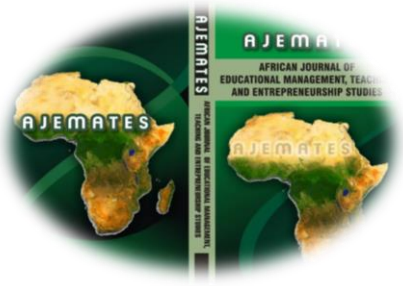
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UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT: A CURRICULUM SUBMISSION AND PEACE BUILDERS' PERSPECTIVE.

Dr. Athanatius Ifeanyi IBEH
Dept. of Educational Foundations; Ebonyi State College of Education, Ikwo
Email: doctorathanatiusibeh@gmail.com

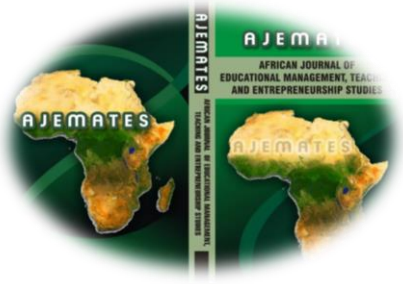
ABSTRACT
This paper concern about the spate of violence in Nigeria and suggests the introduction of certain learning tasks in school curriculum which would change the attitudinal build-up of youths and groom them into accommodating their individuality, appreciating differences in opinion, accepting the need to avoid conflicts through knowing how to communicate and even express anger without violence. The paper also identifies the instructors that would implement the curriculum as those who are favourably disposed to ensuring an enduring peace in the country.

Introduction

Conflict is mistakenly assumed as inherently violent. However, we recognize conflict as a naturally occurring phenomenon that has both constructive and destructive potential, depending on how it is managed. Engaging in conflict tends to generate anxiety in many people who associate it with negative or violent outcomes, which leads to fight or flight responses. In fact, conflict can provide an opportunity to learn about ourselves and others, motivate necessary changes in the status quo, challenge obsolete ways of thinking, relating, working, and to innovate. A conflict is a situation where two or more individuals or groups pursue goals or ambitions that they did not think they share with others. The conflict is not necessarily violent. The conflict often occurs during a moment of change. Some want change, while others oppose it. It is the way that conflict is managed that will determine whether the conflict has a positive or negative impact on our lives. It is when conflict is not managed properly that it becomes violent. In other words, conflicts are inevitable, violence is not. If disagreement and conflict are addressed peacefully and creatively, the proc ess can be positive. Positive conflict can buil d relationships, create coalitions, foster communication, strengthen institutions, and create new ideas, rules and laws.

Since the dawn of the current democratic dispensation the polity in Nigeria has suffered one form of conflict or the other. Interested parties first thought it was a reaction to the new found opportunity to give vent to the pent up anger accumulated during the days of military autocracy, but a whole decade after the military had left governance the situation is still the same. This should have been more than enough time for the crises of regional and ethnic conflict to bubble down. On the contrary, old rivalry and bitterness still continue unabated while new ones keep exploding afresh now and again. The implication of this is that the cause of

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conflicts in Nigeria goes deeper and far beyond military interregnum in politics as cause.

Most conflicts in Nigeria can very easily be traced to ethnic rivalry, politics or some form of perceived injustice. The Niger-Delta crisis in Nigeria is an example of an on-going conflict that has defied solution for a very long time. Other areas of disagreement have been the irregular clashes between the various labour unions and government. Of lesser frequency and spread are the ethnic and religious crises that are sporadic, spontaneous and often unpredictable.

All the above happen in spite of the fact that most cultures in Nigeria and indeed the common religions (Christianity, Islam and Traditional) all have definite statues and practices for avoiding and resolving conflicts. Their inadequacies in building an enduring peace or quickly resolving conflict situation create the need for more enduring ways of tackling this problem.

Concepts and Assumptions about Conflicts

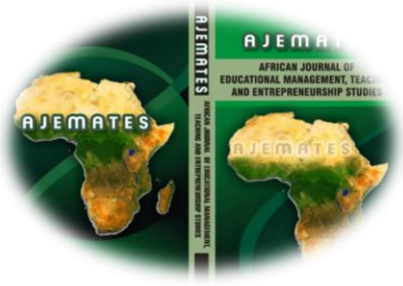
According to Aja Akpuru Aja, Ndifon &Nwaodu(2013),Conflicts are a dispute or difference in opinion. It is a disagreement through which the parties involved perceived a threat to their needs, interest or concern. It is a physical confrontation, clash, controversy, hostility, tension, struggle among individuals and groups in a society.

