

Running Head: Owing Peace

Incorporating Peace Education into the School
Curriculum: Building Empathy and Self-Worth while
Taking Ownership over Peace.

Advisor's Signature

Date

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Plan B Paper

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Incorporating Peace Education into the School Curriculum

It is time for education to become pro-active in the support of teaching peace. In education, we claim that we want to create the best students that we can; administrators strive to earn the status of being the top school; educational systems review and implement the highest standards and appear to have the goal of developing the greatest test-takers. As an educator striving to educate our future leaders, I am left to ask the question what about educating the whole child?

As a society with single-parent homes, increasing populations of differences and a focus of “plugging in” with technology, it becomes apparent that there is an increased need for our education system to provide the skills to help our children become successful leaders in the future. With research on peace studies happening all over the world, one study conducted in India calls for the understanding that... “there is a strong argument for community engagement to be an integral component of education and for schooling to lay the groundwork for future social action and responsibility” (Bajaj, 2010, p. 49).

Children should be provided with appropriate vocabulary, opportunities for practice and endless possibilities that will allow them to internalize and apply those skills needed to support peaceful problem-solving in the future.

Mindfulness of the Teacher

While beginning this qualitative study on Peace Education, a reflective question began to surface: Will an educator be able to properly implement peace into their curriculum if he or she does not feel peace from within? As I continued forward with my research and plan, I was able to see a transformation of my thoughts and ideas as related to peace education with the students as well as with myself. I started to practice some of these ideas related to mindfulness and stress relief as well as letting go of toxic ideas of which I had no control. Through personal observations of my classroom as well as outside observations conducted by my supervisor, our qualitative conclusions showed a positive difference in my approach to managing stressors related to the teaching profession, and an impact on my classroom environment.

Evidence indicates that mindfulness, a way of balancing attention and awareness in the present moment without emotional reaction or conceptual judgment, is active in helping adults reduce stress, regulate emotion, and improve their health and well-being (Cullen, Harrison, Jha, , Oberle, Roeser, Schonert-Reichl, Taylor, Thomson, Wallace, & Wilensky, 2013).

The practices of mindfulness-based stress reduction through hatha yoga, meditation and qigong were conducted through a four-year qualitative study of

graduate counseling students. The study linked positive changes to the students' physical, emotional/attitudinal and spiritual states (Christopher, Christopher, & Schure, 2008).

Individuals attending to mindfulness are taught how to cultivate an attitude of kindness and compassion towards themselves, and in turn can metacognitively solve difficulties that occur on the job more effectively.

Building Empathy and Self Worth

Students need to have the understanding and connections to feeling good internally in order to identify those feelings with others and to support solving a conflict. This needs to start by building self-worth and identifying and focusing on the positive. "Efforts to promote students' self-worth must be embedded within the culture of the school and its mode of curriculum delivery because it is the balance of the interactions between the individual and his or her environment that enhances the growth and development of self-worth" (Cushman, Penni and Cowan, Jackie, 2010). This can be done first by creating a positive environment where safety is ensured: "My body is safe, my feelings are safe, my thoughts, ideas, and words are safe, and my work is safe" (Groulx, Hansen, Lamm, Patton, Martin, & Slaton, 2006). Help children to look at each

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other and understand the connections between facial expressions and feelings then move into scenarios and feelings.

In his article, *Replacing time outs: part one-using guidance to build an encouraging classroom*, Daniel Gartrell (2001) focuses on the necessity of teaching democratic life skills. As teachers, we often overestimate that socially students will know how to problem solve and handle certain situations when in fact that many have never been taught or been involved in experiences that would scaffold these skills. It is important to support teaching and understanding differences and to find new ways of teaching a diverse population of students throughout each day.

Buzzelli and Jafar-Al found through their article on *The Art of Storytelling for Cross Cultural Understanding*, that using creative ways in connecting students cross-culturally can make an empowering impact. Students were given photos of the tale of Cinderella from a number of different cultures. The purpose was to demonstrate to children how different cultures have similar tales and that we can use the tales to learn about the world.

“...I also said that by understanding different versions of the tale we can address why there are misunderstandings in the world.”

The student replied, “You mean we can use Cinderella as a peace maker” (2008, p40)?

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They found that by connecting different versions of the same tale from around the world to children, they were providing a catalyst for understanding and appreciating similarities and differences between cultures.

