relate within a wider society. The children feel free and relate warmly and sensitively to others. They regard themselves as valued and useful members of the peer group. They learn to trust, care and love others in a group. Children experience being with others in a mutually and enriching way such that it enhances the quality of once own life and quality of life those around him or her. Children learn that others are nice, can look after them, can provide fun and happiness. Children are able to study other people's feelings. They can receive encouragement, mix freely with others, feel accepted and learn to be at ease with other people, children also learn to praise others at the same time preserve their personality and independence. The researchers' point of view was that, the new perspective being opened resulting from peer relationship was necessary for the best development of children in terms of having the positive view about society.

3. Conclusion

Based on the discussion of this study it has been discovered that, peer relationships are very vital and cannot be overemphasized. it has a lot of positive effects on children in all realms of life and have developmental role or functions in helping children such as having social skills, it gives them sense of belonging and foster self-concept, they develop physically, cognitively, emotionally, intimately, they obtain leadership skills, they learn to cooperate and different roles of life, they learn rules and obey them, they develop language and learn how to communicate, they learn when to be competitive and not to be competitive, they compare themselves with others, they open up to new perspective of life and are motivated through contacts with other peers.

4. References

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