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PROMOTING POSITIVE PEER RELATIONSHIPS IN THE CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT:

The Classroom is a social setting in which students engage not just in learning but also in interacting with their peers and teachers. Peer relationships clearly constitute a crucial part of the classroom climate and have a direct impact on students' personal development and the quality of teaching and learning. Many skills are mastered through peer relationships. Some of the skills developed are how to make and keep friends, and how to work effectively with others. According to Piaget, "interactions with peers of the same level group, may stimulate the cognitive development" (Snowman & Biehle, 1997). When the students interact with each other,

they not only learn from each other but also generate new knowledge for themselves. Peer relationships are very important for children's both social and academic development. In this paper discussed the peer relationships, benefits, and importance of peer relationships of the classroom and briefly discussed the developing strategies for promoting positive peer relationships.

KEYWORDS: Peer relations, self-acceptance, conflict-resolution skills, Social-emotional skills.

INTRODUCTION

Influence on student learning in an academic environment can be numerous and contradictory. The interactions among peers in the classroom are a normal and essential part of the learning process that influences the lifelong learning habits of students. The potential effects of peer relationships are reciprocal. Some students are more receptive than others. The students who know the values of peer relationship, they can involve them in taking them any decision. In addition, peer relations have particular value

for social and even cognitive development of the student. Through peers, children come to better understand who they are, how they fit into their "Own Skin." The ability to make and keep friends represents a key measurement of social development (Fabes et al., 2008).

PEER RELATIONSHIPS

The Peer is typically age-mates (Bukowski, Motzoi & Meyer, 2009). Most often, peers share a common activity or interest and meet at regularly scheduled intervals to engage in these events. Relationships "defined as aggregations of interactions that endure over time and that form the basis for reciprocal

interpersonal expectations (Hinde, 1997), are thus basic social contexts. No wonder, then those well-functioning relationships have a bearing on mental and physical health, mortality, and well-being. As Children mature from the age two through age twelve, they spend more and more time in the company of peers. In the company of peers, children try on different roles and learn what is acceptable social behavior and what is not (Gest, Graham - Bermann & Hartup, 2001). Throughout this period of development, peers play an increasingly significant role in a child's life. Peer relationships have been associated with normal social development,

whereas peer isolation and rejection have been linked to a host of behavioral problems in children.

Benefits of good Peer Relationships

Many teachers recognize that students can enjoy school life and learn better if they maintain good relationships with their peers as this provides them with friendships and stimulating recreational activities. The researches have shown that the students who have a good relationship with their peers, they are able to establish these are the values.

- Togetherness
- Belongingness
- Self-worth
- Self-acceptance
- Prosocial skills such as cooperation and altruism

Above feelings promote purposeful and responsible behavior and lead to effective learning. In contrast, those who relate poorly to their peers tend to experience more tension, stress, and depression, and they have difficulty in learning, even when teaching is effective and student-centered.

Importance of Peer Relations to Learning

The success of peer relations and group works in classrooms will depend ultimately on the separate informal network of the relationship between peers in the school.

- It helps to bring out the potential of informal context for learning.
- It can be an inherently motivating context for action and learning.
- To provide an opportunity for children to acquire creative skills and refine current ones.
- Children learn quickly from the peers reactions about the importance of regulating their emotions and actions.
- Peers can teach things to one another without self-consciousness and without the total disparity in status that marks the adult-child relationship.
- It offers the children, to the unique opportunities of interacting in a context of relatively balanced equality and power.

EFFECTS OF SCHOOL ON PEER RELATIONSHIP

In many schools, children are grouped based on various criteria. Children are grouped in classrooms primarily on the basis of age and when within classes often according to ability (Baines et al., 2003). School, wide policies and programs that inculcate the importance of student's pro-social development can facilitate the development of positive peer relationships.

School based programs designed in part to promote friendship building skills and social program solving strategies have documented improvements in the quality of elementary – aged students' peer relationships and social interactions (Lavalley, Bierman & Nix, 2005). In this regard, students can be advised a range of friendship-making strategies and other specific peer interaction skills.

DEVELOPING STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING POSITIVE PEER RELATIONSHIPS

Teachers can help to create good peer relationships in the classroom. Here some practical strategies of value to teachers under five headings:

- **Teaching social-emotional skills**

Social – emotional skills including self-awareness, empathy and communication and conflict-resolution skills (Vitto, 2003) are critical factors in learning, work and life success. They enable students to establish and maintain friendships and a sense of belonging: and when students feel accepted and respected, they learn well.

- **Teaching conflict-resolution skills**

It assists the students to resolve conflicts with their peer, over for example, teasing, losing, accusations, being left out and peer pressure.

- **Teaching problem -solving skills**

The goal of Problem solving training is to teach children a thoughtful, deliberate, sequential approach to reaching good solutions for handling problematic social situations.

- **Making students to learn in groups**

Teachers also need monitoring the progress of group activities and to pay attention to what individual students are doing in their groups. In this regard, attention has to be given to five areas before getting students to learn in groups that are Positive Interdependence, Simultaneous interaction, Individual responsibility, Interpersonal and small group learning skills, reflection and planning.

- **Creating a positive classroom climate for peer relationships**

Good peer relationships can be developed as a classroom climate. There are many ways in which teachers can enhance a classroom culture of friendship, belongingness, and cohesiveness.

CONCLUSION

Aspects of children's development such as communication skills, helping behavior, play and conflict resolution, are important dimensions of peer relationships. Worryingly, the given importance of peer interaction, in recent educational policies has been unhelpful in fostering peer relationships because the increasingly crowded curriculum has led to a reduction in the time given during the breaks in the school hours. But Peer relationship skills might be especially important for adjustment in schools, where peer cultures are particularly strong or where collaborative and cooperative learning is emphasized.

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