Understanding Dialogue: Engaging the Young

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Acknowledgments

This report is based on the proceedings of two workshops that were organized in New Delhi at Bluebells School International and St. Mary’s School on December 8, 2012 and January 19, 2013, respectively. These workshops were part the Hum Kadam: Education for Peace initiative of Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace (WISCOMP) and its partner the Foundation for Academic Excellence and Access (FAEA). We thank the Board members of FAEA for their unwavering support and Prof. V. R. Mehta for mentoring the initiative.

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Background Note

The world in the 21st century is in many respects quite distinct from previous periods in history. While at the macro level, forces of globalization have increasingly blurred borders, triggered modernization and fostered interdependence across the globe, at the societal level, it has spurred community decline, consumerist values, identity crisis and individual isolation. In the wake of fierce competition that globalization has engendered, young people today are burdened with performance pressure and engaged in a perpetual struggle to enhance their employability. What gets lost in this relentless chase are ethics, integrity, and the ability to view people and communities in a web of interdependent relationships, best reflected in the essence of Vasudev Kutumbakam.

Young people living in relatively peaceful areas are largely disconnected from the trauma and upheaval of those living in vulnerable areas or areas affected by violent conflicts. This isolation, frequently combined with lack of communication, gradually nurtures a suspicious attitude towards difference and triggers negative stereotyping of the perceived ‘other’. Over time, rigid views get entrenched, compromising on the formation of an expansive and inclusive identity. By the time the youth are close to adulthood they begin to dichotomize communities into ‘Us versus Them’.

Given this reality, it is important to cultivate a sensibility of tolerance, respect and inclusivity in young minds. This insight formed the basis of the workshops for Youth Leaders—Understanding Dialogue which were organized by WISCOMP as part of the Education for Peace project—Hum Kadam.

The Hum Kadam initiative sought to bring together key segments of the population from Kashmir and New Delhi—identified as youth leaders enrolled at schools and colleges, teachers, and educators—to engage in face-to-face interactions, training in conflict
transformation theory and praxis, and professional training in an effort to foster cooperation and dialogue. Bluebells School International and St. Mary’s School, both in New Delhi were partner institutions in this project.

A day long workshop was conducted at each school as an orientation. The workshop at Bluebells on December 8, 2012 brought together students of grades 8, 9 and 11 and the workshop at St. Mary’s on January 19, 2013 was attended by students of grade 10. The workshops provided students from both schools a space to learn about individuals and communities different from their own and to develop attitudes and behaviors that promote respect for diversity and difference. It engaged the students in both theoretical and practical sessions, with an emphasis on experiential learning. Multiple formats such as film screenings and discussion, role-plays and discussions in small groups were used.

The workshops made an attempt to reach out to young students and explore with them, if differences could be understood in complementary terms instead of being perceived as conflictual. The programme foregrounded the importance of dialogue in this process based on the idea that dialogue provides an opportunity to reflect over differences, nourish a temperament for tolerance and transform conflictual relationships towards more cohesive communities/societies/nations. It propels people to recognize problematic relationships and collectively explore multiple viewpoints through active listening and the vision of an interdependent future. The workshop emphasized the power of effective dialogue to change perceptions and strengthen relationships; to facilitate a culture of active coexistence. Simultaneously, it also aimed at building capacity to equip young students with basic skills to resolve conflicts and cultivate positive links with their immediate environment.

The objective of the workshop was to orient young students to a certain level of sensitivity and knowledge and foster a capacity to
accommodate differences; for future engagement with students at partner institutions in Jammu and Kashmir.

Through various sessions centered around the theme of *Understanding Dialogue* the workshop sought to:

- Provide an understanding of the basic concepts of conflict and peace;
- Discuss the prejudices and stereotypes we harbor against people from different communities;
- Understand the importance of diverse perspectives;
- Build capacity for critical reflection and conscientization; and
- Understand and practice Active listening skills
Proceedings

The workshops opened with ice breakers and warm up exercises. Facilitated by Shreya Jani, Managing Trustee, Standing Together to Enable Peace (STEP) Trust, this session provided the opportunity to lay down some ground rules to make the workshop environment conducive for learning and the interaction a positive one.

Following the introductions, the inaugural session titled “What is Peace” acquainted students with the core concepts of conflict and peace, and provided space to explore their varying connotations. Familiarizing the students with the vocabulary used in peace and conflict studies, Jani explained the various forms in which conflict exists in societies:

- **Overt conflict** – which happens when the parties explicitly use words or actions, violently or non-violently, to express their incompatibility.