Peaceful Language and Modeling

Creating a safe, peaceful environment is step one in supporting education for peace. The next steps are to provide children with modeling, vocabulary, and experiences that support a peaceful pedagogy. Anita Vestal and Nancy Aaron Jones explain in their article, *Peace Building and Conflict Resolution in Preschool Children*, Adults and children alike, if they are caught in a cycle of violence they begin to expect it and accept it. “When a child feels victimized by his or her environment or feels that the environment instigates aggression, the child is likely to act out aggressively” (2001, p.132).

Linda Kavelin Popov (2000) psychotherapist and author of, *The Virtues Project*, experienced this firsthand. She was a parent who had children attending an “open classroom” school in South Carolina. The school was a “new experiment” and she watched in horror as the children misbehaved; the teacher had little control. The students who were well-behaved were being “bull-dozed” by the ones who weren’t, as well as learning negative life lessons. Linda decided she wanted to help. She started with a small group of children, the ones who misbehaved the most. She started small, praising and teaching the “good”

behavior whenever she saw a small glimpse of the behavior she was looking for. She spent time defining virtuous vocabulary and acting out the associated behaviors. The children responded, practiced and their behavior transformed as they learned the many ways to “be good”.

Daniel Gartrell (2001) agrees with this approach claiming that teachers must focus on teaching and modeling the expected behavior; the teacher must be the “guided professional” using language that supports the process of thinking through the behavior, encouraging self-worth and supporting student problem solving.

Independence and Ownership

As children gain experience in understanding each other and the positive impact they can have on one another, it is important to think about the life-long process. How can we build this into their character to carry on into the future? The children must be given opportunities for practice to use the model and vocabulary, to give feedback and the support to carry on this process independently. In the article, *Creating Environments for Peaceful Problem-Solving*, the authors call for setting up a peace table or area where students can go to work out their problems (Groulx et al.2006).

The article lists many materials to have in this area: calming music, puppets to help act out the problem, silly putty or play dough (any sensorial calming

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items), mirrors, facial expression cards, or feelings posters (Groulx et al., 2006). The summary of this research seems to be positive; authors comment that classroom environments have changed for the better. *Children routinely tell their teachers and parents they are going to go to the peace place to work out a problem.* The result is that peace keeping is no longer the responsibility of the adult, it becomes the responsibility of the children and the process can be applied up through adulthood. The researchers explain that it takes time and responsibility on the teacher's part, but when the environment is set, the children will use it (Groulx et al., 2006).

Linda Popov also had a positive experience with her students taking ownership of their behavior. After the students were taught the vocabulary and modeled the behavior, they became the teachers for their classmates. The results clearly show a behavioral change from before and after the implementation of virtue activities (Popov, 2000). Duckworth, Allen and Williams share in their findings that from the evidence of student testimonies, it was clear that giving students the opportunity to educate each other has a lasting impact on internalizing peace education. They express the need for public schools to get on board with educating the "whole child" by making time for education on social issues and peace education, to reach out, educate and use community members and parents (Duckworth, Allen & Williams, 2012).

Conclusion of Literature Review

Peace education is both a philosophy and a process. Frans Kruger calls attention to educators in her article, *The Role TESOL in Educating for Peace*,

“If violence is not genetically coded into human beings, but rather is based on modeled behavior, it follows that through providing a model of peaceful interaction in the classroom, learners can be made aware that a society based on peace, both in terms of the local and the global, is a viable option.” (Kruger, 2012, p. 4)

There is a need to create positive environments in which children of diverse backgrounds can be supported in the development of self-worth and only then can they be supported with experiences that build empathy. Children are impressionable and are exposed to many different environmental factors throughout their lifetime. Modeling behaviors that support the development of self-worth, understanding and problem solving, are necessary for children to recognize positive social interactions. Internalization of these interactions leads to application that will impact learning over a lifetime.

As educators we need to develop a pedagogy that is concerned with non-violence, compassion, love, and reverence for all life. The process needs to empower children with the necessary skills, attitudes and knowledge in order

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to create a safe world and build a sustainable environment. The framework begins with the love of self, building empathy, multicultural awareness and the internalization of conflict resolution. The ultimate goal is to “engage learners with the issues surrounding peace and non-violence, and the creation of a sustainable future” (Kruger, 2012, p27).

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to find out if students are given the proper framework for developing peace, are they able to build empathy and awareness while peacefully supporting one another? The following questions will help guide the study:

- 1.) If children are taught vocabulary that establishes virtues, are they able to positively support one another using this vocabulary?
- 2.) Does implementing a peace program have an effect on student self-worth and building empathy?
- 3.) How does teaching peace education impact the classroom community?

