EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Editors
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EXPOSING NIGERIAN CHILDREN TO PEACE EDUCATION THROUGH CULTURE AND THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM

Odinko, Monica N. & Okoli, Bibian I.

Introduction

This paper focused on the concepts 'Peace' and 'peace education' and how these could be inculcated in Nigerian children through the School (curricular) and the home (culture). Further, the writers suggest that those working/living with children in any environment should protect and project peace as well as advocate for quality all round development of the child. Theorists suggested objectives/aims that the Nigerian policy makers and other stakeholders could have in mind for introducing such peace education during the early years as well as the expected behavior changes were also outlined.

The paper is divided into three sections namely;

- The concept Peace;
- Peace Education
- Role of the School (curriculum) and home (culture) in inculcating peace in Nigerian preschooler
- Expected aims and curricular outcomes of such education.

The Concept Peace

The word peace in the English language is derived from the Latin word 'Pax' which means cessation in fighting. The Oxford English dictionary (Oxford University Press, 2010) defines Peace as a situation in which there is no war between countries, within a

country or among peoples. Peace could also be defined from the angle of what it is not, rather than what it is. For instance, one can introduce this concept to Nigerian children using the activities of the "militants" in the Niger Delta region as well as the "Boko Haram" insurgents in the Northern part of the country. And buttressing ones point with the emotional, economic and social effects they have on Nigerian citizens in general. Bretherlon (2006) however, argued that if children are introduced to this concept from the negative perspective, a child might have a negative graphic representation of peace by first drawing a weapon of war such as bows and arrows, sophisticated guns, rockets or bombs, and the placing of a cross over it. According to her, the disadvantage of this approach is that it might lead to militaristic tendencies, the glorification of heroic conquests and use of images or de-humanizing stereotypes among children.

However, peace advocates and researchers such as Galtung (1996) pointed to the need for a positive definition that describes peace in terms of such conditions that could hold when a peaceful state is maintained and promoted. According to him, to draw out this concept of peace from children, the teacher might ask them to think of and share a moment of peace. The images of peace that flashes in their minds from such reflections and actions taken while sharing the moment of peace, could include, people shaking hands and embracing each other in love, people meeting and undertaking social activities together in their natural environment, family get together, as well as friends from other families going for a picnic and sharing food and snacks together. Thus, such reflections would exclude any form of militancy but instead show love, equality, and sense of being wanted by people living in a community of peace. Peace keeping initiatives by the United Nations gives a living example of idea of imbibing the Peace culture. Since culture consist of concepts, values and assumptions about life that guides behaviour of people with diverse differences, introducing peace concepts within a cultural setting could create a space of imbibing such culture from the very beginning. The assimilation or integration of this concept by Nigerian children during their early

years could depend on the way both the home and school settings expose their young ones to it.

Peace Education

Education is the process by which ones' mind develops through learning at home, school or at work. The knowledge and skills that are gained from such exposures are therefore used to shape the learner's behaviour as well as prepare the child for survival in that given society. Peace education is the process of acquiring the values, the knowledge and developing the attitudes, skills, and behaviors to live in harmony with oneself, with others, and with the natural environment. Harris and Synott (2002) have described peace education as a series of "teaching encounters" that draw from people: their desire for peace, nonviolent alternatives for managing conflict, and skills for critical analysis of structural arrangements that produce and legitimize injustice and inequality. James (2008) suggests peace education be thought of as "encouraging a commitment to peace as a settled disposition and enhancing the confidence of the individual as an individual agent of peace; as informing the learner on the consequences of war and social injustice; as informing the student on the value of peaceful and just social structures and working to uphold or develop such social structures; as encouraging the child to love the world and to imagine a peaceful future; and as caring for the learner and encouraging the student to care for others. He thus, suggests that a rationale for peace education might be located in virtue ethics, consequentiality ethics, conservative political ethics, aesthetic ethics and the ethics of care.

