

# The Necessity of Peace Education

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Within the field of conflict studies, concepts of debate, nonviolent debate, critical thinking skills curriculum, and fostering the appreciation of diverse perspectives, are interconnected to the field of peace education. As the field of conflict resolution was gaining attention in the 1950s and 1960s, with a heavy emphasis on the rule of law and human rights, scholars like Johan Galtung, in 1969, established the International Peace Research Association (IPRA). Galtung was adamant in the idea that peace needs to be learned, practiced, and reinforced in the educational system. To practice peace or peacebuilding it must be taught at the earliest levels of school for society members to comprehend and practice peace.

Distinguishing between negative peace and positive peace, Galtung asserted that 'positive peace' is a condition where nonviolence, ecological sustainability, and social justice remove the causes of violence. A positive peace curriculum requires both the adoption of a set of beliefs by individuals and the presence of social institutions that provide for an equitable distribution of resources and peaceful resolution of conflicts.

By the mid-1970s the establishment of organizations such as the Stockholm Institute of Peace Research (SIPRI) and the Peace Research Institute of Oslo (PRIO) and the outstanding work of Galtung, Ruth Sivard's publications on military expenditures, and Peter Wallensteen and Karin Axell's works on the costs of the Cold War illustrated how little resources were allocated toward peace education. The Quaker mathematician Lewis Richardson established precedents for tracking and statistically assessing data for comparative research in peace education.

In midst of the 1980s Cold War, conflict researchers were acutely concerned about the threat of nuclear war, interstate conflict, human rights, mass atrocities, and genocide prevention. In this milieu, new research works produced the stage of peace education. For instance, *Education for Peace by a Norwegian* (Brocke-Utne, 1985); *Comprehensive Peace Education* (Reardon, 1988); and *Peace Education* (Harris, 1988). Specifically, Reardon argued that the core values of schooling should be care, concern, and commitment, and key concepts of peace education was about planetary stewardship, inculcating humane relationships, and global citizenship. Professor Harris proposed the importance of peace ed-

ucation to understand violent behaviour, to develop intercultural understanding, to provide for a future orientation, to teach peace as a process, to promote a concept of peace accompanied by social justice, to stimulate a respect for life, and to end violence. Harris was a proponent of a pedagogy based upon cooperative learning, democratic community, moral sensitivity, and critical thinking skills.

During the same time in November 1998 the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted a resolution for the culture of peace and another declaring the year 2000 the International Year for the Culture of Peace and the years 2001-2010 to be the "International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence for the Children of the World." From this mandate UNESCO developed eight areas of action necessary for the transition from a culture of war to a culture of peace. The first of these is "Culture of Peace through Education" which stated that the only one way to fight violence is with nonviolent education.



Peace education takes on different shapes as educators attempt to address different forms of violence in diverse social, cultural, political, developmental contexts. In countries of the global south where the problems of poverty and underdevelopment cause violence, this form of education has often been referred to as “development education” where students learn about different strategies to address problems of structural violence. In Ireland peace education is referred to as “Education for Mutual Understanding,” as Catholic and Protestant peace educators try to use educational strategies to undo centuries of enmity.

While the field of Peace Education as a discipline and field of study is approximately seventy years old, the academic field has yet to be an established field of study in Muslim majority countries. For a variety of complex reasons ranging from the limitations of ministries of education to make impactful change, the professional training and emphasis on the sciences and mathematics, the inability to reform in higher education, the lack of imagination to expand educational disciplines, and even the xenophobic attitudes among ministers of education that the field of peace education was a western construct incompatible with Arab and Muslim majority societies.

#### AIMS OF PEACE EDUCATION:

But what exactly is peace education and what are the aims of the field? Peace educators agree that children need formal training in dealing with variety forms of violence and to move beyond the limited moment of violence with interventions. Teachers can create innovative curricula, extra-curricular activities for students to value nonviolent dialogues, and debates to embrace pluralism as an asset to their communities. These peacebuilding activities address the issues of anger management, social perspective taking, decision making, social problem solving, peer negotiation, conflict management, valuing diversity, social resistance skills, active listening, and effective communication to express oneself clearly and succinctly. This education provides students with peace-making skills that they can use to manage their interpersonal and intrapersonal conflicts.

Perhaps the primary aim of the peace education field is to develop to prepare students to be self-aware and to learn to analyse thinking, which means identifying objectives in thinking, the questions being asked, the information being used, the assumptions being taken for granted, the concepts guiding the thinking, reasoning, logic, and supporting evidence.

Teachers stress the need to learn to assess thinking itself by using intellectual parameters such as clarity, accuracy, depth, breadth, fairness, significance, and relevance. It is the aim to develop intellectual traits, such as intellectual integrity, intellectual humility, intellectual perseverance, empathy, impartiality, comprehension, and an intellectual sense of justice.