Method

Participants

Participants in this study were first through third grade students at a rural, public Montessori school. There are currently 150 students enrolled at the

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public Montessori including grades 4K-Grade 6. 93.83% are white, 2.47% are Hispanic, 2.47% are African American, and 1% are of Asian background. 20% qualify for free and reduced lunch. There are students with special needs that attend the Montessori, but often by parent choice, they receive support mainly by the classroom teacher. For students that have a formal IEP, support staff comes to the school or the student may qualify to be served at a surrounding school. Currently there are students who are served for speech and ELL support. There were 19 first through third grade students who participated in a peace program implemented by their classroom teacher.

The methodology used was a small-scale qualitative study aimed to find the answer: If students are given the tools to build peaceful vocabulary and self-worth, are the students then able to positively support one another in the classroom? The peace program included developing vocabulary related to peace, teacher-led and student-led discussion based on actions related to the vocabulary, weekly observations by the students, weekly peace meetings and a peace celebration. Using a qualitative approach, data was gathered through observing weekly videos of the peace meetings, student surveys, student interviews, student work and parent testimonies.

Procedure

The program was implemented for 8 months. During those 8 months, student work samples were collected throughout the program. In December students took a survey that was directed to have the students reflect on our peace program. In January students participated in a writing sample related to what peace looks like, feels like and sounds like. In March, during parent teacher conferences, parents were asked the following questions, 1.) Have you noticed any positive changes in your child this school-year related to peaceful behavior at home or at school? 2.) Has your child used any vocabulary relating to peace that may be different than the way you've discussed it at home? 3.) Has your child mentioned anything about your peace meetings or celebrations? 4.) Has your child been excited to participate with any of the events or activities related to peace that has happened or is coming up? 5.) If yes was an answer to any or all of those questions, please describe.

Students were interviewed at the end of the research in April. Students were asked 1.) What did you learn from our peace program? 2.) How do you think we could improve learning our virtues?

Developing Peaceful Vocabulary

Each week students were introduced to new peace vocabulary, using Popov's Book, *The Virtues Project: Educator's Guide (2000)*. The book helped guide

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discussion and allow students to brainstorm real-life situations in which they've experienced the virtue. Refer to Appendix A and B.

Secret Pals

Each week the students drew names out of a basket. The names that they drew would become their secret pals for the week. Each student would observe his/her secret pal all week, hoping to catch his/her pal demonstrating actions related to the virtue of the week. They would record their findings on their secret pal forms and recognize their secret pals at our weekly peace meeting.

Weekly Peace Meetings

Student led weekly meetings were held to review the virtue of the week, recognize secret pals and introduce a new virtue for the next week. Table 1.

Table 1. Weekly Schedule for the Peace Program

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
-Morning meeting reminder of peace virtue.	-Students observe their secret pals.	-Students observe their secret pals.	-Students observe their secret pals.	-Afternoon peace meeting.
-Class discussion on what the virtue looks like in the community.	-Bringing in the virtue throughout the classroom curriculum.	-Bringing in the virtue throughout the classroom curriculum.	-Bringing in the virtue throughout the classroom curriculum.	-Choosing of the next virtue.
-Sharing of student thoughts				
-Choosing secret pals.				

Meeting set-up.

- 1.) Call to Order from the Leaders – The students used a Rain Stick, Drop of Food Coloring in Water or soft music to recognize the beginning of the meeting.
- 2.) Announcement of Past Virtue – The students would review the past virtue of the week and give a brief definition.
- 3.) Recognition of Secret Pals – The leaders would initiate the beginning of recognizing the secret pals by choosing where to start. Each student would get a turn to reveal their secret pal by saying, “This week my secret pal was _____, and I saw them being (insert virtue of the week) by _____. The student would gain a colored bead from the leader and give it to their secret pal to place in our peace jar. The students would receive a bead for each action they observed.
- 4.) Closing the Meeting – The peace leaders would be prepared by having a new virtue for the next week and a prepared short explanation of the virtue.
- 5.) Collection of Virtues – Together, the students pooled their virtues together into our peace jar. As the jar began to fill, the students discussed and voted on a peaceful activity that they wanted to do for the community. The student list included, writing letters to a children’s hospital, visiting the residents in the retirement home, starting a school fundraiser, raising money for countries in need of water, and more. After

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the activity was chosen by the students, the student peace leaders for the week practiced life skills and took ownership over the activity by calling and setting up the appointment (with the support of the teacher).

