

Education for Peace in the Multi-Cultural Society

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INTRODUCTION

Peace education encompasses the key concepts of education and peace. While it is possible to define education as a process of systematic institutionalized transmission of knowledge and skills, as well as of basic values and norms that are accepted in a certain society, the concept of peace is rather less clearly defined. The understanding of the concept of peace has changed throughout history, and so has its role and importance in the educational system from the very beginning of the institutionalized socialization of children. When discussing the evolution of peace education, however, there have been a few important landmarks in the history that defined its broad aims and purposes. The end of World War I (1914-1918) facilitated the ground for powerful support for the need for international cooperation and understanding and helped instill a desire to incorporate these ideas in a visible form in educational systems. The league of Nations and a number of non-governmental organizations worked in unison on these ideas, especially through the International Institute of the Intellectual cooperation an organization that was the predecessor of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural organization (UNESCO). World War II(1939-1945) ended with millions of victims and the frightening use of atomic weapons against Japan, at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. As a sequel in 1946 UNESCO was founded as an umbrella institution of the United Nations, it was vested with the responsibility of planning, developing and implementing general changes in education according to the international policies of peace and security. The status of this organization further reinforced the acceptance of the principle of the role of education in the development of peace, and accordingly a broad framework was evolved for including and applying the principles of peace in the general world education systems.

The cold war division of the world after World War II and the strategy of the balance of fear between the so called west and east blocks reformulated and redirected the peace efforts. The peace movement began concentrating on stopping the threat of nuclear war and halting the arms race, and encouraging the policy of disarmament. Somewhat parallel to this, the issues of environmental protection and development also found their place in peace education programs. The contemporary socio-political environment (particularly the events in Gujarat, Mumbai in 1990s), the fear of terrorism and the widening gulf between developed and underdeveloped countries has created new challenges for the conceptualization of peace and for the development of the underlying twin principles of responsibility and security.

Looking at the world today any sensitive person feels disheartened and even horrified to see the kind of violent acts being committed by man against man and nature. It is sad to realize that we live in an era of unprecedented violence in the form of terrorism,

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war crimes, injustice, oppression and exploitation amidst a seemingly outward development enjoyed by a few. The majority of mankind lives in stark poverty struggling for bare survival. There is so much disorder and confusion in the present society man has figmented for himself. The saddest part of the story is that this state of disorder and confusion in the society is affecting the children's innocent minds. Children naturally absorb the spirit of violence prevailing in the atmosphere and soon grow and emerge to be the next generation of perpetrators of violence. Therefore the need to nurture peace in the hearts of the children has become an urgent issue to be addressed squarely.

DEVELOPMENT OF PEACE EDUCATION

In tracing the perspectives which inherit the recent development of peace education we find that in the past it has been an integral part of education at all times and in all cultures. Every culture has tended to regard peace as a noble idea to attain. However, with the advent of western secularism at the beginning of the 20th century through the guise of positivist, scientific outlook to education moral and human values including peace were slowly discouraged away from school curricula. Under the ideal of value free positivist and reductionist knowledge the whole education was viewed narrowly as teaching got confined to facts of various subjects.

However, despite such predominant materialistic views, the thinking of such humanist leaders like Rousseau, Henry Thoreau, Tolstoy, Maria Montessori, Swami Vivekanad, Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Annie Beasant and Mahatma Gandhi kept the sense of education alive. With the witness of the horrors of wars there was a reawakening to the need of developing the humanistic side of education. In this context Maria Montessori's loud and tireless reiteration on the need for educating for peace should be mentioned with respect and admiration. At the beginning of the 21st century today we are only rediscovering her vision of peace education which she tried to propagate to the world in 1930's.

Maria Montessori's vision of education provides a meaningful and sound basis for peace education. She looked at education as a tool for building world peace. In her stipulation peace is the guiding principle of man and nature. Any attempt to deviate from this principle will bring about destruction. However, it has never been investigated seriously so far. Peace should be studied as a science identifying and analyzing its direct and indirect complex factors. She also observed that man had neglected and willfully ignored to realize his inner sources of energies. Mastery over the external world alone is inadequate in bringing about a peaceful world. Peace is not only cessation of war. There are many positive qualities of peace. Violence destroys the moral perception so apparent in man. Like Rousseau, Maria believed that man is intrinsically pure by nature. The child's natural innocence has to be preserved from being side tracked or spoilt by society. The child is the promise of mankind. The child has the real vision, a bright little frame of enlightenment that brings us a gift. Constructive education for peace must aim to reform humanity so as to permit the inner development of human personality and bring about a more conscious vision of

the mission of mankind and the present conditions of social life. What we need today is an education that is capable of saving mankind from the present predicament. Such an education basically involves the spiritual development of man and the enhancement of his value as an individual and prepares the young people to understand the time in which they live. At school we must construct, promote and nurture an environment in which children can be actively engaged in learning.