- **Latent conflict** – which happens when the incompatibilities are implicit and not expressed openly.\(^1\)

Through a vibrant discussion marked with several illustrations, Jani underscored conflict as a positive phenomenon and a “motor of change”\(^2\). She noted how history was replete with examples which highlight the necessity of acknowledging conflict for initiating constructive social change. In India, clashes between zamindars and poor peasants paved the path for land reforms, while globally, protests by women over unequal rights culminated in women’s suffrage being

\(^1\) Jayne Docherty, “Workshop Handout” (Handouts given at a workshop organized by the Center for Justice and Peacebuilding, Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg, Virginia, June 4 – 14, 2005).

granted in most countries. Thus, conflict allows suppressed issues to surface and be addressed.

Jani further elucidated the concept of conflict by using the example of the parent–child relationship. Till early childhood, children are expected to obey decisions made by their parents unquestioningly. Divergence in thoughts exists, but remains stifled in the fear and perceived powerlessness of a child. The divergence in opinions and repressed conflicting relationships emerge during adolescence, which is generally marked with parents complaining “you are being difficult, stop throwing a tantrum”. Jani explained that these tantrums are an expression of the dissatisfaction with the problematic equation that a child has had with his/her parents over the years. She stressed on the need for children and parents to acknowledge the conflict and engage in a dialogue to foster stronger relationships and renewed understanding. Thus, conflict must be viewed as a “natural phenomenon that creates potential for constructive growth.”

Furthering this basic understanding of conflict, Jani brought attention to the fact that conflict is not an intrinsically positive phenomenon, what determines or brings out the positive potential is ‘how conflict is dealt with’. When conflict is handled constructively, people develop ways to satisfy the needs of all involved through the use of nonviolent tools. The same is handled destructively when people resort to violence to address their needs, and in the process suppress others’ interests and destroy relationships. Thus, she noted, the fundamental concern is not to exterminate all conflicts, but to channel the energy generated by conflicts in a constructive and nonviolent manner, rather than allowing it to move in destructive and violent directions.

Prodding the students to reflect over their understanding of conflict and violence, Jani stressed that conflict is different from violence,

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and that the two cannot be used interchangeably. She furthered this argument by highlighting three basic forms of violence:

- **Direct violence**, which involves physical force, verbal violence and threat to use force. For example, murder, physical assault etc.

- **Structural Violence**, which refers to any oppressive and unequal structure which drastically reduces one’s lifespan and fails to acknowledge the right of all human beings to be equal to one another. For example, lack of healthcare and water supply, poverty, unemployment etc.

- **Cultural Violence** that adversely affects the quality of one’s life and inhibits the optimal realization of one’s potential. For example, lack of education, patriarchy etc.⁴

Having explicated the various forms of violence, Jani shifted focus towards varying conceptions of peace among the students. The students thoughtfully remarked that the term peace would have different meanings for different people. Jani responded by reiterating that the concept of peace was subjective with varying connotations and embraced myriad ideas and activities under its purview. Nudging the students to critically reflect, Jani raised questions over whether peace was a means or an end; a process or a destination. She urged them to recognize that peace was not static, rather it was a “process-structure which was simultaneously dynamic, adaptive, and changing, and yet has a form, purpose, and direction.”⁵

Jani shared that “Peace is not the absence of conflict but the ability of people to deal with it imaginatively.” Hence, imagination and reflection help to check violent energies and allow space for dialogue,

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⁴ Johan Galtung, “Workshop Handout” (Handouts given at the workshop Conflict Transformation: The TRANSCEND Approach held in Manassas, Virginia, November 2002).

⁵ Lederach, *op.cit.*
accommodation of differences and gradual transformation of conflicts.

Motivating the students to serve as agents of peace and social change in their immediate environment, Jani cautioned them against oversimplifying conflicts, especially the ones that pitted groups against one another. Conflict is a complex, multilayered phenomenon and must not be mistaken as being bipolar. Illustrating the layered intricacies of a conflict, she explained that each conflict constituted of several sub-conflicts, rendering it complex and multi-faceted. Thus, those committed to building peace explore and acknowledge varied aspects of a complex reality and engage with a conflict at multiple levels, to bring into focus all its dimensions and implications.

Jani further noted that individuals must critically reflect and analyze an issue from several perspectives rather than deducing hasty conclusions. It is essential to avoid dichotomizing opinions into rigid categories of “yes and no”; acknowledging grey areas as integral to any conflict. Also, it is crucial to have an open mindset that is willing to question preconceived notions and biases, and allow space for
dialogue. Engaging in effective dialogue and active listening brings to surface a multitude of underlying emotions, needs and beliefs. It allows space for empathy and acknowledgment of varied perspectives which can in turn lead to a more holistic understanding.