Conflicts are sometimes caused by miscommunications. But more often it is about issues like values or beliefs "it is a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resource" (Coser 1956, p8). Once the ingredients for conflict are in place certain issues like poverty, injustice, exploitation of resources etc are always to blame for escalating the conflict. That is why Ayindo, Sam and Janice (2001) insist that certain institutions such as development projects, trade relationships and community peace groups must permanently be in place to continuously promote peace.

Conflicts just like storms and forest fire start quietly, gather momentum and energy then explode into the society often with a wild anger and destructiveness that belief their genesis. As they sweep through a society they attract attention to themselves and the destruction they leave behind with the result that people tend to forget the original cause of the crises and instead focus on the effects. This more so when conflicts like fires or storms soon abate. And like fires too conflicts tend to consume the materials that fuel them. But conflict is not necessarily evil. It is an essential ingredient in the dynamics of societal development. It is usually an opportunity where a minority may voice its opinion and where the majority or powerful is forced to examine an alternative view point. Difficulties arise only when there is a perceived threat to the minority or less powerful over when their needs, interests and concerns are not adequately addressed.

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In the line of the above, this work sets to examine conflicts generally and proffer a curriculum and peace builders suggestion on how to identify indicator the predict conflicts and how to resolve them amicably when they occur. It also provides a training manual through which conflict resolution skills can be introduced to learners in the Nigerian school's system. People building assume that conflict is a natural part of human existence. Thus the goal of peace building is to transform the destructive ways we deal with conflict to lead to more constructive outcomes.

One reasons that social conflicts are hard to deal with that they are very complex. Conflict invokes many actors in processes that are usually not very straight forward, caritas (2002) identifies four levels of conflicts, intra-personal, inter-personal, intra-group and inter-group conflicts. All these interact and have implications on the society. They all have to be resolved. But while the personal conflicts can usually be solved by the individual himself or his counselor, the group conflicts have to have to be attended to by a knowledge peace builder or conflict mediator. The thrust of this paper is to proffer training tasks and experiences through which the citizens especially within the schools system can understand the dynamics involved in conflict and thus be in the position to be able to nip them in the bud or resolved them when they do occur.

Conflicts are not static; they change over time, sometimes increasing in intensity, sometimes decreasing. They may even at other times remain dormant.

Generally, five stages of conflict development can be identified as reported by Caritas (2002)

- Moving from peaceful situation
- Political tension
- Serious political conflict
- Low intensity conflict
- High intensity conflict

Ayindo et al (1995), and Macbeth and fine (1995), had earlier on used this idea of stages explain conflict. They compared conflict to a fire: they agreed that conflict like fire goes through a number of stages that makes it unique.

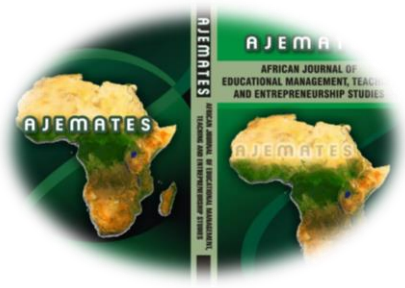
Stage 1 gathering of materials potential conflict: during this stage people usually experience structural violence which is form of injustice where people are not allowed to experience their right or discharge their responsibilities. Unequal treatment is perceived and this becomes unbearable.

Stage 2 Fire begins to burn confrontation: here a match is lit and the fire begins. Usually a public demonstration serves as the match that quickly ignites the dry waiting materials.

Stage 3 Bonfire crisis: at this stage the fire burns as fast and as far as it can. The conflict gets out of control. At this stage disputants get scared and frustrated and would thus engage in any form of wickedness in order to 'win'. It is also this stage that third parties (opportunists) not originally concerned in the conflict come in to take advantage of the disorder to perpetuate havoc to their personal advantage.

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Stage 4 Coals potential conflict: at some point the fire (violence) abate, the flames largely vanish and just the coals continue to glow as most of the fuel is burnt up. At this stage the conflict continues to burn itself out or it can easily ignite if new fuel is introduced. Violence usually cycles through increased fighting and relative calm. This is the time for peace accords and real efforts at ensuring justice. But if the original injustice is not solved then the conflict will explode again.

Stage 5 Fire out/regeneration: At this stage the fire finally goes out. Even the ashes are cool. This is the period for the cooling of tension which provides the opportunity to rebuild what has been destroyed. Everything has to be regenerated afresh and lasting institutions to address injustice put in place. Rejuvenation may take years. It takes years to regenerate a forest destroyed by fire, just as it may take years to rebuild the confidence of a people ravaged by mistrust, injustice or violence.

