

PEACE EDUCATION FROM THE EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

A world marked by extreme poverty, starvation, avoidable diseases, discrimination against minority groups and denial of human rights is a world devoid of peace and human security hence, it breeds anger and generates tension leading to armed conflict and war. The malleable years of youth in schools are crucial. Violence in school settings is a matter for national concern as this reflects the health situation of the nation. In today's contemporary school settings, managing youth violence is no longer considered the sole responsibility of teachers and school administrators. It is an issue that extends beyond the boundaries of individual schools into whole communities. Peace education is concerned with helping learners to develop an awareness of the processes and skills that are necessary for achieving understanding tolerance and good will in the world today. The study would focus on the concepts of Peace, Violence, Peace Education, the importance of Peace education in teaching and learning, some peaceful alternatives for learners, and the initiatives associated to peace education.

Keywords: *Peace, Peace Education, Alternatives, Initiatives*



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1.1 Introduction:

The malleable years of youth in schools are crucial. Violence in school settings is a matter for national concern as this reflects the health situation of the nation. In schools and communities in Africa today brutal and disorderly behaviors are rampant. Even the use of arms such as guns and knives are connected with incidence of violence. Growing public concern for the safety of children at school is not wholly unfounded. In today's contemporary school settings, managing youth violence is no longer considered the sole responsibility of teachers and school administrators. It is an issue that extends beyond the boundaries of individual schools into whole communities. One's definition of peace, and hence one's approach to peace education, is logically interconnected with one's conception of political society, nationally and internationally (Brown, 1992; Doyle, 1997). Thus, Peace and security are facing new challenges that could have negative implications if we do not address them positively. We have paid a high price the lives of millions and millions of people for this culture of war. Now we must build a culture of peace. A peaceful future depends on our everyday acts and gestures. After independence the National Commission of Secondary Education (1952-53)

was a significant landmark in emphasizing character building as the defining goal of education.

1.2 Concepts of Peace

Peace is a broad concept with practical and spiritual connotations. Peace as a concept has received international priorities in United Nations Resolution 53/25 (1998) which proclaimed the period 2001-2010 as the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World. It is a state of inner calm or end of conflict. Peace has been understood as absence of conflict or violence and conversely as the presence of states of mind and of society such as harmony, accord, security and understanding. Webster defines peace “as a state of quiet or tranquility, freedom from disturbance or agitation, calm repose”. In the absence of fundamentals such as tolerance, understanding, empathy, cooperation and respect for the difference in others, there cannot be peace. A world marked by extreme poverty, starvation, avoidable diseases, discrimination against minority groups and denial of human rights is a world devoid of peace and human security hence, it breeds anger and generates tension leading to armed conflict and war. Johan Galtung, a renowned peace theorist and researcher, argues that structural violence occurs when the wealth of affluent nations, groups or individuals is based on the labor and the essential resources drawn from nations, groups and individuals who, as a consequence, are required to live diminished lives of deprivation (Monez, 1973).

The UNICEF ‘Anti-War Agenda’, set out in **The State of the World’s Children 1996**, declares: “...Disputes may be inevitable, but violence is not. To prevent continued cycles of conflict, education must seek to promote peace and tolerance, not fuel hatred and suspicion.”

1.3 What is Peace Education?

Peace education is an umbrella term which encompasses many different but related subjects. This includes human rights studies, conflict resolution and disarmament, social and ecological responsibility **Marcia L. Johnson(1998)**. Peace education is the vital element in the education and it helps the Children to grow and develop as full-fledged human beings.

Peace education is a means and goal of education. Education no doubt can teach children the necessary pro-social skills and preventive practice that will equip young people to cope in the face of fear, uncertainty and danger (Hamburg and Hamburg, 2004).

According to John Dewey “Peace education is grounded in active citizenship, preparing learners for assiduous participation in a democracy, through problem – posing and problem – solving education, and a commitment to transformative action in our societies.”

Dewey(1916) informed peace education through his work on the relationship between education and democracy. According to United Nations Children Education Fund (UNICEF, 1999) peace education is the process of promoting knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed to bring behavior change to enable individuals prevent conflict and violence.

Peace education has to do with preparation on the avoidance and management of vicious conflicts, better human relationship, unity and internal co-operation between the various tribes of the country. Nsirik-Abasi and Nneji (2010) described peace education as those aspects of formal and non-formal education, in school and out-of-school aimed the elimination of groups’ prejudice, stereotypes and hatred which make people prefer war to peace, violence to non-violence, exclusion to cooperation and destruction to construction. Peace education is therefore education for peaceful and non-violent co-existence.

