

Promoting the Institutionalization of Peace Through Education

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Dear teachers from all over the world,

I greet you with joy and a wide smile from Bucharest, Romania, as Mother Teresa beautifully said, "Peace begins with a smile"! I am a primary education teacher at the Ferdinand I School and I have been teaching with energy, enthusiasm and light in my soul and in my mind for 27 years. I put soul and passion into everything I do, and development opportunities do not cease to appear in my life! My school is taking care of the education of about seven hundred students from 6 till 14 years old and we developed a lot of projects for increasing harmony and respect among students.

A wonderful and unique chance for my school was participating along with my students in the project run by HWPL Education for Peace in the 2021-2022. I am deeply grateful to the HWPL team for the invitation to be a messenger of peace in my class, in my school, in my family, in my country, but also around the world!

The beloved singer, John Lennon, said that "Peace is not something you would want. Peace is what you do, it's what you create, it's something you are, it's what you give". Following these words, I put them into action and together with my 7-8 years old students we carried out attractive activities, we realized the importance of peace on earth and we understood what are the most important values for maintaining peace and harmony between people.

Although my students were at an early age, they understood very well the message of each lesson and they managed to prove that they are children of peace, raised in love, understanding and harmony. The project consisted in presenting 12 peace lessons from the organization's textbook and drawing up a report at the end of each lesson. The offered lessons were a real support in the sense that there were debated issues related to the harmony of nature, the intervention of man in the deterioration of this harmony, gratitude, respect for the elderly, appreciation of the effort of all members of the community, effective communication and restoration of peace, and last but not least understanding the importance of love in creating a world of peace and harmony.

The activities were carefully thought out, especially since they were held in front of such young children, preparatory and first grade, but I realized how important it is to talk to them from now on about these valuable aspects, necessary for the smooth running of mankind / humanity!

I gladly relive every moment spent to facilitate the correct understanding of the message in the peace lesson's textbook to my students. I really enjoyed bringing in front of them games, experiments, images, examples of different people, works of art and especially stories! Stories have an overwhelming impact on children's minds and souls, and they are effective tools in introducing them to quite abstract concepts at this age. I carefully observed my students during the presentations and I realized how important it is to talk to them about peace from an early age and what impact peace talks can have on a group. In just a few months, the children have become quieter, they treat each other with more respect, they take better care of the places where they learn and play, they are more attentive to the needs of others, they are empathetic and eager to help.

I know that nothing is accidental in this world, and everything happens to us to evolve to a new, good and beautiful world. The development of this project was not accidental either, because shortly after the completion of the 12 peace lessons, in our neighboring country, Ukraine, the war occurred, and in our school we received hundreds, thousands of Ukrainian refugees. My students and their parents, already sensitized and aware of the serious consequences of the war, participated and are still volunteering to help these people in need. They provided food, shelter, transportation, hygiene items, clothing, toys, etc. The fact that they did it with an open heart shows how great the impact of these lessons was and how valuable the stories were.

The parents of my students were also of real support because no activity is successful if we do not collaborate and support each other! We are fortunate to have a diversity of cultures in our classroom, such as Syrians, Turks, Greeks. This gives us multiple opportunities to learn interesting things about each other. This happened when the mother of a Syrian girl told the children about the war in Syria and how they had to leave their country, about the terrible effects brought by the war in her country. She presented the children images of her country before and after the war, and the children were left speechless seeing so much destruction. Whenever a conflict occurs in the classroom, there are children who bring up the serious consequences of a war, and they calm down much faster.

The things learned from going through the 12 lessons were multiple and extremely valuable! We learned about harmony in nature and how easily it can be destroyed, about the fact that each of us is valuable for what we do, for the way we appreciate and respect others. We then learned about forgiveness, about empathy, about

respecting our family, our ancestors and the legacy they leave, about gratitude and sacrifice for the benefit of others, and about preserving our traditions and cultural heritage. Above all these teachings was the understanding that only love and kindness can save us and maintain peace on earth. The words of Jimi Hendrix stay in my mind: "When the power of love overwhelms the love of power, the world will know peace".

Teaching and learning together with our students about peace during and after those 12 lessons, we understand that effective communication is very important in creating harmonious relationships in the classroom and in the school. For developing communication we choose to make our school more hospitable for everyone who enters: students, parents, teachers, administrative staff, guests, etc So we decided to have a new way of welcoming every week. Sometimes we greeted everyone with beautiful words, sometimes with big smiles and body signs, but the important thing is that we spent a few seconds looking in the other's eyes making him or her feel important, making them feel seen and appreciated.

For children this was a fabulous thing, they felt in a familiar, warm and friendly atmosphere. When a teacher greeted them and gave them those 3 seconds, they felt special, took their share of courage and support for the whole day, got rid of emotions and could learn more easily during the day. On the other hand, teachers' faces were no longer so frowned and serious, on the contrary, they became childish and supportive. Then the children said that it is very important to take the greeting in class, among colleagues, to create the comfort they need for a new day with new learning experiences. Older children then greet the younger children, thus creating a safe atmosphere throughout the school. And in this way we spread peace and harmony in the whole school.

When we talk about respect, one of the most important peace values, we refer to creating that warm and friendly atmosphere in the classroom, among children, but also in school, among teachers, the management team, administration, parents of our students and all the guests who visit us. It is very important to show everyone that they are welcome and that we are good hosts to give them courage and freedom of expression.

All of these led to a durable and harmonious partnership, based on mutual trust and respect. When school and family work together and are real partners, children feel comfortable and learning overcomes all barriers. These could seem to be small steps in developing peace in our school but they had a huge value for our community because little by little we became more calm and gentle in our strategies of educated children and in this moment we can say that we are as a big and happy family.

Then I urge you, dear teachers, those who have in your classes the future of this world, to courageously approach the lessons about peace, for they will open a new chapter in the life of mankind! It is up to each of us to be light where we go! I will not stop spreading this light of love, truth, compassion, and humanity!