Further, Peace education according to Danesh, (2008) must focus on the political processes associated with conflict and on the healthy development and maturation of human consciousness through assisting people to examine and transform their worldviews. He defined Worldviews as the subconscious lens (acquired through cultural, family, historical, religious and societal influences). The objectives of such exposure should include to; familiarize children from the very beginning with the international covenants and declarations of the United Nations system; train

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them to recognize violations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; and promote tolerance, solidarity, autonomy and self-affirmation at the individual and collective levels (Brabeck, (2001). To encourage active participation in governance and social awareness creation, the curriculum should be structured to inculcate the skills of critical thinking, debate and coalition-building, and promote the values of freedom of speech, individuality, tolerance of diversity, compromise and conscientious objection. It should aim at producing responsible citizens who will hold their governments accountable to the standards of peace, primarily through adversarial processes (U.S. Department of State Bureau of International Information Programs, 2003).

There are numerous declarations by the United Nations on the importance of peace education. They include; Declaration of Principles on Tolerance, Articles 1 and 4.; Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace, Articles 1/4 and B/9; A World Fit for Children, Articles 5 and 20; Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 29.1(d) among others (James, 2008). Reardon (1997) and Roche (1993) reiterated the importance of peace education and saw it as a right and not a privilege. Peace education thus should aim at cultivating in children those attitudes that could help them develop the capacity for peaceful co-existence. Such attitudes includes; to imbibe in the Nigeria children the culture of peace from their early years, promote appreciation of one another irrespective of the differences existing, ensure a continued close harmony between what a child is taught at home and that of the school, stop the continuation of revenge wherever it appears, develop a close, effective, mutual understanding of religious teachings and cultural differences among children from the very beginning, and help the individual learner grow beyond self-centeredness, among others.

Peace education could be introduced as a separate subject, or spread across the curriculum (in social studies, Christian Religious Knowledge, Islamic studies, literary studies, among others.) or be a whole-school way of life. The curricular content should not focus only on the content of the concept but also should aim at inculcating positive behavior changes that must reflect in

behaviour tendencies. Therefore, the expected learning outcomes should include; Nigerian children's ability to exhibit awareness of peace culture, be aware of the importance of peace in the development of confidence, self-esteem and a sense of security, have the ability to form positive relationship with other children and adults from different religious inclination as well as cultural backgrounds, become aware of and respect the culture of others in their behaviours and learn to follow rules, exhibit behaviours that show that they can play co-operatively, take turns and accommodate and respect other people's cultures, feelings and ideas.

To achieve these expected learning outcomes, the teaching methodology should be involving, active and participatory in nature. Thus, instructional delivery should not be through the use of texts only but should incorporate stories of real life war and peace activities, interactions that are participatory in nature – such as use of role plays, games and collaborative learning group activities. Group activities according to Bretherton (2004) provide opportunities for children to learn about negotiation, cooperation and collective responsibility. Encouraging children to participate actively through role-playing, questioning and answer sessions could help sharpen their analytical powers and thus deepen their understanding of the concept. Reflective discussions during these activities (between the teacher and the children) could widen their understanding and provide better meaning of the concept. For instance, the teacher should encourage the children to participate through role-playing, explore different viewpoints through role-reversals, challenge the children to initiate and create different endings, or ask thought provoking (high level) questions about the feelings of different characters in the play. It is usually during such interactions that the teacher evaluates the extent to which the learners have understood the concept and how much the set out objectives have been achieved. Be that as it may, the teacher in trying to encourage active participation among the children, should be able to manage the emotional climate of the learners. This is because learning tends to occur more in the atmosphere of trust and recognition of every child within that learning environment as an

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individual. Peace of course is most time about relationship between or among people. If children are to imbibe this culture, therefore, teachers as well as adults in any given child's community need to exhibit positive relationships and endeavour to deal with differences and conflicts in non violent ways.

