

## Collaborative Learning and Role of Nonviolent Pedagogy in Promoting 21st Century Skills: A Theoretical Perspective

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**Abstract:** Collaboration is indisputably being recognized as one of the most important attributes in defining personal, academic and professional success in the context of a globalizing world. Among the other 21<sup>st</sup> century skills (critical thinking, creativity and communication, the ability to work in teams (collaboration) has become one of the most sought after skills. In order to achieve the SDG goals, collaborative skills will be critically instrumental in promoting the emotional and social wellbeing of all learners, in realizing inclusive, equitable and innovative learning environments, for promoting gender equality, building peaceful and inclusive societies as well as global partnerships. Through improved collaborative skills in all graduates, great steps can be made that would engender achievement of all SDGs as nations strive to work together. Two problems however stare many education stakeholders in the face: the education system has not succeeded in producing graduates with the level of collaborative skills needed to succeed on the job, let alone in the communities where they live. This chapter looks at the enormous potential of nonviolent pedagogy in promoting collaboration in 21<sup>st</sup> century classrooms. It examines the notions of violence and nonviolence, defines nonviolent communication and discusses how practice in nonviolent pedagogy can support learners in boosting their collaborative skills. In order to ensure any level of success with nonviolent pedagogy, the chapter recommends innovative teacher education and a curriculum that re-conceptualizes a critical nonviolent pedagogy with focus on teaching and assessing of collaborative skills.

**Keywords:** 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills, teaching, learning, collaborative skills, nonviolent pedagogy.

### INTRODUCTION

In spite of the importance attached to the ability to work effectively with others, and one that plays a fundamental role in the realization of the SDGs and promotion of human rights for all, the education system has not succeeded in producing graduates that can work effectively with others. Collaboration is needed in all societies so as to assist modern day citizens to live fulfilled lives as well as succeed in a globalizing world where productivity depends on the pulling together of both human and non-human resources (Lai, DiCerbo, Foltz, 2017 (P21), Dews, 2013; DeRenzi, 2015). The truth of the matter is that there is too much violence in the world with the unfortunate effect of undermining effective classroom learning. Since the origin of time, humanity has been faced with a development paradox such that in spite of the continued pursuit for democratic deals by almost all nations of the world, violence seems to be a byproduct of modernity. A good example can be the negative effects of technological development such as addiction, cyber bullying and other crimes. In the USA, and in spite of the many years of democratic independence, there have been reported time and again gang presence in schools and random shootings (Zembylas, 2011). In this country, 329,825 homicides affected African Americans between 1976 and 2008. These were reported to have occurred in a context that did not have any form of armed conflict (WHO, 2009). In the academic context, African American doctoral students reported their sense of isolation,

frustration and marginalization from supervisors that had to do with racial differences with the unfortunate effect in declining numbers in African American representation in counselor education faculty (Malik, Owens and Witherspoon, 2011). Students in this country have lived in fear of attack in schools (Dinks, Kemp & Baum, 2009). Interpersonal violence is a leading cause of death and injury in many countries and includes parents and their disciplining styles (Nadine & Kenelm, 1998). The overall effect of parental and community violence means that many classrooms will be filled or at least will have violent elements that undermine their own learning and that of their counterparts. Promotion of collaborative skills can thus be faced by stiff challenges as a result.

For most people, only physical violence counts as violence and yet violence is more than killing people and includes both verbal and non-verbal behaviours that cause psychological damage on the individual. Violence may be individual and institutional and it may or may not kill. Many forms of systemic violence skip our notice because they are very often part of the infrastructure of life such as racism, ethnicity, sexism and ageism (Terence 2004). We need to understand that violence may be prevalent even in the absence of war and civil conflict. In its World Report on Health, WHO (2002) defines violence as "intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, which