Peace education more so emphasizes the need to draw out the instinct to live peacefully which resides in each individual as a response to the world they live in. These responses have been summed up beautifully by V. Cawagas and T. Swee-Hin (1991) into six categories:

- Dismantling a culture of war
- Living with justice and compassion
- Promoting human rights and responsibility
- Living in harmony with the earth
- Building a culture of respect reconciliation and solidarity
- Cultivating inner peace

To sum it up, “Peace education is the process of promoting knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed to bring about behavior 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, inter-group, national or international level.” (UNICEF).

1.4 Peace Education in Teaching and Learning

Peace education is concerned with helping learners to develop an awareness of the processes and skills that are necessary for achieving understanding tolerance and good will in the world today. Peace education has been practiced in formally by generations of humans who want to

resolve conflicts in ways that do not use deadly force. Peace education seeks to teach the concept of oneness of the human race. Differences are meant to enrich us, not to divide us. There is general acceptance that education must provide the thrust for nurturing values. Students are empty vessels into which knowledge must be poured.

Article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) states: "...the education of the child shall be directed to...the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples..."

"In the classroom, peace education aims to develop skills, attitudes and knowledge with co-operative and participatory learning methods and an environment of tolerance, care and respect. Through dialogue and exploration, teachers and students engage in a journey of shared learning. Students are nurtured and empowered to take responsibility for their own growth and achievement while teachers take care of the well-being of all students. The practice of peace education is an opportunity to promote the total welfare of students, advocate for their just and equitable treatment of youth and promote individual and social responsibility for both educators and learners. Through pedagogy and social action, peace educators demonstrate that there are alternatives to violence." (UNESCO Culture of Peace Global Educators)

Peace education does not aspire to train pupils what to think, but rather how to think critically. Peace education brings together multiple traditions of pedagogy, theories of education and international initiatives for the advancement of human development through learning.

The aim of peace education is perhaps best summarized in the Hague Appeal for peace which states that a culture of its peace will be achieved when citizen of the world:

- Understand global problems
- Have the skills to resolve Conflict – Constructively
- Know and live by international standards of Human rights, gender and racial equality.
- Appreciate cultural diversity
- Respect the integrity of the earth

1.5 Some Peaceful Alternatives for Learners

The peace opportunities latent in the curriculum are maximised when the school atmosphere is imbued with the values and attitudes of peace. Teacher–student interactions,

lesson designs in textbooks, the pedagogic approach, and the total life of the school must all be oriented toward peace. The essential content of peace education varies with time, place, and the particular needs of individuals, groups, and societies. The following alternatives can help the learners to understand peace and give the direction to implement it.

- **Disarmament** - Learners can be introduced to the goal of abolishing war and reducing global armed forces and armaments. It is good for them to see the stupidity of excessive arms and military expenditures and the logic of re-allocating resources toward the fulfillment of people's basic needs (e.g. food, housing, health care and education).
- **Nonviolence**- Learners can study the philosophical and spiritual underpinnings of nonviolence as well as its worth to produce change. They can be introduced with the cases of individuals and groups who have advocated nonviolence as a philosophy and method and can be examined. Some of these are Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Aung San Suu Kyi, Thich Nhat Hanh, Desmond Tutu and Wangari Maathai.
- **Conflict Resolution, Transformation and Prevention** – Students can be taught effective ways of resolving conflicts nonviolently (e.g., collaborative problem solving) and how it can be applied into their lives. They can examine about how a conflict that has been resolved can be transformed into a desirable situation. Ways to prevent conflict can also be explored because as Johan Peace Education: A Pathway to a Culture of Peace 27 Galtung has said, like in the medical field it is better to prevent than “remedy a situation that has gone wrong.”
- **Human Rights** - The learners must have an integral understanding of human rights and reject all forms of repression and discrimination based on beliefs, race, ethnicity, gender and social class. They should learn how to respect the dignity of all especially the weak and powerless.
- **Human Solidarity** - All humans have common basic desires and aspirations and a shared membership in an interdependent human/ global community. We have only one home i.e. planet earth and a common future. Students can learn how to increase inter-religious, inter-cultural and inter-group trust, empathy, respect and cooperation, as well as discourage stereotyping and prejudice.
- **Development Based on Justice** - Learners can be made critically aware of the tragic consequences of structural violence and should learn how a philosophy of

development based on justice is a preferred alternative. They need to identify that development is not economic growth alone but also the impartial sharing of its fruits.

