

NURTURING A CULTURE OF PEACE IN SCHOOL CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

Peace education in classrooms aims at furnishing students with necessary knowledge and attitudes through respectful, tolerant, participatory, and cooperative techniques and methods. Peace education provides the opportunity to improve the social well-being and responsibilities of both teachers and students. The present study was carried out to measure the impact of a peace programme among school children. The value of imparting peace education for a just society with sustainable peace is related through the data collected from students and teachers who participated in this research. The findings show that children and youth have reported change within, in becoming more tolerant, accepting, knowledgeable of the diversity that they co-inhabit in, respecting and willing to know more about others, work for their communities and state. And more significant is the fact that a large number of children are beginning to promote peace by talking about the same with their peers, family and community, by mediating in conflict that they come across in family and friends, by doing social work activities.

Keywords: Culture of Peace, Peace Education, Peace Club, Transformation.

INTRODUCTION:

Conflict has been part and parcel of the North East region since the time India got its independence from the British in 1947 and the gradual reorganization of its states and international borders. The region has been afflicted by conflicts ranging from demand for autonomy to fights over resources. Humanitarian measures like immediate relief after and crisis interventions during conflicts while very important are not enough. There is a growing need in the region for pre and post conflict interventions and trauma healing for a just and sustainable peace and development. As such, there are many Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) ranging from international to national and local working sometimes in isolation and other times in tandem with each other to build peace in the region. Different strategies ranging from advocacy, counseling, capacity building, and mediation to awareness creation are employed for various target groups such as top level to middle level as well as the grass roots level. The purpose of the present study was to examine the impact and relevance of a peace education programme implemented by North East Diocesan Social Service Society (NEDSSS) among children (peace club members) in schools in the states of Nagaland, Manipur and Tripura respectively.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

According to Harris and Morrison (2003), peace education is both a philosophy and a process. The philosophy of peace education teaches an understanding and compassion for life through nonviolence. The process of peace education exposes students to tools to create and maintain a safe and sustainable world. Peace education teaches important skills such as listening, reflecting, problem solving, cooperating and solving conflicts. Momodu (2009) posit that peace education is a behavioural and attitudinal change mechanism which aims at: pre-empting conflict (build-up); preventing conflict outbreaks; resolving conflict and promoting a culture of peace. Oshita (2006) believes that the aim of peace education becomes not just educating for peace but educating for a 'peace capacity'. Peace education is essentially a peace empowerment strategy which mainly equips individuals with the knowledge and skills to prevent and manage conflict at intra/inter-personal or intra/inter-group levels. Salomon (2002) re-echoes that "peace education is unique because it deals with relations between groups, not individuals". By and large, peace is a culture and a peoples' way of life, which can be promoted or propagated through education as a tool. Therefore, the whole essence of peace education is to promote the culture of non-violence as against the culture of violence in responding to conflict between or among individuals and groups.

Peace Education, its contexts, actors, and interpretations have a long and changing history. As a field it consists of several multidisciplinary sub-fields, each with different perspectives and approaches. The concept Peace Education has, both in history and today, been interpreted as an ethic, moral, religious and philosophical matter. In connection to war and peace disciplines like history, political and social sciences have discussed roads to a peaceful society, whilst the development of peace education as skills and competencies for conflict handling has roots in psychological and pedagogical theories (Andersson et al, 2011, p.1). The focus on peace education has increased substantially since the eighties of the last century (Harris, 2008; Thelin, 1996). This trend is widespread, and takes different forms and definitions in different cultures (Harris, 1990). Africa and South America speak of 'development education' and 'human rights education'; while peace education is referred to as 'Gandhian studies' in India. In Northern Europe, peace education is primarily motivated by the high cost of international armaments, and the term 'disarmament education' is often used. The Japanese refer to the atomic bombs that were dropped on their country at the end of WWII; peace education here comes under the title 'A-bomb education'. Peace education in Western Europe also often remembers World War II, as reflected for instance in the term 'remembrance education'. Throughout the world, both in war zones and conflict-free countries, political and educational authorities alike have sought for about three decades to teach peace and tolerance at schools. The underlying idea is always the same: there will be no preparedness for peace without systematic peace education (Wintersteiner, 2010, p.57). Despite the efforts already made and the high level of interest in the issue, the problem remains that peace education has been largely accepted as a sub-set within the study of education rather than as a full fledged discipline. It thus holds a rather unique position among scientific disciplines (Wintersteiner, 2010).