either results in or has high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation. In USA where students have expressed fear of attack in schools, the context of the violence they face has nothing to do with war and civil strife. Most countries of the world are now confronted with both opportunities but also tragically, the negative effects of globalization. Immigration in a number of other countries is threatening the very social fabric of these nations while it continues to affect immigrants in unimaginable dimensions. We witness now more than ever before social and economic marginalization as well as cultural differences. The major causes of violence in the world are intolerance, drugs, broken homes, greed, media, lack of education, racism, unemployment, religion and poverty (Chauhun,2013). The tremendous increase in population and the subsequent socio- economic strain placed on all nations will remain a key predictor of violence in the future. Even so, countries that are most affected by violence are in the Middle East, Africa and Latin America where economies are less developed and political systems are more volatile. This promotes a climate where violence is prevalent with countries like Nigeria, South Africa, Syria, Pakistan, Colombia and Somalia being some nations with high levels of violence. It is against this backdrop that we examine the role education in promoting collaborative skills. This chapter will specifically attempt to achieve the following objectives: attempt a conceptualization of collaborative skills and why schools and universities should focus more on their promotion, define nonviolence, explore the nature of nonviolent communication in a school environment, describe key features of collaborative and nonviolent pedagogy, look into the role of teacher education and also consider the benefits of nonviolent pedagogy.

### **Conceptualizing collaborative skills**

The Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills (P21) recognizes now more than ever before the need for innovative teaching and learning. Intrinsicly, this means that all learners will need educational opportunities and mainly challenging environments intentionally designed with the goal of fostering knowledge and skills that graduates will need to live successfully in a global and digitally interconnected world (Lai, DiCerbo, Foltz,2017). They recognize collaboration as an important learning outcome and emphasize the need for educators to conceptualize not only more

novel ways of teaching collaboration about also ways of assessing it. Bandura's human agency theory spells out three modes of human agency: individual, collective and proxy. The collective agency plays a much more important role than the other two because it facilitates the pooling together of a wide range of human resources, be they physical, mental or otherwise. In addition, the human differences of people working collaboratively can be turned into opportunities by building values and capabilities of diverse populations. According to The Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, collaborative skills involve working effectively and respectfully with diverse teams, making necessary compromises in order to accomplish a common goal, assume shared responsibility and value the contribution of each member. Stevens and Campion (1994) consider interpersonal and self-management to be cardinal for effective collaboration where interpersonal skills involve conflict resolution, problem-solving and communication. On the other hand, self-management entails goal-setting, monitoring, performance management and providing feedback. According to the International Advisory Board, the new age requires a new curriculum design, one that has well defined goals, requires patience by both teachers and students, involves team play, tracks progress, provides conducive learning environments where learning is personalized, there are immediate consequences for classroom behavior and where information is provided in patterns of varying complexity.

Assessment is an integral part of the teaching learning process. Anything that is not assessed may not be taken seriously by both teachers and students; and of course and there goes the challenge that all must continue to ponder and seek solutions for: how best do we extend the notion of assessment to such complex domains of knowledge and attributes that are exemplified by 21<sup>st</sup> century skills including collaboration and how best do we assess it. While the purpose of this chapter is not to discuss assessment of this rather complex skill, efforts are made to understand how nonviolent pedagogy can be valued as a key modality in the promotion of collaborative skills in both basic and higher levels of learning. Benefits of teaching and learning collaborative skills include better performance by students, interpersonal skills, proactive in problem solving, improved group performance and learning in university programmes (Druskat & Kayes ,2000). Collaborative skills involve and also promote

planning, setting goals, time management, create positive group environment. At the workplace, those who exhibit collaborative skills earn recognition from managers and fellow workmates. Collaborative skills also promote conflict resolution abilities, communication, goal setting and task management. Collaboration is effective in supporting workplace and academic performance, promoting civic engagements and a healthy democracy.