Involving the students in a deeper analysis of violence and non-violence, Jani used an experiential activity to illustrate the continuum between the two and the varying shades of grey in between. She asked the students to ponder over how they would handle various situations of conflict which could occur in their own lives. What would they do, for example, in situations where their family was threatened? Does it become more difficult to commit to non-violence in such situations? Reflection over these scenarios helped the students to refrain from judging someone who resorts to violence, and also about what their own initial reaction would be in difficult situations. Jani also pointed out that not as many people are trained in non-violence as in violent means (such as in the army) and she explained that Mahatama Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Nelson Mandela all trained and studied extensively, the non-violent methods in order to lead the movements in their respective contexts.
Stressing the importance of “just peace”, Jani cautioned the students against looking for instant remedies and band-aid solutions to conflicts. Rather, one should invest in durable and long-term solutions, which build structures of sustainable peace including vertical and horizontal linkages that are required. Jani explained that peace activities across the society need to be interconnected and resolution of a conflict at the systemic level was contingent upon transformation of the inner self. It is crucial for those who wish to reach out to “the other” to gauge their limitations and constantly dialogue with themselves to be self-aware. Jani concluded the session by summing up the key role of those committed to peacebuilding – ‘acknowledge your inner resources; focus on what you wish to do; reflect over how best you can do it; translate your ideas into action’.

The subsequent session on Silent Dialogue, facilitated by Jani, explored the ambiguity and misperceptions that plague people in the absence of dialogue. She underlined the necessity of dialogue for clarity and harmonious relationships. After dividing the students into smaller groups, Jani screened several video clips which highlighted the present day marginalization of slum dwellers, exploitation of tribal land and forests in the name of development, the beauty of nature and human relationships, and the dangers of disrupting this beauty.6

The students were asked to pen down their thoughts and questions on sheets of papers within their groups and engage in a written dialogue in an atmosphere of complete silence. They could walk around the room and, if they chose, participate in the written dialogues initiated by other groups.

It was noted, that while some students paused to introspect and critically reflect over their understanding of the issue emerging from

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6 The clips were 1) Gaon Chhod ab Nahin 2) New (Improved) Delhi 3) Chand Sooraj and 4) Slide show accompanied by the song Bande.
the video clippings, others eagerly plunged into penning down their thoughts. Responses reflected the diversity of ideas and multitude of interpretations that ensue after a conflict surfaces.

While a few students chose to engage in a written monologue, many others explored their collective understanding of the issue through constant exchange of opinions. It was noted that in the process, some students expressed contradictory opinions on the issues. For example, some advocated extending educational facilities and schools to tribals to increase their awareness and equip them with relevant knowledge to act against state atrocities that encroach on their rights. Contrary to this, others believed that most tribals felt self-sufficient with the knowledge of their indigenous culture, forests and nature and willfully chose to remain distant from formal education. Multiple perceptions emerged and led to differences of opinion. While most groups respectfully agreed to accept the differences and made attempts to elaborate upon their respective stands in the hope of converging at a common point, students of some groups penned down rigid, absolute views, negating other’s opinions. This gave the
facilitators an opportunity to highlight **active listening and communication as essential components of dialogue.**

The *Silent Dialogue* session at both schools elicited some extremely insightful and thought-provoking written inputs from the students. Speaking about the growing tendency to demolish unauthorized colonies by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), home to thousands, one student noted “For development, does the MCD have the right to take away others’ livelihood? Will the demands of ‘most of us’ overshadow the needs of some?” On several occasions, the students unanimously expressed resentment over the rampant corruption that afflicts the government body, leading to lopsided development – “Who decides? Money and power decides.” “While the country is progressing, the poor are regressing.” Displaying keen discernment and introspection, some groups of students shifted the onus of the deplorable plight of poor onto their own burgeoning demands and luxurious lifestyles, and stated “Look at the way we lead our lives, what we consume, what we dream of living like, and then think if it is possible not to displace people to make that dream a reality. Who ultimately is murdering humanity? Our life is a result of their sacrifice.”

A number of the participants wrote in questioning patterns about whether “development” must necessarily destroy ecosystems and the livelihoods of indigenous peoples by asking, for example “Should we then stop developing? Is this what we have to do?” There was one particularly poignant reaction to the experience of watching these film clippings, where a student wrote “There are so many things in the world of which I am unaware.”

Responding to one of the clips that included images of child soldiers, many expressed great concern over children being involved in war and penned down their reflections and analysis of why this occurs. There was a range of statements which reflected the extent of solidarity most students felt with the “other” and taking responsibility for helping others by contemplating change in their own behavior,
for example one participant said, “…I’ll think about who should be fed – my friends who already have so much or…”

Debating about which level of dialogue is most effective in creating change, one student wrote that the general mindset of the country’s citizens is to fight the Pakistanis, and therefore as a priority people’s mindsets must be changed, while another asked if perhaps it is most important first to change the mindset of the political leaders of the country as they influence the masses.