Summary

The peace program was introduced by the classroom teacher. The teacher started the program as the leader. After a few weeks of developing systems, procedures and coaching of the children, the students took over leadership of the meetings and decisions. The following virtues were the focus of the program (randomly chosen by the teacher and the students) for the first 3 months: Caring, Compassion, Confidence, Creativity, Gentleness, Helpfulness, Kindness, Love, Patience, Respect, Trust and Understanding. As the program progressed, and the students gained understanding of the virtues, the students were encouraged to observe their secret pal for more than just the virtue of the week. The students could observe for any of the virtues that were presented.

Findings and Discussion

The overall consensus of the peace program was positive in nature and evidence demonstrated a cultivation of a more empathetic, thoughtful classroom climate. Students illustrated behaviors related to an increased self-worth, a deeper understanding of peaceful vocabulary and behaviors surrounding a more empathetic nature. The results can be interpreted through

the data collection methods: observation of weekly peace meetings, student interviews, a student survey, parent interviews, and student work.

Results

Question 1: Using Virtuous Vocabulary.

Students positively supported one another during weekly peace meetings. One student shared about his secret pal, “I saw Abby being patient by waiting next to the teacher to ask a question until she was done talking to another student.”

The virtuous vocabulary came out through daily work time and informal observations. During regular classroom work one student noticed that another student had spilled a large bead work for a math lesson. The student walked over and started helping, the other student looked up and said, “Ben, thank you for being so helpful and kind.” Another example of students using peace language outside of the meeting came through on the school playground. A student who had been an observer of the situation came running in and exclaimed, “I saw Sue being compassionate by helping another student from a different class after he fell on the black top!”

When asked the survey question: *What do you like about learning the virtues and our peace meetings?* Three central themes emerged (See Table 2). Student responses were built around the act of having a secret pal, celebrating the

virtues and our weekly peace meetings. Students shared that they enjoyed being nice to others, and hearing and saying kind words about one another. Students were able to positively support one another using virtuous vocabulary and their responses illustrate the value in using the vocabulary.

Table 2. Examining Survey Themes

What do you like about learning virtues and our peace meetings?		
Themes	Number of Students	Grade Level
Having Secret Pals	6	-3 First Grade Responses -2 Second Grade Responses -1 Third Grade Response
Celebrating Virtues	8	-4 First Grade Responses -1 Second Grade Response -3 Third Grade Responses
The act of Peace Meetings	6	-3 First Grade Responses -1 Second Grade Response -2 Third Grade Responses

Question 2: Student Self Worth and Empathy Building.

Creating empathy begins by having an internal self-worth; students need to have the understanding and connections of feelings in order to identify the position within others and to support solving a conflict. Helping students to define those characteristics and guide them in looking for positives within each

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other has made a positive impact. The survey question was asked to students in the program, *why are virtues important?*

Student Responses:

- They help you learn
- To help you be nice and loving
- To make new friends
- I like when we talk about them
- To create more things, make more friends and to know that you can trust your friends.

Learning the virtues, identifying the acts within others and providing time to listen to one another aided in the development of student self-worth in the classroom as well has helped to build empathy for one another. Discussions lent themselves to questioning and understanding differences. Taken from an informal observation, there was one child in the classroom that needed extra support staying on task, voice reminders and special cues. An adult from outside the school came in to observe the Montessori classroom work time. The adult attempted to ask the child who needed extra support a question. He did not respond, turned and made a noise. The adult looked baffled and sat down in the observation chair. Another student responded, “Ari learns differently sometimes and that’s okay. Here’s how we help him...” with that, the child showed the adult the cards the students used to help guide Ari.

Question 3: Impact on the Community.

Teaching peace education in the classroom has a large, positive impact on the larger community. The Montessori curriculum naturally supports this through the interconnectedness of subject areas, historical significance, appreciation of nature and the reverence for all life. Peace education should be taught in a way that weaves itself in an out of the curriculum and everyday classroom life.

Bringing in vocabulary through the work of the students, lessons and actions modeled in the classroom. Based on student work, surveys and discussion, the peace program has impacted the way students think and feel about peace. In a survey, 19 students rated the virtues they had learned up to that point, based on importance. See Figure 1.