The roles of the home and school in conditioning the peace culture in Nigerian children

The home is the first place a child receives any form of education. This is because parents as well as significant others (e.g. siblings, aunts, uncles, grandparents, elders in the neighbourhood, etc) in any given Nigerian home devote considerable amount of time and energy transmitting the society's cultural heritage to its younger generation. It is thus, this inter-generational transmission of cultural heritage that forms the first type of education a child is exposed to. Culture and education according to Obanya, (2004) are thus indistinguishable, as the primary definition of education is acculturation- transmission of cultural heritage from one generation to another. Culture as well as education (school curriculum), are all made up of concepts, values, expected patterned way of thinking, feeling, reacting, and assumptions about life that guide people's behaviours that are widely shared by people. All these are transmitted from generation to generation (be it at home or at school) rarely with explicit instructions by parents or teachers.

Going by these definitions, the culture of peace could be acquired by Nigerian children. This is the natural way by which people learn other behaviours that are regarded as right or wrong in the society. If "peace education" is learned the natural way, it could become automatically internalized and as such could be conditioned to become part of the peoples' values and beliefs. Fortunately, from the psychological point of view, conditioning occurs mostly during the early years of life. It is during this stage in life that basic behaviours expected for survival are learned whereas adults continued to be conditioned as they acquire new *behaviours throughout life. However, one important fact to* acknowledge as a major advantage of early years conditioning is

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that once a behaviour is internalized or conditioned, it takes longer time to unlearn such behaviour. Therefore, exposing Nigeria children during their early years to such good culture-"peace", both at home and at school could go a long way to eradicating violence, hatred and anger from the minds of Nigerian children. This type of education is needed in our country considering the fact that Nigeria as nation, is characterized a great deal by ethnic heterogeneity, despite the implicit claims of homogeneity of culture and identity.

Introducing such education at home and in the school, could also help create awareness of this diversity and therefore prepare the minds of our children to appreciate what other people belief in. Nevertheless, Nigerian traditional education system has a way of maintaining cultural homogeneity. These methods, which have worked for us from the beginning of our existence, could be used to introduce this concept. The school, through which our children are educated using a unified curriculum could also foster this culture. For instance Coulby (1977) cited in Bush and Saltarelli (2000) highlights some of the ways in which formal education has been used in maintaining cultural homogenization. This includes the passing into law the use of a common national language.

Considering this opinion, the school could contribute immensely to this process of nurturing peace in our preschoolers by constructing and introducing common topics in the curriculum/curricular in a given subject (e.g. social studies) or built in across some subjects (Christian Religious studies, Islamic Religious studies, etc) as subtopics. Further, care must be taken to itemize the expected learning outcomes. For instance the curriculum content should aim at brining about citizens who can tolerate and have respect for individual differences and resort to discussion and negotiation than violence, should conflicts arise. This can go a long way in reducing ethnic or religious intolerance, militancy, fear and rejection of Nigerian people in any parts of the country they find themselves.

The curriculum/curricular should help children and young people see the effects which not living in peace could have on their families, themselves, their communities and the nation in general.

The contents and process of peace education according to Bush and Saltarelli (2000) should therefore promote peace, social justice, respect for human rights and acceptance of responsibility. To them, children need to learn the skills of negotiation, problem solving, critical thinking and communication that will enable them to resolve conflicts without resorting to violence. They further emphasized that the education systems should be encouraged to include instruction about the false ideas or beliefs and great dangers of unreasonable dislike of people who are from different ethnic group, religious or language backgrounds. It is therefore the duty of the curriculum and culture to eradicate these notions from the Nigerian children at the very beginning and inculcate in them the tendencies to be at alert so as not to engage in such act.

Ways through which process of peace Education could be conditioned

Education begins at home and continues there and in a range of other settings e.g. school. Therefore, educating children in their early years could require the school working in collaboration with the home. To foster continuity, early years experiences should build on what children already know and believe in through culture (home). Effective education requires both a relevant curriculum and practitioners who understand and are able to implement the curriculum requirements. To achieve this, the preschool environment should be well planned and organized to enable children have rich and stimulating experiences. It should provide the structure for teaching that would enable children to participate actively and interact maximally with both adults and materials. For instance, in the home environment, traditional ceremonies, stories, rites and customs as well as contemporary electronic communicable gadgets could be seen as potential avenues of educating our children about peace.