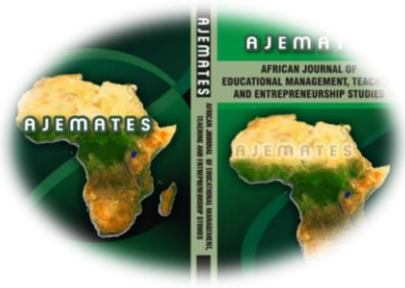
Five Strategies for Managing Conflict in the Classroom

There are many different scenarios for classroom conflicts, and not all can be resolved in the same manner; however, there are five key conflict resolution strategies that should be understood. Often a topic among teachers in online master's degree programs, these strategies, when implemented appropriately, can help create a classroom that is more conducive to learning. They also help teach students valuable lessons for conflict resolution that can last a lifetime.

- **Problem-solving negotiations**: When both the goal and the relationship are highly important to the students, problem-solving negotiations are initiated to resolve the conflict. Solutions are sought that ensure both students fully achieve their goals and that any tensions or negative feelings between the two are dissipated.
- **Smoothing**: When the goal is of little importance, but the relationship is of high importance, one person gives up their goals so that the other person can achieve theirs. This is done to maintain the highest-quality relationship possible. If the teacher detects that one student's goals or interests in the conflict are much stronger than the others, the teacher can facilitate a smoothing of the conflict. Smoothing should be done with good humor
- **Forcing or win-lose negotiations**: When the goal is very important but the relationship is not, students will seek to achieve their own goals at the expense of the other person's goals. They do so by forcing or persuading the other person to yield. They are competing for a win.
- **Compromising**: When both the goal and the relationship are moderately important, and it appears that neither person can have their way, the students will need to give up part of their goals, and possibly sacrifice part of the relationship, in order to reach an agreement. Compromising may involve meeting in the middle or flipping a coin. Compromising is often used when students wish to engage in problem-solving negotiations but do not have the time to do so.

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- **Withdrawing**: When the goal is not important to the student and neither is the relationship, a student may wish to give up their goal completely and avoid the issue with the person. Sometimes it is good for both students to withdraw from the conflict until they have calmed down and are in control of their feelings.

Each of the five strategies is appropriate under a particular set of circumstances. To be truly effective in managing conflicts, teachers must engage competently in each strategy. This takes practice.

Need for conflict management skills in the curriculum

Various Nigeria religion and cultures have definite processes of identifying and resolving conflict situations. For instance the Christian bible replete with conflict situations that were nipped in the bud (Gen 13;5-12) Abraham & Lot) or ongoing crises that were completely resolved (Gen 25: 33 Esau & Jacob). Similarly, every culture has institutions that can resolve on-going crisis or traditions that help to prevent the starting of one.

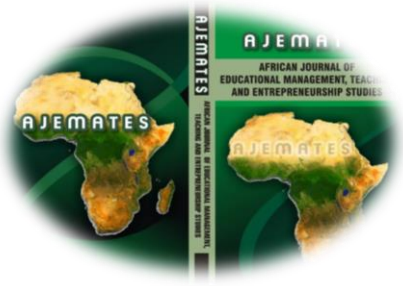
Unfortunately, religions and cultural practices for the prevention and resolution of conflicts are often neglected by the modern society in the heat of disagreement or perceived threats to ones interest, values or resources. Thus without any religious piety, tradition or training to inhibit ones excesses, the individuals often resort to conflict to resolve sometimes simple differences in opinion. These conflicts become violent and may spread to involve others. This paper is of the opinion that since religion and tradition have failed, the problem must e taken to the school system and learners taught the basic issues of conflict prevention and peace building. Such issues can be built into school curriculum at all level so that attitudes can begin to change. Training in the school system is viewed as necessary because learners being in their formative years in school can easily acquire the appropriate attitude that would mould them into peace makers when they emerge into the society. Such training must however start with the teachers for without sufficient training to address teachers own behavior there is the danger that adults words will not match their actions. (Bodine Crawford and Schrumpf, 1994; Lieber and Rogers, 1994; Miller, 1994).