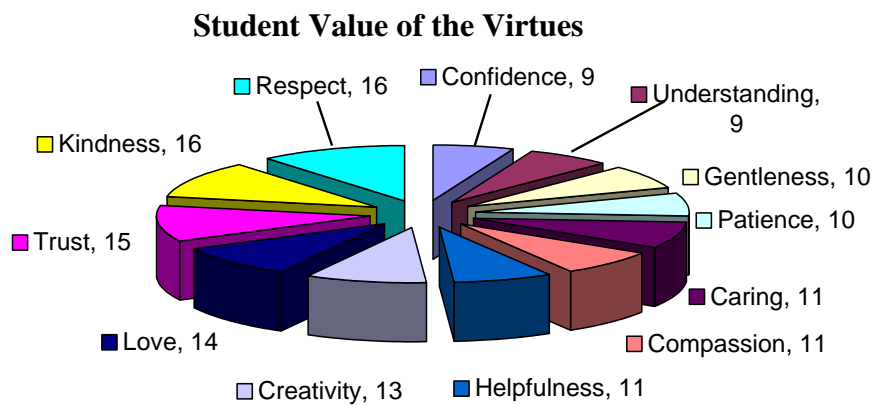


Figure 1: Student Value of the Virtues

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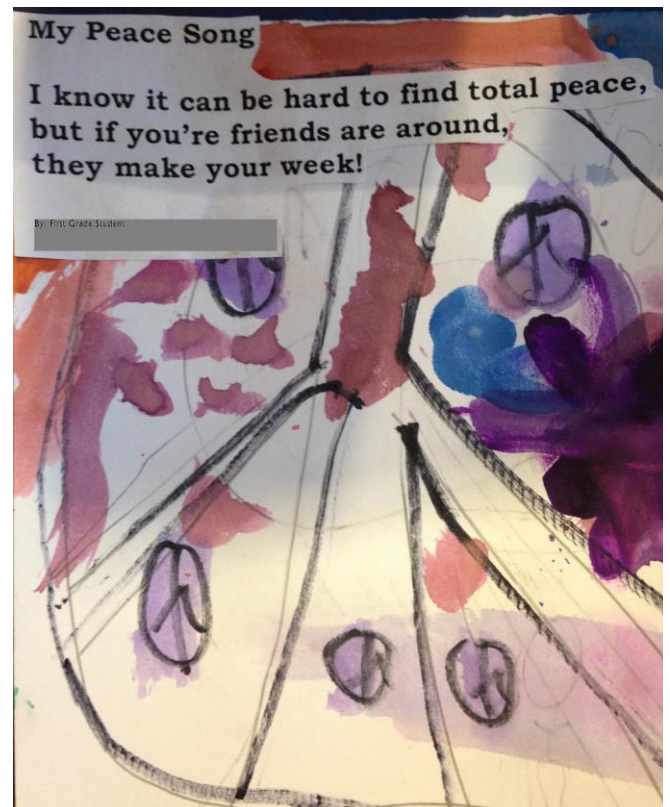
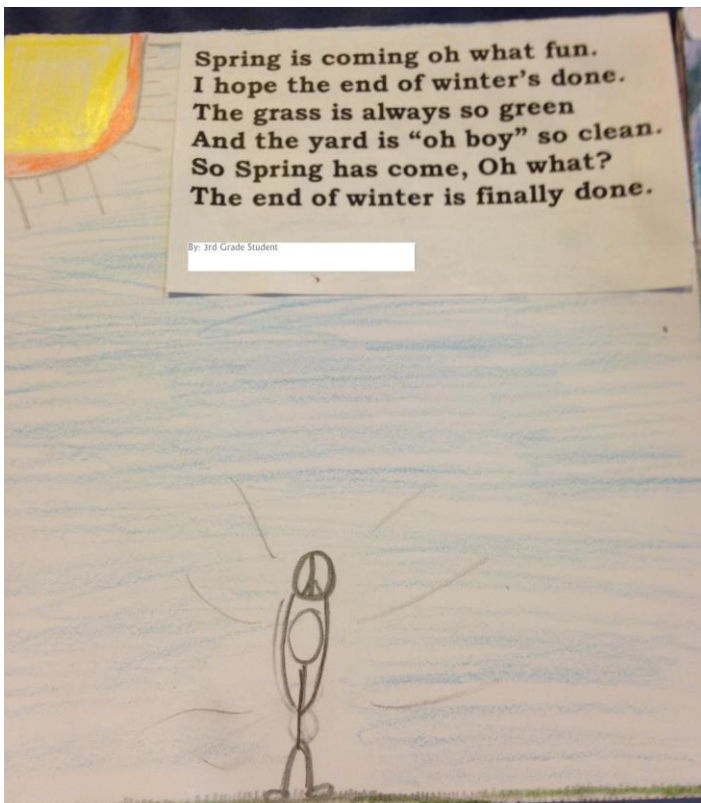
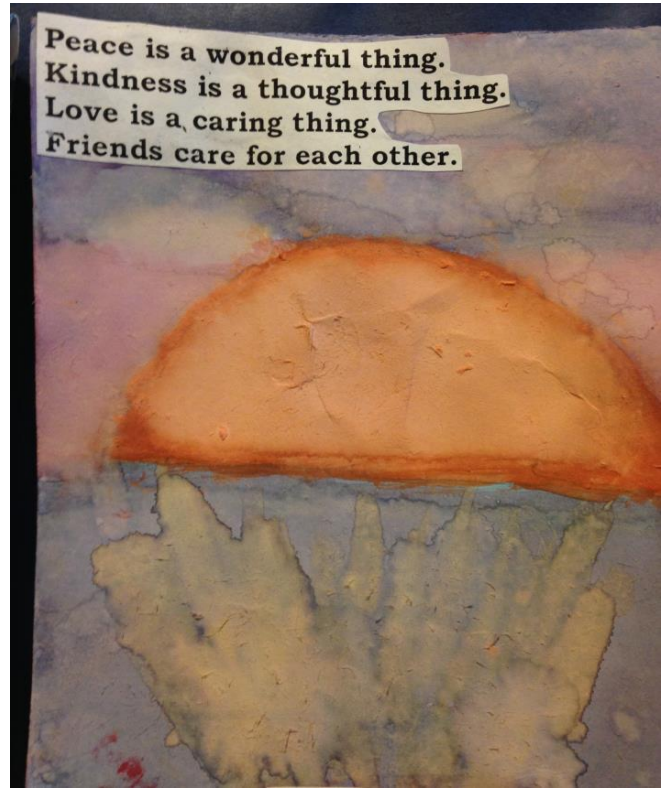
The students were able to choose as many of the virtues as they felt were the most important. Kindness and respect received the highest rating with 16 out of 19 students choosing those virtues as the most important, followed by trust with 15 student votes and love with 14 student votes.