PEACE EDUCATION AND PEACE BUILDING

Peace education is more effective and meaningful when it is adopted and assimilated according to the social and cultural contexts and the needs of a country. It should be enriched by its cultural and spiritual values together with the universal human values. It should be globally relevant. Peace Education could be defined in a number of ways. There is no universally accepted definition as such. Some of the definitions are:

- "Peace education is an attempt to respond to problems of conflict and violence on scales ranging from the global and national to the local and personal. It is about exploring ways of creating more just and sustainable futures." (R.D. LIANG-1978)
- "Peace education is holistic. It embraces the physical, emotional, intellectual and social growth of children within framework deeply rooted in traditional human values. It is based on the philosophy that teaches love compassion, trust, fairness, cooperation and reverence for the human family and all life on our beautiful planet." (FRAN SCHMIDT & ALICE FRIEDMAN- 1988).

Peace education is skill building. It empowers children to be creative and use non destructive ways to settle conflict and to live in harmony with themselves and others. The basic concepts embedded in the above definitions are that peace education is a remedial measure to protect children from falling into the ways of violence in society. It aims at the total development of the child. It tries to inculcate higher human and social values in the mind of the child. In essence it attempts to develop a set of behavioural skills necessary for peaceful living and peace building from which the whole of humanity will benefit. It may be rightly stressed that the two out of the four pillars of education suggested by the Delor's report, namely, Learning to live together and Learning to be are related to peaceful living.

ROLE OF SCHOOLS

Peace education in the broader perspectives set forth by UNICEF refers to the process of promoting the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed to bring about behaviour changes that will enable children, youth and adults to prevent conflict and violence, both overt and structural to resolve conflict peacefully and to create the conditions conducive to peace whether at an intrapersonal, interpersonal, intergroup, national or international levels. Schooling and other educational experiences that reflect UNICEF's approach to peace education should be construed to function as psychological zones of peace, where children are safe from conflict in the community, develop a climate within the school or other learning environment that models peaceful

and rights-responsive behaviour in the relationships between all members of the school community. Teachers, administrators, other staff members, parents and children can demonstrate the principles of equality and non-discrimination in administrative policies and practices, handle conflicts whether between children or between children and adults- in a non-violent manner that respects the rights and dignity of all involved, integrates an understanding of peace, human rights, social justice and global issues throughout the curriculum whenever possible, provides a forum for the explicit discussions of values of peace and social justice, uses teaching and learning methods that promotes participation, cooperation, synergistic problem-solving and respect for differences, provides opportunities for continuous reflections and professional development of all educators in relation to issues of peace, justice and rights.

SOME SPECIFIC TARGETS

In advocating a broad conception for applying peace education and creating a peace culture, it has been observed that schools can organize their ventures to achieve the following results:

- Develop a more humanistic management approach.
- Improve human relations between teacher-student, teacher-teacher, and student-student etc.
- Help develop healthy attitude in students and teachers as well as spirit of cooperation, mutual respect etc.
- Help positive emotional development in students with proactive moves.
- Facilitate socialization through participation in interactive and co-operative learning activities.
- Explore concepts of peace both as state of being and as an active process.
- Improve students' power of self discipline and moral behaviour.
- Develop creativity both in students and teachers.
- Improve standard of quality of teaching and learning.
- Explore a range of different alternative futures, in particular ways of building more just and sustainable world society.
- Help resolve conflicts in ways that will lead towards a less violent and a more just world.
- Help students to develop lively, enquiring minds, the ability to question and argue rationally.
- Instill respect for religious and moral values and tolerance of other races, religion and ways of life.
- Help pupils to understand the world in which they live and the interdependence of individual, groups and nations.

A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

So conceptualized schools can directly benefit by adopting Peace Education. There is ample evidence to show that it improves the quality of teaching and learning, and rigors of self discipline, helps emotional development in children and promotes a

culture of responsive and empathetic mutuality at the level of understandings leading to fulfillment and self actualization. Peace is something everybody wants to have. It is, thus, clear that peace implies more a process than a condition. Mahatma Gandhi a successful social reformist and a non-violent activist forcefully articulated his concern in this regard, "We must be the change we wish to see in the world" So peace building is essentially the activity to obtain peace. It needs lot of strong partners as the balancing or managing factors of different interests and needs, requires respects for all members of the society and the imperatives to be dealt in a just way.

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