Lam, (19890 and Metis (1990), in their evaluation studies of conflict and peace building experiences built into the school curriculum showed positive trends related to aggression, students self-image and skills and the over-all school climate. However, the full benefits of conflicts resolution in schools and society may depend on the inclusion of these learning tasks in the pre-service curriculum of teachers who have the mandate to teach the appropriate attitude to their wards. Stevehn , Johnson, Johnson, Oberle and Wahl, (2000) in their own study were able to show a significant differences between trained and untrained children in their knowledge and retention of the conflict situations and conceptual understanding of friendship.

Steven (2004) posits that conflict training not only enables students to learn, use and develop more positive attitudes towards

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conflicts resolution, but also enhances academic achievement. Furthermore, as Johnson and Johnson (1996) suggest, conflict resolution and peer mediation programs do seems to be effective in training students in negotiation and mediation procedures. After training students also tend to use these conflicts strategies to generally lead to constructive outcomes.

The resolution of conflicts whether in the education system or in the society must not be left in the hands of untrained individuals. This because there are potentially numerous negative outcomes of poorly managed conflicts or negotiated settlement. Some of these include the risk of re-occurrence of conflict, lowered societal harmony occasioned by fear or distrust and the challenges of self esteem or self efficacy. It is this that makes the introduction of conflict management and resolution skills into the school curriculum at all levels necessity.

Girard (nd0 asserts that conflict resolution in education is linked to democracy and citizenship developing a peaceful world, cooperative learning multicultural education, prejudice reduction, social justice, violence prevention and intervention, critical thinking and problem solving and site-based management. It thus becomes an essential addition to the school curriculum in all levels in Nigeria.

The increase in commercial and school based violence in Nigeria has fueled interest in conflict resolution skills. There is however the concern among professional mediators that government interference and the need for quick fix to problems may lead to unrealistic and short lived solutions. For instance the urgency to address issues of social and economic injustice in Nigeria in the Niger-Delta has lead to the escalation of the crisis at several approaches (sometimes at variance with each other) were adopted in solving the problem. Enduring peace building must be viewed as one component and that is preparing youth to find non violence responses to conflict, in promoting social justice.

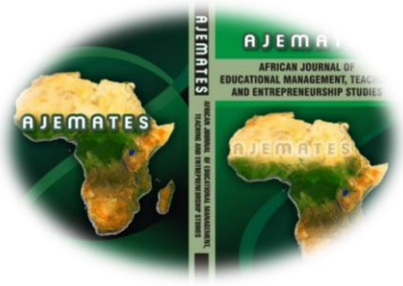
The negotiator/ Mediator/ Peace builder

The negotiator or mediator in a conflict situation is expressed to have certain traits that would help him in advancing the cause of peace between the conflicting parties. There are also certain things he needs to do personally to facilitate the mediation process. For instance, to effectively manage a conflict in any place, school workplace or society. It is important for the negotiator to know him. As common saying puts it 'men know thyself'. This is a requirement that demand that the negotiator understands his personal fears, biases and triggers and purge himself of those to such an extent that they do not influence his perception of the situation. He must also be full, comfortable within himself having and enough sleep, exercise and nourishment. The negotiator must be able to clarify any personal needs which are threatened by the dispute and be able to identify objective desired outcomes from a negotiated process. He must posses active listening and communication skills.

While the negotiator must be able to assert his leadership in the negotiation process, he must

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however approach the process with flexibility and must not allow one party to dominate the other when presenting their position. The negotiator must be able to identify issues at stake clearly and concisely so he can appreciate the criteria for decision making. He must be able to generate lively brainstorming sessions even if they go slightly off-tangent for it is usually during this time that underlying causes of disputes comes to light. Other methods the negotiator can use to get the real cause of the dispute and locate the positions or issues each of the disputants is ready to forgo is to consult each other of them privately. In privacy conflicting partners are more forthcoming with their true grievances and once their view point is appreciated would more readily concede space and accept amicable settlement.

The negotiator must be able to manage an impasse with calm, patience and respect. He should be able to see and focus on the underlying needs, interest and concerns of disputants.

Furthermore, the mediator must never impose his solution or view point on the conflicting parties but must encourage them to craft their way into a sustainable agreement or settlement. He must review and build on whatever agreement is revealed and ensure that such is properly documented for future reference.

Finally, engaging in a dispute resolution process requires the mediator to tap a personal fountain of courage, confront and knowledge personal fears and face the risks or threats embedded in the conflict. Such roles also requires the mediator to continuously assure the disputants of his objectivity and non-partisanship in the conflict understanding the role and position of the mediator helps facilitate a quick settlement or disputes and (in this work) helps to select the appropriate curriculum experience that would help in training of mediators or at least begin to cease more peace loving citizenry ready to discuss their differences in friendly ways.