Peace education as a practice in schools is attributed to Maria Montessori, John Dewey and Paulo Freire, among other scholars, though earlier thought on education for peace can be traced back to Comenius, Erasmus and Socrates (Kester, 2010, p.19). Montessori, in her work, sought to foster peace on three inter-related levels: the individual, community and nation, and the global/cosmos. The individual level relates to person-centered awareness of the self, whereas the community level refers to interpersonal relations, and the global level concerns cultural and environmental consciousness at the level of interaction between States and non-State

actors (Montessori, 1949). Dewey, on the other hand, informed peace education through his work on the inter-relationship between education and democracy, stating that one role of education is to foster active citizenship through promoting increased learner participation in processes of democracy; yet, Dewey emphasized that for this to be plausible the education system itself must model democracy in its structures and the human relations it mediates (Dewey, 1916). Harris (2004) divides peace education into five categories: international education, development education, environmental education, human rights education, and conflict resolution education. Curricula in peace education cover a range of topics, including the history and philosophy of peace education (Burns and Aspeslagh, 1996; Harris and Morrison, 2003), the dialectic between 'negative' and 'positive' peace (Galtung, 1969; 1996), gender and militarism (Reardon, 2001), conflict resolution education (Johnson and Johnson, 2006) and the formation of peaceful values in education (Boulding 1988; Toh and Cawagas, 1991). Fundamentally, peace education aims at building the peace capacity of people so that they do not only learn to resolve their conflicts through peaceful dialogue but to also live in peace. It aims at systematically inculcating the culture of peace in the minds of individuals with a view to deconstructing the culture of violence from their minds by equipping them with the knowledge, skills and abilities, which would assist individuals to interact peacefully and to collaborate to achieve collective as well as personal goals (Mishra, 2015, p.49).

METHODOLOGY:

Data was gathered using a mixed-methods approach, triangulating data from qualitative, quantitative and secondary sources.

Sample population: Children and teachers who were programme participants were selected to participate in the process of data gathering. The schools where the peace education activities were conducted were randomly selected. Children within these schools that were in the peace clubs of the interventions were asked to complete a short survey on their knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) related to the key messages. Also Teachers in charge of Peace Clubs were surveyed on similar lines. The details of respondents covered for each state is given in the table below.

Table 1: Profile of Respondents

| | Tripura | Nagaland | Manipur |
|-------------------------------------|---------|----------|---------|
| Questionnaire | | | |
| Number of educational institutions | 4 | 5 | 4 |
| Number of students surveyed | 60 | 47 | 91 |
| Number of teachers surveyed | 6 | 19 | - |
| Focus Group Discussion (FGD) | | | |
| Number of Peace clubs in schools | 4 | 2 | 3 |
| Interview | | | |
| Number of School principals | 4 | 2 | 4 |

198 students from thirteen schools and 25 teachers were surveyed. Questionnaire was administered for both the students and teachers to elicit responses. Focus group discussions and personal interviews were also held with both students and teachers and school principals.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION:

Children find themselves in precarious situations that often lead to escalated conflict with their peers. Conflicts arise in the classroom, lunchroom, library, school bus, playground, while standing in line, and any place where kids gather. During adolescence into the developing stages of puberty, many children act out their emotions in the form of teasing, gossip, and physical aggression. If left unchecked, these same behavioral patterns will transfer over into the teenage years, where stiffer competition exists among peer groups. The inability to resolve conflict without resorting violence is symptomatic of youth's inability to handle confrontation. Teaching youth how to resolve conflict in a peaceful way can help reduce incidents of violence and criminal mischief. Peace education aims to make that a reality (Hart, n.d, para 1).

Table 2: Age of Respondents

| Age | Total number | % |
|--------------------|--------------|----|
| 9 Years or Younger | 1 | 1 |
| 10-12 yrs | 12 | 6 |
| 13-15 | 105 | 53 |
| 15-18 | 43 | 22 |
| 19 or Older | 34 | 17 |

From Table 2, it is clear that the programme has engaged largely with 13 to 18 year old students of High School level and above. This age group of adolescent youth is a time of seeking answers, questioning, thinking, looking for role models, and building opinions and ideology and as such perhaps a right time to influence and ignite their minds.

Table 3: No of Female and Male

| Sex | Total number | % |
|------|--------------|----|
| Girl | 133 | 67 |
| Boy | 63 | 32 |

As seen from table 3, out of 198 students, 99% answered the question out of which 67% were girls and 32% were boys. There seems to be more girls than boys in the programme. The children in the study group are basically from a patriarchal society. The fact that girls are more is interesting because in the larger society, peace is considered to be soft and considered a woman's work. The reason for more girls in the programme could be due to social conditioning that takes place at home. Perhaps this is another area to be studied in depth.