Measuring the impact the peace program has had on the classroom environment can be confirmed through the actions and work of the children.

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Student Work Examples:

These student work samples were taken from an all-school art show. The theme of the project was *What is Peace?* The directions were fairly open to the children, they were to draw, color, or paint a picture that represented peace. They could choose to add words, songs, stories or poetry to accompany the piece.



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Students were asked in a survey, *what is peace to you?*

Student Responses:

- Being nice to others
- Meditating
- Being quiet
- When I'm with my family
- Peace is not having war and not fighting
- Peace is all around
- Peace to me is everything

Leading into the peace program, the teacher led a discussion on peace to set the program in motion. The students were able to share their thoughts related to peace and when they felt peaceful. The discussion led to the idea that peace is all around, and as peacemakers we are able to recognize when peace has been disrupted. As peacemakers we also hold the power to repair the disrupted peace and use our actions to help others (Janke and Peterson, 1999). The survey was taken near the end of the program, but themes of the discussion are evident through the responses of the children.

Peaceful actions of the children have also been observed outside of the classroom and at home. One parent writes:

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We LOVE your peace program. It has definitely had an impact on Samuel and on our family. He has shared with us with pride many of the elements of the program that you described. He has told us how it has helped him to learn about his classmates and resolve his own conflicts.

Mostly we have noticed his desire for conflict to be as peaceful as possible here at home. He has always been a gentle child and has desired peace around him, but this past year especially he has expressed those desires to us and has been using quite a bit of "peace vocabulary" to do so. By doing this, Samuel has even had an impact on how my husband and I resolve our own conflicts.

Another parent writes:

Lawrence has commented that the peace meetings and celebrations promote peaceful behaviors in a new way for him. He says he has learned that peace is for everyone to consider related to everyday life -- not just when talking about "world peace" on a very broad scale that is hard to comprehend.

Thank you for providing such a wonderful learning environment for him this year. Learning about and practicing peaceful behavior is very important to our family.

Analysis & Conclusion

The students paid more attention to the actual acts of peace that the students were carrying out versus focusing on the vocabulary. They enjoyed learning the virtues and placed value on understanding the virtues through the student survey, but observations of the peace meetings conclude that the students paid more attention to how the action was being carried out. This is extremely important to recognize when developing a curriculum and building a school climate at the elementary level. The students must be given opportunities and examples of what the vocabulary looks like through daily actions and encounters.