In the modern digital world, mediated interactions happen every day and every hour with peers separated often by great distances across the globe, creating a remarkable shift from traditional face to face realities where more sophisticated interpersonal capabilities assume unprecedented value in the digital age than has been the case hitherto (Dede, 2010). According to Morgesson, Reider & Campion (2005) conflict resolution, goal setting, task coordination and performance management are viewed as more important predictors of team success than social skills or personality parameters. In the global world learning contexts, youths want to have choice and be in control, think differently and take risks as well as be inclusive. The development of their collaborative skills has the power to make these personal, academic as well as career goals attainable.

To achieve the aforementioned goals, the 21<sup>st</sup> century teacher has to play more of a guiding and facilitating role especially with regard to group work. There has been a long standing misconception that group work is synonymous with collaboration. According to Rotherham & Willingham (2010), there is no evidence that more group work will increase students' skills in collaborating. The simple activity of fitting students into groups and assigning tasks to them may not lead to collaborative skills promotion. The authors assert that skills are developed by "noticing what you are doing wrong and formulating strategies to do better", p19. Since collaboration skills are indeed not one but many skills, effective teaching that promotes these skills must consciously and explicitly discuss these skills with students and with very clear guidelines that articulates students' specific roles and actions.

### **What is nonviolence?**

The principle of non-violence also known as non-violent resistance – reflects the use of physical violence in order to achieve social or political change. Often referred to as "the politics of

ordinary people", this form of social struggle has been adopted by mass populations all over the world in campaigns for social justice Sharp (2017, www.un.org). Mahatma Gandhi is one of the world leaders recognized for his inspiration on nonviolent movements on civil rights and social change across the world. His entire life was marked by a strong commitment to his belief in non-violence even under oppressive conditions even when confronted by extremely difficult circumstances. According to Bai and Cohen (2008), violence comes from the split between the body and the mind and between the self and the other. The major thrust of the non-violent theory is that the power of rulers depends on the consent of the population, and that non-violence seeks to undermine such power through withdrawal of the consent and cooperation of the populace ( Horseburgh, 2008). In his review of "The Politics of Nonviolence Action" by Professor Gene Sharp, Horseburgh commented that Sharp was the first to write a book (in 1973) about this subject and that according to the reviewer, he had produced the "fullest and most thorough study of non-violent action" in its extrapolation of the concept of nonviolence. The reviewer, however, noted that Sharp's book was one sided in that it did not consider that violence can be intrapersonal and often times it has nothing to do with an individual's desire to want anything from another individual. He did not look at violence from the point of view of one being their own worst enemy in which case one can self-destruct or turn violent against himself or herself. Zembylas (2008) has examined the issue of school violence and extends the notion of this construct to its emotional basis where apathy, bitterness, disengagement, hatred, anger, rage, humiliation guilt and shame as day to day emotions can be the cause of continued violence in the school environment. The reality, he explains, is that these emotions are not just problems of the student but also the teacher as well. Violence is understood to manifest at various levels and multiple contexts. In the classroom, violence is evident from disruptive behavior and antagonistic verbal sparring ( Chubbuck, 2008). Several tools have been developed to measure nonviolence. The Gadhian Personality Scale, The Teenage Nonviolent Test and The Pacifism Scale are some of these as discussed in Mayton II et al (2009). The authors have concluded that violence is a multi-dimensional construct. The authors have discussed the role of nonviolence and its role as a means of conflict resolution. To teach collaborative skills effectively, nonviolence should

not only be taken into account, it must be openly brought out as a possible barrier in the effort to promote teamwork.