Courses are designed and executed with a focus on specific skills, concepts, and stories relating to effective ways to handle cultural differences in conflict and peace building fields. With an emphasis on frameworks, skills and approaches to deal with issues of prejudice, bias, bullying, stereotyping, and ethnocentrism in conflict settings, students engage in interactive exercises, role-plays, real-life case studies, and simulations to learn constructive ways of addressing intercultural encounters with experiential learning methods.

#### A FEW KEY CONCEPTS:

Peace educators are interested in violence prevention to get their students to understand that anger is a normal emotion that can be handled positively. To counter hostile behaviours or the use of violence learned in the broader culture, peace educators believe that the necessity of dealing with violence should utilize alternative narratives, or reframing techniques. Students are taught anger management techniques that help students avoid fights in school and resolve angry disputes in their immediate lives. Acknowledging that images of violence in the mass media are both disturbing and intriguing to young people, and that many of their students live in homes that are violent, it is important to first recognize various forms of violence.

The point of the violence prevention course is to provide young people with alternatives to fighting and thinking that violent force is the primary way to resolve interpersonal and communal conflicts. Teaching students to be peacemakers involves creating a cooperative context that encourages disputants to reach mutually acceptable compromises and not dominate each other. Preventing conflict skills involved recognizing incompatible goals and rising tensions within discussions and role-playing specific methods in deescalating discord with dialogue.

Within Peace education a pedagogy based upon modelling open peaceful democratic classroom practices, discussion, debates, and intense debates. The understanding is that through peace education methods and practices people can develop certain

thoughts and dispositions that will lead to peaceful nonviolent behaviour. Important virtues and dispositions expand upon kindness, tolerance, cooperation, and caring for oneself and for others. While developing such virtues are an important part of peace education, it is not the complete picture. As much as the problems of violence lie in the individual and communities suffering from violent conflict, peace educators advocate people to understand how to live these virtues considering broader social forces and institutions that must be addressed. For example, violence in schools mirrors the violence in society and is exacerbated by the availability of guns, urban and rural poverty, drug and alcohol abuse, domestic abuse- the teaching here is a person can live with virtues of peace despite the existence of institutional violence.

Peace educators use the teaching and learning processes as an act of peacebuilding where students are engaged in modelling and practicing dialogue to emphasize the process allowing for the development and recognition of individuals' voices. In essence, dialogue refers to both a quality of relationship arising, however briefly, between two or more people, and a way of thinking about human affairs highlighting their dialogic qualities.

Fundamentally, every peace educator believes that critical thinking skills is one of the goals of their curriculum. While definitions vary, fostering critical thinking skills is the process of applying reasoned and disciplined thinking to a subject, and is different from the formal transmission of facts and ideas. It involves examining assumptions, identifying hidden values, and assessing evidence to reach conclusions. It is an important element of the peacebuilding curriculum as it helps people understand and resist propaganda or political manipulation.

Among a growing number of researchers there is a consensus to integrate critical thinking across disciplines which can be taught by teachers in various disciplines. It is understood that critical thinking cannot be an abstract philosophical exercise, rather, it needs to be integrated into all curricula. Peace education specialists insist that data reveals that students will thrive as thoughtful good citizens concerned with

the public interest or as global citizens interested in peacebuilding in local communities.

One of the most interesting areas within peace education is to examine, evaluate, and assess their national and global histories critically. They pose questions as to who the authors of history are, how it was recorded, if the information is based upon reliable sources, if there are numerous stories that are unexplored, and if the past needs to be understood with uniformity and without critical reflection. This examination is designed to help students understand how we are shaped by histories based on war, battles, victories, land acquisitions, imperial power, and the struggle between global powers. At the same time, to explore past periods of peace to explore divergent historiographies and narratives.

Cultivating the passion to debate, explore through discussions, critical exchanges as a social learning process, a process that only improves knowledge and skills if only practiced often. Under a thoroughly designed curricula, carefully designed debates are encouraged but students are instructed to identify bias and hatred in arguments. Identifying assumptions of peers, the teachers, and texts are examined; then assumptions are examined for accuracy and context; nonviolent debates and discussions uncover evidence, test generalizations, and identify if examples of evidence are supportive or not. In this manner students learn various methods and styles of debate and critical thinking by teachers modelling them, and repeated practice.

The abovementioned themes sketch out fundamental activities and techniques for debate, dialogue, critical thinking skills to be learned and practiced. The curriculum stresses the importance of teachers modelling debate, dialogue, and critical thinking to demonstrate how it is done effectively and ensure the sequencing is understood properly. Identifying alternative perspectives, self-examination, checking assumptions, and taking informed actions fosters a shared understanding of critical thinking and helps students in various disciplines. It is long overdue for the field of Peace education to be established as an academic study in Muslim majority countries.

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