Table 4: Received Education on Peace

| Answer | Total number | % |
|------------|--------------|----|
| Yes | 185 | 93 |
| No | 6 | 3 |
| Don't know | 2 | 1 |

Out of 97% (Table 4) who answered, 93% confirmed that they have received education/sessions on Peace while 3% said no and 1% of the students did not know. More than 70% also confirmed that they received this education as part of been a peace club member in their school. On further asking on the helpfulness of the information received on peace, 57% considered it very helpful, 35% of the students rated it as helpful while the rest consisting of 6% perceived it as somewhat helpful to very unhelpful and the rest 2% did not give any reply. During focus group discussion (FGD), students shared that they have learnt many topics such as conflict resolution skills, environmental pollution, Levels of peace – social, personal and ecological, Basic Human Rights – Right to food, right to life, right to culture and so on, Games/energizers with life skills like team spirit, Leadership – patient, self respect, confidence, good manners, communication skills, how to bring peace in the society, overcoming fear, inner peace, loyalty, energizers, importance of smiling as a peace club member, self control through meditation, ice breaker, peace prayer, meditation, learning and sharing session, peace anthem, action plan evaluation, peace pledge, peace rally, peace garden, peace campaign, how mingle with others, stand in-front of others with confidence, ability to share about peace with friends & family, control anger, cleanliness, obey respect teachers & parents, learnt to do away with sadness, how to resolve conflict, understand each others' problem, how to become a good leader, help those in trouble and how to interact with friends, unity and how to understand problem to solve it etc. Some of the quotes from the students in their words have been;

- Peace club is very helpful to me because it encourages me to do my duty and it also helps me help others
- As a Peace Club member I have learn how to speak with family members, with our friend or may other thing etc.

Table 5: Non Violent Ways of Resolving Conflict

| Which of these according to you are non violent ways of resolving conflict? | Total number | % |
|---|--------------|----|
| Agreements | 54 | 27 |
| Acceptance of Differences | 42 | 21 |
| Protest Rallies | 14 | 7 |
| Mediation | 36 | 18 |
| Silent Rally | 22 | 11 |
| Physical Aggression | 9 | 5 |
| Disregard of Others' Rights | 10 | 5 |
| Other | 2 | 1 |

In order to affirm their learning, question was asked on which of the following in Table 5 were non violent ways of resolving conflict?. There seems to be some confusion among at least 17% of the participants as 7% pointed out protest rally as non violent and another 5% each pointed out physical aggression and disregard of other's rights as non violent. But from the maximum reply, it can be assumed that the children have learnt ways to resolve conflict nonviolently.

Table 6: Handling Conflict

| | Are you able to handle conflict in your daily life, be it among friends, schoolmates, family or community? | | Have you prevented the occurrence of physical violence or spreading racist rumours or threats? | | Have you ever tried to bring agreement between two conflicting groups among friends, family, or community? | |
|------------|--|----|--|----|--|----|
| | Total | % | Total | % | Total number | % |
| Yes | 80 | 40 | 58 | 29 | 92 | 46 |
| No | 15 | 8 | 35 | 18 | 13 | 7 |
| Don't Know | 6 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 1 |

On the question of handling conflict (Table 6) in daily life, 40% said yes, while 8% said no and 6% did not know. 29% said that they have prevented violence, rumours and threats from occurring while the rest who answered were in the negative. On the question of bringing agreement between conflicting groups, 46% of them agreed that they have tried while 8% either said no or did not know. It is deductible from the reply that the peace club members are utilizing their learning.

Table 7: Share Learning with Others

| With whom do you discuss/share your learning on Peace? | Total number | % |
|--|--------------|----|
| Friends | 143 | 72 |
| Peers | 14 | 7 |
| Family | 76 | 38 |
| Neighbours | 22 | 11 |
| Community Leaders | 33 | 17 |
| Other | 14 | 7 |
| Don't know | 3 | 2 |

The children shared their learning (Table 7) with friends, family, neighbours and also with community leaders and others. They are also aware about other tribes (Table 8) living in their own states and have regular interactions (more than 50% said) with them.