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Through one student interview the question was asked, how do you think we could improve learning our virtues? The 2nd grade student response was:

“Maybe we could have made posters or art of what we thought the virtue was about?”

Though there were opportunities to create art related to peace and the provided opportunity to show ownership over the virtues by observing the secret pals, there weren't a variety of opportunities related to learning the virtues that allowed the students to show ownership through creativity over the virtuous vocabulary.

The peace program was positive in nature and evidence demonstrated that students were able to build empathy for one another, develop awareness for peace inside and outside of the classroom and positively support one another.

Action Plan

The results of this study supported that the peace program helped develop virtuous vocabulary, gave a framework for using and observing the vocabulary and helped to positively change the classroom climate. The students enjoyed all aspects of the peace program and an excitement for peace has been infused within the classroom.

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Through the data collection of informal observations, student surveys and student interviews, I can see that I would like to continue adding to the current peace program. Listening to the students compliment each other and become more aware of peaceful behaviors inside and outside the classroom, has lit a fire in me to continue with the development of this program. I would love to continue building on the student ownership and application pieces.

The next steps will be to allow more time and creative opportunities for the students to explore the virtuous vocabulary. I would like to see if adding more time and activities will support the students in not only describing the virtuous actions of their secret pals, but also with naming the actual virtue. I would also like to advance the application of “living peace” to conflict resolution and our classroom peace table. In the article, *Analyzing Peace Pedagogies*, a similar theme is examined closely, “Central to programs of peace education are experiential learning, the teaching of: critical thinking, respectful treatment of all people and structuring schools to facilitate inclusive decision-making” (Haavlesrud and Stensburg, 2012, p75). Through informal observation, I’ve learned that though the classroom climate has become more positive and students are recognizing peaceful actions, we still need the framework and support to transfer those skills to peaceful decision making in conflict resolution.

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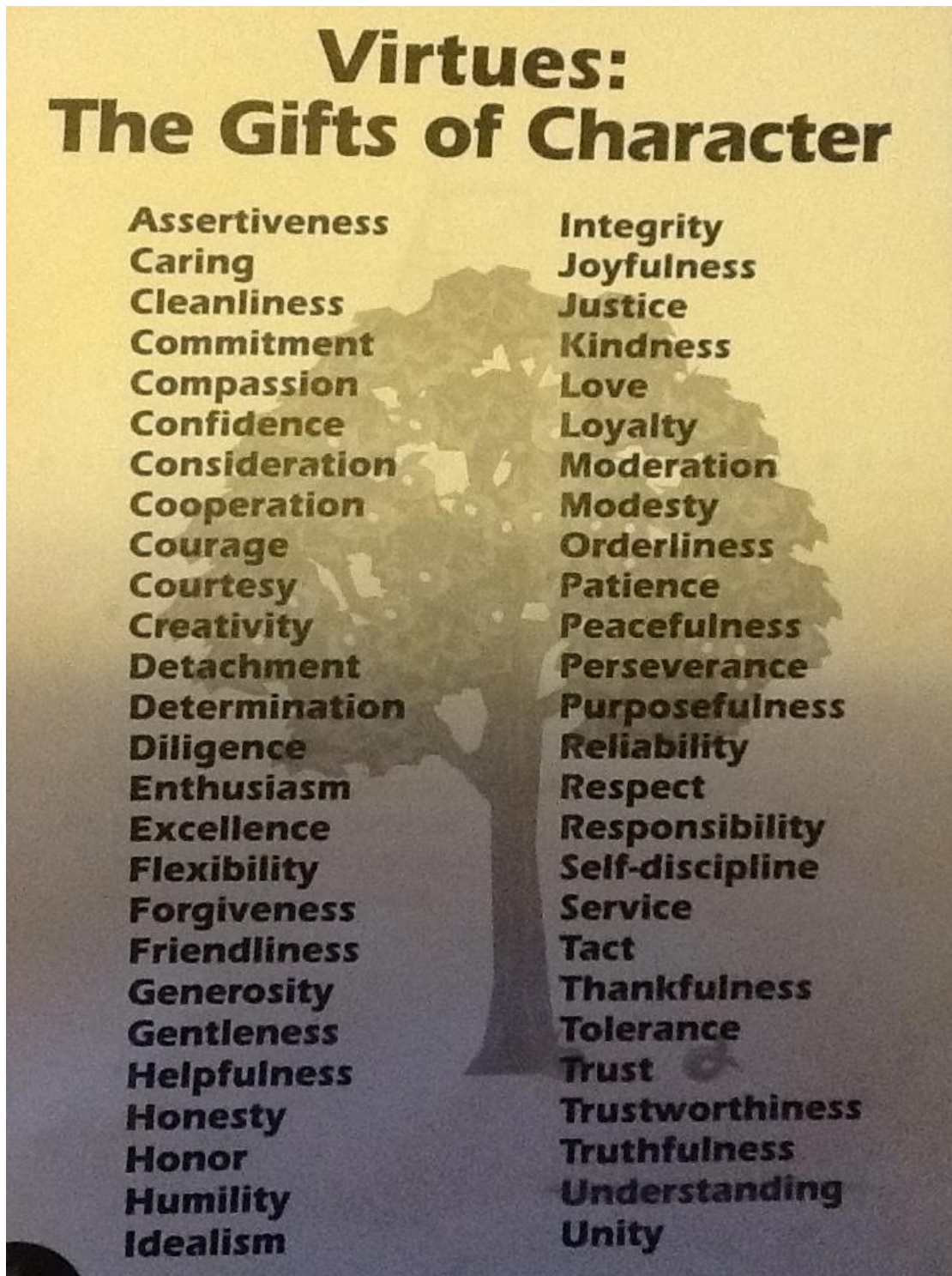
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Appendix A: Linda Kavelin Popov's Vocabulary