### **Nonviolent Communication**

Collaborative skills cannot be developed without effective communication. In other words, effective communication does play a key role in supporting teams to accomplish their goal. Since violence can detract team processes, it is worthwhile to understand why nonviolence communication is necessary for collaborative skills development. Nonviolent communication is a fundamental quality of any effective nonviolent pedagogy. As an educational methodology, nonviolent communication is associated with Marshall Rosenberg since the early as the 1960's. He later founded the Center for Nonviolent Communication in the United States of America. Nonviolent communication is founded on the belief that all human beings have been created with the capacity for compassion and they only resort to violent strategies to meet their needs if they are not aware of more effective strategies. Many people do not consider the way they speak as violent and yet our personal judgments, passing on to others our views of what is right and wrong and even openly telling others directly or indirectly what we feel is wrong with them, dominating in conversations and interrupting others or entirely ignoring and not acknowledging others all have the potential to carry psychological violence. The language can be a barrier that makes it hard for us to hear others and vice versa and to connect emotionally with them. However, it would be misguided to believe that the problem of violence is in language per se. That is far from the truth. It starts with what is happening inside of us, our specific human or (heart) condition, our outlook to life and issues, our emotions and needs. This means that teachers need to practice nonviolent communication with themselves first because that is where change must first begin.. There are four basic elements of nonviolence communication: observation, feelings, needs, requests (Mayton II, 2009).

Nonviolent communication is now recognized as an educational method whose key goal is to promote compassionate connection with others by improving learners' habits of thought and speaking. Nonviolent communication has been applied in other fields such as business, parenting, mediation, prisons, children's books and others. The concept was the result of Marshall Rosenberg's work to promote peace in schools and organizations in the Southern United States

following effects of long racial segregation and his center was born out of his search for a means to disseminate peacemaking skills. Following his work with civil rights activists, he mediated between rioting students and college administrators. Rosenberg has used nonviolent communication in different peace programmes in conflict zones such as Rwanda, Burundi, Nigeria, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Columbia, Serbia, Croatia, Ireland and Middle East ( Marshall, 2001; Little, 2008). One practitioner in peace education Emily Gaarder, was interviewed on the subject of nonviolent communication and how to practice it in day to day life ( Sullivan ;2007). She has observed that nonviolence communication starts with speech. Nonviolent communication is also known as compassionate and collaborative communication with focus on three aspects that include self-empathy, empathy and honest self expression (Little, 2008).

Emily Gaarder also used the theory of nonviolent communication developed by Marshall Rosenberg to advance an understanding of nonviolent pedagogy. Gaarder defines nonviolent communication as an approach to life that uses the language of feelings and needs to help us connect compassionately with others and ourselves (Sullivan, 2007). The goal of nonviolent communication is on how to modify our language because nonviolence starts in the mouth. Nonviolence communication has to do with treating each person as a human being that deserves dignity. The key goal of such communication is to intentionally reduce conflict and to reduce or entirely eliminate the power struggle ( Chubbuck, 2008). The author also adds that nonviolence is the relational school climate that is achieved as a result of appropriate pedagogies and effective methods of classroom management. Nonviolent communication serves to protect student dignity, reduce authoritarian control and de-escalate conflict (Chubbuck, 2008). Nonviolent communication is believed to spring from the heart and the role of emotions in sustaining or dismantling structures of power, privilege, racism, and oppression ( Zemylyas 2007). He stresses that people, no matter where they are expect specific emotional responses such grief, remorse, compassion and caring. Violence results when the appropriate set of expected responses are withheld from some people on grounds of being accepted as different culturally or in other ways ( Zemylyas, 2008).

### Nonviolent Pedagogy

Collaboration cannot happen in learning environments that do not consciously dissipate any negative effects of violence. In such as case, nonviolence pedagogy would truly not matter. Nonviolent pedagogy entails a curriculum that opens up opportunities for both teachers and students to understand how unjust systems and practices inform our everyday life ( Harris, 1996). Teaching practices ought to promote student voices and allow students to take cognizance of how power experiences can be channeled towards productive purposes. This they can do if teachers encourage them to view truth as a commodity owned by all and yet one where different perspectives should be encouraged and nurtured ( Brantmeier,2010). This author argues that teacher education needs to re-conceptualize the pre-service and in-service curriculum that encompasses a critical pedagogy of nonviolence. Such a curriculum bears great potential and possibilities for creating greater collaboration in schools and ultimately more peaceful societies. In this, teachers and students are exposed to teaching approaches, methods and strategies that enable teachers to avail opportunities to their learners for addressing injustice and also explore alternative non-violent responses.