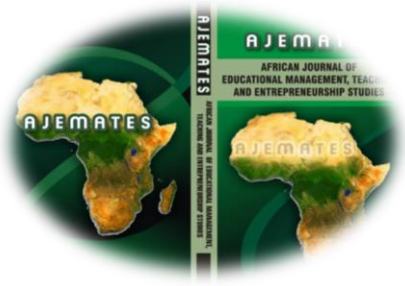
Peaceful Conflict Resolution and Violence Prevention Curriculum

The curriculum is a learning program or experience through which learners pass in order to achieve a definite educational goal. Such learning experiences can be presented to the learners in a variety of ways such as instructions discussion, practice, or even simulated situations to which that learners are expected to react as appropriate. What is important is that by the end of the program, recipients of the training would have acquired new skills and gained new attitudes and insights into the learning task.

To this end then this apery does not offer any definite method of how to present the learning skills for conflict resolution or violence prevention. However, taking into cognizance the peculiar situation in the Nigeria school system, the overcrowded syllabus and centrally coordinated curriculum which is operative in the schools the author hastens to add that conflict learning experiences have to be built into the existing curriculum by school proprietors and implemented by teachers who are favourably

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disposed to ensuring an enduring peace in the country.

The main issues in the curriculum according to Barkin and Kronchuk (2001), should carefully approximate the following:

- → Identification of solutions that could result to violence
- → Communication skills
- → Dynamics of a fight
- → How to express anger without violence

Other skills that maybe added to the above for the understanding and prevention of violence are:

- → Cooperation strategies
- → Prejudice reduction in a multicultural society
- → Rationale for conflict resolution skills

Avruch (1997) drew a relationship between culture and conflict. He posits that to understand and resolves communal conflicts. It is important to appreciate the local culture as it is and as it evolved. He posits that local cultures are those complex systems of meaning created, shared and transmitted by individuals in particular social groups. He claims that while "generic culture directs attention to universal attributes of human development (human nature) local culture directs attention to diversity, differences and particularism". The understanding of local culture helps in solving local conflicts.

It is also relevant to study how major conflicts such as war affect women and children. In violent conflicts women are easily victims of violent war crimes such as rape. Very often they are also detested by the very side on which they are. So they never win. Similarly, children are also victims of military service. They too are eventual losers. An understanding of the role and need of women and children help in the attitudinal build up against violent conflicts.

Conclusion

Conflicts are a necessary presence in any society that is growing. What makes them evil and unacceptable is the attitude with which disputants express their grievance and speed, appropriateness and honesty with which the superior or majority attends to them.

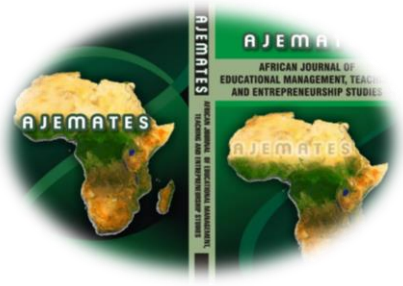
Although there are definite recommendation of how to prevent violent conflicts in the common religions in Nigeria, such religion are inadequate as they are usually not adhered to in the face of perceived injustice. Thus, is the need for a more enduring attitudinal understanding of conflicts, their effects and how they can be solved or prevented.

The school curriculum has been accepted the world over as the most appropriate way through which this attitudinal change can take place. It is therefore relevant for school proprietors (public or private) to work into their existing curriculum specific learning tasks through which youths can be grounded into accepting their individuality, appreciating differences in opinion, and accepting the need to avoid conflicts through knowing how to communicate and even express anger without violence.

Conflict avoidance and resolution skills must be taught in schools only by teachers who understands the values of peace and are

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positively disposed to issues of democracy, diplomacy, transparency and justice. Their bringing up youths in the proper way must not be limited to classroom activities only but also by examples (modeling) in real life situation.

An understanding of the stages, characteristics and effects of conflicts provides one with the knowledge and disposition of a negotiator. And, in the conflict ridden phase of Nigeria's journey to unity and development such knowledge is indispensible.

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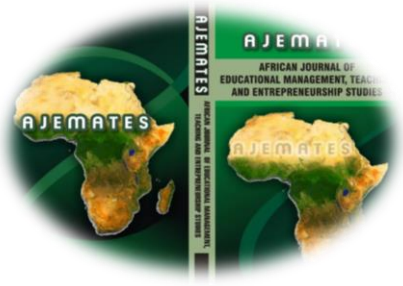
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