Appendix B: Popov's Discussion Guide

Kindness




What Is Kindness?

Kindness is showing you care, doing some good to make life better for others. It is being thoughtful about people's needs. Kindness is showing love and compassion to someone who is sad or needs your help. Kindness is treating yourself and others gently. It is caring about the earth and all living things.



Why Practice It?

Without kindness, no one would listen when people or animals need help. Everyone would be looking out for himself. The world is lonely without kindness. When someone reaches out to another in an act of kindness, it helps them both. People's lack of kindness to the earth damages the air, water and the land. This causes people and animals to suffer, too. Being kind allows us to feel connected to everything and everyone.



How Do You Practice It?

You practice kindness by noticing when someone or something needs care. Become sensitive to the world around you. Use your imagination to think of things that give others happiness. Find out what habits harm the earth and choose kinder ways to live. When you are tempted to be cruel, to criticize or tease, decide not to do it. Speak kindly instead. Greet people kindly. Take good care of your pets.

What would Kindness look like if...

- A new student comes into your class and looks lonely?
- You start teasing your brother and he is getting upset?
- Some kids you have been playing with start teasing a boy with big ears?
- Your cat has some burrs in her fur?
- Your mother seems tired lately?
- You see someone in a wheel chair coming toward you?

Signs of Success

Congratulations! You are practicing Kindness when you...

- Give tender attention to someone who is sad or needs help
- Do things to give others happiness
- Practice habits that help the environment (reduce, re-use, recycle)
- Resist the temptation to be cruel
- Accept people who are different

Affirmation

I am kind. I look for ways to help others. I show kindness to any person or animal I see. I do all I can to take care of the earth.

Appendix C: Permission Letter

October 19, 2013

Dear Families,

As part of a continuous mission for best teaching practices, I will be doing an action research project in the classroom. I am working toward a Master's Degree in Montessori Education, and as part of my course work, I am doing an action research project which entails analyzing the results of strategies I use in class to support children's leadership and classroom community building.

Research shows that teaching character education to children is an important concept in building leadership and social skills. I have chosen to look at how I can develop a peaceful environment where students can independently problem solve and support one another. My plan is to teach the children vocabulary related to virtues, incorporate student observations of those virtues and analyze how those virtues unfold in the classroom. The second part of my plan incorporates the idea of independent problem solving, if students are given vocabulary and a model, can they carry out the problem solving with absence of the adult?

I would very much appreciate having your permission to record your child during a class meeting and use my observations to support positive community building. I will use a pseudonym to protect your child's privacy. The information will only be shared in educational settings including a university mini conference for teachers and as part of my paper.

Please sign this form and return it to me as soon as you are able. Thank you for your consideration.

If you have any questions or concerns, please email me or call me at:

(Email and phone provided)

Sincerely,
Markell Lockwood

I give permission for my child _____ to participate in the Building Classroom Community and Independent Peace Maker's Project during the Fall & Spring 2013-2014.

Parent's Name _____

Parent's Signature _____ Date _____