Baesler and Lauricella (2012) investigated the impact of teaching peace education with focus on assessment of instruction in a nonviolent communication course. The course applied an education peace model that was three pronged. It introduced use of peace role models such as Nelson Mander, Desmond Tutu, Oprah Winfrey and others, provided to students a detailed exploration of what peace means, and also went ahead to ask students to describe how they would apply it everyday life. In their conclusion, the authors state that “ The reliability, validity and efficacy of nonviolent communication and peace course are a poignant response to the call for this new model of education”. Thus they reported the efficacy of nonviolent pedagogy through a nonviolent communication and peace course with Canadian undergraduate students. It revealed an increased recall of peace models, increased scores in intrapersonal, interpersonal, group and global communication contexts. In addition, students also generated more comprehensive definitions of peace. The combination of teaching strategies employed in this study used video presentations, class discussions, social, political and economic peace events, history, role models, readings and

assignments. The course required application of critical thinking and encouraged the need for students to have an open mind.

Bolliger and Wang (2013) have provided their perception of nonviolent education across different cultures and have proposed a pedagogy of nonviolence that can booster student relationships. They see this type of pedagogy as a proactive approach to curbing violence and promoting compassionate relationality. According to them, such pedagogy should focus on 3 aspects: cultivating, enabling nonviolent relationships with and among learners, and creating an environment of nonviolence. They propose a curriculum that includes topics on intercultural education and social justice. The curriculum should also put emphasis on appealing to students’ senses by bringing in pleasant smells, using tender soothing teacher voices and demeanor, gentle music, gentle touch, kind words and smiling faces. This permits students to think, feel and act calmly and respectively and also appreciate the shared peace, joy and friendship (Boliger & Wang ,2013; Wang, 2010). Andrusyk & Andrusyk (2003) have emphasized the need for explicit instruction where the teacher focuses on promoting group listening skills, encouragement of team members, ensuring that disagreements are appropriate and the focus is on building and not tearing down team mates as well as conflict resolution skills. Johnson & Johnson (1990) have provided specific steps for teaching collaborative skills. These are: explaining why these skills are important, displaying key lesson points on a bulletin board, creating a chart that bears the physical as well as verbal actions relating to the skill, role play, group processing and then practice. Explicit teaching means that the skills can be applied both in the classroom and therefore increasing chances of their future application later in life and in the world of work.

In a study of high school students in New Mexico a multidisciplinary violence prevention programme, the researcher sought to find out the role of such a programme in boosting students’ self-esteem and reducing aggressive behavior ( Israel et al 1998). The researcher used an experimental design to introduce school based anti-violence programmes using a public health model. The study revealed that anti-violence programmes had a positive effect in reducing physical and verbal aggression among adolescents. The study, however, had no effect on boosting students’ self esteem. In a different study ( Parker, 2016) investigated the effect of peace building

dialogue in elementary school ( ages 3-9) in order to find out how diverse students especially immigrants felt about nonviolent classroom experiences. Parker looked at peace building education and its benefits which include character building, strengthening values, building empathy, critical and analytical thinking as well as providing opportunities for nationalism and citizenship. Other payoffs include students being able to embrace as well as contest divergent perspectives and classrooms being able to cultivate inclusive spaces for all learners and hence providing conducive environments for effective learning for all.

### CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Nonviolent pedagogy plays a key role in enhancing collaboration. To do this effectively, new kinds of instructional demands have to be placed on the 21<sup>st</sup> century teachers and their students in all parts of the globe. Explicit teaching of these skills stands the best chance of their inculcation in teachers and students alike. Any argument for the teaching of collaborative skills bears great implications for teacher education and teacher professional development, curriculum design and the nature of assessment. This chapter is an attempt to engender greater interest in the field of nonviolent pedagogy and the promotion of collaborative skills in particular.

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