- **Democratization** –Learners need to understand that democracy provides the environment within which people’s fundamental rights, interests and wishes are respected.
- **Sustainable Development** - Learners should recognize the interdependent relationship between humans and the natural environment and understand the changes that are necessary to ensure the well-being of the earth’s ecosystems such that it can continue to meet future and present needs. They need to revive the wisdom of our indigenous peoples who have always respected nature.

1.6 Initiatives associated to Peace Education

The following are some of the initiatives which are associated to peace education

- **Children’s rights/human rights education:** The two are closely linked activities that go together and support each other. Rights cannot be realized without Peace. Ensuring basic rights is essential to bringing about peace. It encourages the growth of skills that enables children to act in ways that support rights, both their own and others’. Rights education includes provisions of international documents such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- **Education for Development:** The term is used in UNICEF to describe an approach to teaching and learning which builds a commitment to global solidarity, peace, acceptance of differences, social justice and environmental awareness in young people (Fountain, 1995). Its aim is to empower children and youth to bring constructive change both locally and globally.
- **Gender training:** Gender conflict is found in societies around the globe, and gender discrimination and conflict is a leading cause of violence (UNICEF ROSA, 1998). Many Gender training initiatives have begun to address the prevention of violence against women and alternative ways to handle gender conflicts. It emphasise the rights of girls and women. The initiatives have an essential perception to add to peace education activities, which sometimes tended to overlook the gender component in violence and conflict resolution.
- **Global education:** A term coined in the 1970s, has been adopted in the UNICEF MENA region.

It binds themes such as the environment and ecology, peace, tolerance, conflict avoidance, personal health, cooperative skills, multiculturalism, comparative views on human values, and human and child rights. It gives priority to active, learner-based teaching methods, peer-learning, problem solving, community participation, and conflict resolution skills. It is values-based and future-oriented (Selby, 1997).

- **Life skills education:** It enables children and young people to translate knowledge, attitudes and values into action. It promotes skills that help children and young people cope with the challenges of everyday life. It promotes life skills such as cooperation, negotiation, communication, decision-making, problem-solving, coping with emotions, self-awareness, empathy, critical and creative thinking, dealing with peer pressure, awareness of risk, assertiveness, and preparation for the world of work (Baldo and Furniss, 1998).
- **Landmine awareness:** UNICEF supports landmine awareness campaigns and educational programmes. It is an aspect of life skills education relating to issues of personal health and safety, rather than issues relating to the resolution and prevention of conflict. It develops skills and promotes behavioural changes that are essential to help children cope safely with situations of armed conflict, and help children deal with the impact of armed conflict.
- **Psychosocial rehabilitation:** UNICEF supports programmes for the psychosocial rehabilitation of children affected by war and violence in a number of countries that have undergone – or are undergoing – armed conflict. They are therapeutic, aims to promote self-expression, coping skills and psychological healing. However, psychosocial rehabilitation programmes complement and support peace education and promote recovery from post-traumatic stress, and help children learn new skills to deal with conflict.

Today, many institutions in our country are working for the promotion of peace, particularly Gandhian ideas of peace, the Gandhi Peace Foundation, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samriti, Gandhian Institute of Studies, and Jaipur Peace Foundation being prominent examples.

1.7 Conclusion

Education for peace has the potential to set in motion the process of growth and change- the change of mindset that is likely to result in positive attitudes and improved

practices, approaches and skills, for living in harmony with oneself and with others. Humans should be aware that waging war is a choice, not a manifest destiny. People who have well-read the consequences of violence, and have reflected on another options would not be easily influenced by propaganda. We need the skills and knowledge to create and nurture peace for individual selves as well as for the world we belong to. Peace education is the one concrete pathway to challenge war. Thus, teaching intended for values is not like teaching any other school subject. It is teaching the learner about how to think regarding something, to reflect, critically evaluate, appreciate one's own values and those of others, build up better communication, enhanced decision-making so that the concepts eventually find their way into behaviours and actions. Attitudes, values and skills cannot be developed by forcing students to memorise words, and also not by impositions. Experiences and opportunities must be set to internalize such attitudes and values, which can be persistent in the long run. Hence, Peace begins with the individual and spreads to the family, to the community, to the nation, and to the global village. For this to happen education has to go beyond the warehousing of information to a celebration of awareness, which is best facilitated through education for peace.

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