Table 8: Awareness and Interaction with Others

| Are you aware of the different tribes and communities that live in your state? | Total Number | % |
|---|--------------|----|
| Yes | 131 | 66 |
| No | 55 | 28 |
| Don't Know | 3 | 2 |
| When was the last time that you had good interaction with someone who is not from your tribe or your community? | | |
| Days Ago | 52 | 26 |
| Weeks Ago | 29 | 15 |
| Months Ago | 29 | 15 |
| Years Ago | 37 | 19 |
| Never had Interaction | 31 | 16 |

Table 9 reveals that the 63% children who are part of the peace programme are taking part in peace and other community services as well. While the rest 29% and 3% said no and did not know. Of those who said yes, they were further asked on what type of activity did they participate and maximum numbers participated in peace celebration, rally and cleanliness drive while tree plantation was another activity participated by 12%. Other activities such as visiting jails, promoting child rights and peace programme in community are in very small percentages.

Table 9: Participation in Peace and Community Service

| Have you been a part of any activity related to peace or community service? | Total number | % |
|---|--------------|----|
| Yes | 125 | 63 |
| No | 57 | 29 |
| Don't Know | 6 | 3 |
| If so, what are these activities? | | |
| Peace Celebration | 51 | 26 |
| Rally | 42 | 21 |
| Poster Campaign | 2 | 1 |
| Tree Plantation | 24 | 12 |
| Cleanliness drive | 41 | 21 |
| Visiting Jail/Orphanage | 5 | 3 |
| Promoting Child Rights | 10 | 5 |
| Giving Counselling | 1 | 1 |
| Peace Programme in Community | 14 | 7 |
| Other | 3 | 2 |

Further, during the focus group discussions (FGDs), the children shared that the following activities were done – peace celebration, speech, sharing of their experiences, singing competition, leading school assembly, cleanliness drive, peace garden and orphanage visit, speech, leading school assembly, cleanliness drive, peace rally. The peace club members discuss about respect, cleanliness, and love, peace and ill effects of bad habits with friends and family. Every Monday, the notice board is arranged with topics on peace.

According to Singh (2015, p. 13), teachers are the most affecting factor in school setting so for peace education. Peace education depends on the teacher's sense of responsibility and responsiveness towards the students... Taking these responsibilities and having the capacities they can sow the seeds of peace among the students. Students are needed to learn the different values for inculcation of Peace among themselves and for a peaceful society... Teachers should shoulder the responsibility and behave in a model way for being ideal for the students to inculcate the right kind of values, attitudes and behaviour. In the line of act as a model, James Baldwin had rightly said 'Children are not good at listening to their elders but they never fail to imitate them'. 25 teachers were surveyed, Out of 76% who rated the quality of peace education, 40 felt that it was good while 20 considered it very good and the rest 16% rated it as average. The rest of 24% did not answer the question. Because of the peace education that was imparted to the students, 72% of the teachers felt that there was change

in the students while 12% did not know and 16% did not answer the question.

One of the teachers shared that the programme is very effective as it is catering largely to weak students. She explained that the Peace Club is one among the many clubs existing in the school. The children who join Peace Club are largely the ones who have not been selected in the other clubs. She said she was very happy to see the change in the confidence and engagement level of the children after joining the Club and thus requested more activities and exposure for them. According to Flower (2015), the strength of the peace clubs lies in equipping them with advice, structure and an alternative group membership. However, the stories do not just explain that they want to join groups, they also explain how this process takes place, through powerful leaders, friendship groups and when the group is fulfilling an un-met need; in particular by boosting their confidence.

CONCLUSION:

Peace education as a practice aims to confront and resist violence to transform societies toward cultures of peace. Peace education focuses both on education *about* peace and education *for* peace while addressing the knowledge, values, skills and behaviors needed to nurture a peace culture. The content of peace education includes knowledge of peace movements, peacemakers, 'negative and positive' peace, direct and indirect violence, peace as an active process, human rights and responsibilities, worldviews and ideologies, non-violent communication, community and dialogue (Kester, 2010, p.8). In conclusion, they have learnt not only on peace and conflict resolution but other important topics such as human rights and other life skills. Children find whatever they have learnt very helpful and shared it with their peer and family. They took up activities to promote peace as well. The teachers themselves have confirmed that change was visible in the peace club members. They also affirmed that more inputs on peace and related topics should be imparted to the children.

Peace education must contribute to giving as many citizens as possible with normal jobs and family lives the opportunity to commit, and not just a few especially dedicated individuals who can 'afford' to commit to peace because of their financial or personal circumstances. Peace activity in everyday life can take many forms. It involves finding out information and the courage to oppose xenophobic talk at school, work or the sports club, or oppose violent fancy concerning the effectiveness of military intervention. The extent to which the capacity for peace, the art of peace and peace activity are harnessed is now becoming clear. What is also becoming clear is the degree of effort required to meet the challenge of peace education ("Why do we need peace education?").

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