Peace education could be introduced to children through practical and spontaneous activities, such as play, imitation, repetition, observation, demonstration, explanation and reinforcements; among others. Play is considered as one of the most effective ways of teaching or helping children to learn. Play

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is the characteristic activity of childhood. Watching children at play tells one of the reason why it is regarded as a powerful learning medium during the early years. During play, children are always engrossed in what they are doing, set their own level of challenge and what they do is usually developmentally appropriate to a reasonable extent. Play can help develop children's receptive and expressive language, as well as their skills at joint planning, negotiation, problem-solving, and goal seeking (Bergen, 2001).

Teachers should, therefore, provide pupils with an environment where they can play with each other using a variety of materials designed to facilitate their learning and development. In some cases teachers can usefully join in children's play in order to extend it. For instance, teachers (school teachers, significant adults a home) can introduce this concept or idea of living in peace to the children through stories, instruction, pictures and video clips. Situations could be created to encourage children act them. The teacher can actually exhibit such expected behaviours through acting and modeling living in peace with neighbours, colleagues, within the family and others within their immediate environments. As a result, conscious efforts must be made by adults not to display negative behaviuors (in their actions and choice of words) whenever they are at logger heads with one another. This is because children would always watch and imitate such actions. The teacher needs to make sure that all children take part in such activities.

Drama and short plays are another way of allowing children to take part in an activity they enjoy which has strong educational benefits, especially in developing their talk and language skills. The fact that drama activities allow children to engage in talk that is different from what they do day-to-day will also help develop their thinking more widely (Hendy and Toon, 2001). Small group or class discussion is another method that has been proposed for early years' education. One way to do this is for teachers to introduce an idea or topic, and then allow the children to give all the possible answers, ideas and relevant words they can come up with. All children should be encouraged to participate and should be made to listen to others.

In homes, appropriate behaviours expected of children to exhibit are taught formally or informally during preschool years. Formally in the sense that parents and significant others instil in the Nigeria Child code of conducts peculiar with every geographical setting. This includes mode of greeting, respect for adults, respect for family and communal living as well as conforming to the laws of the land. The informal nature of home *education stems from the fact that there are no set out rules,* regulations or format to follow while educating the young ones. Further, all these inductions into the ways of life of the people tend to arise by impulse, response to suggestion from others or reacting to an improper behaviour observed.

Peaceful behaviours should be exhibited during ceremonies and should always be demonstrated by adults under the watchful eyes of the children. Children should then be encouraged to observe as well as imitate such behaviours. Teaching them songs that reflect peaceful co-existence could be used. For instance, in Ibo communities they have such songs that teach peace, love and the effect of such concepts in communal living. One of such songs run thus:

> Udo , Udo
> Udo , udo ga di
> Ebe ihunanya di
> Ebe ahu ka udo ga adi
>
> Umuaka kwenu udo
> Udo , udo ga di
> Ebe ihunanya di
> Ebe ahu ka udo ga adi

Literally, this means Peace, peace must reign because wherever love exists Peace must exist there. As the children learn the words, sing and dance accordingly, the adult who is teaching them should also reinforce their actions. This will encourage them to extend the actions and practice more even when the adult is not there.

Conclusion

Introducing peace education to children should start from the very beginning at home and continue at school. We believe that peace starts with the individual, parents, significant others, in children's home environments as well as teachers at school. This implies that every one around children should try to live and exhibit the expected behaviours accruing from imbibing peace. This is because children learn by doing, imitation, observation and through play. As a result they will always want to act as well as exhibit any behaviours learned from adults. If the culture of peace is conditioned in children from the very beginning, we are then aiming at bring up citizens who can tolerate one another, have respect for individual differences, and those who would frown at militancy and behaviour that would militate against peace. By so doing, we would jointly make the world a better place to live for all in the twenty-first century and beyond. The mission of World Peace Partnership is to inspire and empower people around the world to be more at peace with themselves, others and the environment. They are creating a global community that is actively working towards peace. We believe that one by one and together we can all make a difference.

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