The session thus served to bring home the necessity of reflective capacity to perceive each individual’s contribution to a conflict, and stressed on the need for dialogue to untangle muddled thoughts, inhibit negative stereotyping and initiate holistic understanding and accommodation of varied perspectives.

The session continued into a creative activity on building cultures of peace nonviolently. As an introduction, each student was asked to say the name of his/her favorite superhero. Their answers included fictional characters such as Superman and Batman; a few students named their parents or relatives. Jani explained that she wanted them to think about the fact that many of the popular superheroes use violence which is justified in the name of “doing good.” She asked them to interrogate the idea that ‘ends justify the means’. Within their respective groups, the students were asked to sketch their conception of a super hero/heroine who possessed the ability to build an environment conducive to dialogue and peacebuilding activities through strict adherence to nonviolent strategies. The students collectively innovated and experimented with several ideas and displayed immense ingenuity through their sketches.

One group created ‘Symphony’ as their super heroine who played melodious music to soothe minds of people for a calm dialogue. They stated that the power of music to breakdown walls of hatred and instill an ethos of peace was their motivation. Another set of students came up with the idea of ‘Mirror Man’ who initiated self-
reflection and realization in people. Another group came up with ‘Santa Claus’ as a superhero with the power to fulfill the needs of everyone and thus prevent suffering and fighting over scarcity. Jani pointed out to all the students that simply giving someone what they needed rarely resolved the problems as it involves a sense of charity, quoting the adage that if you ‘give a fish to a man and he eats for a day, but teach him how to fish and he eats for a lifetime.’ Another small group created a Superhero who had the ability to provide a flash of momentary insight to a person who was about to commit a crime against another, to show him/her the adverse repercussions of the crime. Intrigued by this creation, some students raised questions about whether this entailed using force. The creators of the superhero clarified that they were not giving the superhero the power to force change but only a moment of reflection. After this, how the potential criminal chose to use the moment of insight was at his discretion – he may choose to proceed as planned and commit the crime or may decide to change his behavior. The power of choice could still be exercised. This activity was followed by a sequence of role-plays that depicted the power of each super hero/heroine to intervene and cultivate a spirit of peace in situations of conflict.
Thus, through these creative activities Jani highlighted the strength of nonviolent interventions to hinder the development of hostilities and create space for dialogue and understanding.

The Film Screening session that followed these exercises was facilitated by Seema Kakran (Assistant Director, WISCOMP). The session sought to introduce and sensitize the students to the protracted conflict in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). It entailed screening of movie clippings on the intractable conflict which illustrated the different perspectives held by various actors on the issue. The purpose was to orient the students to a certain level of sensitivity and knowledge and foster a capacity to engage with diverse viewpoints, for future engagement with students at partner institutions in J&K.

The students were divided into three groups, each viewing a movie clip from the perspective of one set of actors – the Indian Army, a young Kashmiri boy who is denied a visa to play international football due to his father’s activities as a militant, and the painful separation and helplessness of women whose husbands and sons have disappeared in the conflict ridden Valley since the conflict turned violent in 1989.

The films were followed by a group activity where each group summarized their understanding of the conflict and problematized the issue by presenting various aspects of the conflict. While some sympathized with the tedious and challenging nature of the army’s work and expressed belief in their impartiality while dealing with suspected militants, others refuted this claim and raised concern over the atrocities committed in J&K. Some students shared that security forces were believed to have violated individual rights of citizens with impunity, and had offered no signs of remorse.

In the course of the discussion with the students, Kakran asserted the need to avoid engaging in a ‘blame game’ and oversimplifying the conflict in J&K. As a start, she foregrounded the importance of
carrying out a dispassionate analysis of the origins of the conflict and briefly mapped how the conflict had panned out over the last 65 years. Kakran shed light on the multi-linguistic, religious and cultural diversity in J&K and explained that the demand for Azadi in the state was not monolithic. Thus, it was essential for people to sensitize themselves to the layered intricacies of the conflict before formulating opinions on what the different parties to the conflict need to do.

Through a series of questions the students collectively explored the multiple layers of the conflict in J&K. Prior to watching the video clippings, she encouraged all the students to think critically about the ideas being conveyed in each film/clip and about whose ideas/stands were being portrayed. In the course of the follow-up discussion, she emphasized how each of the actors in the conflict

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7 This was a reference to groups both inside and outside the Kashmir Valley. People of Jammu and Kashmir are not in agreement with each other on how the problem of autonomy or aazadi can be resolved in a manner that is acceptable to all the diverse groups in the state- Buddhists of Ladakh, Shias of Ladakh, Hindus of Jammu, Gujjars and Bakerwals in the state, Kashmiri Pandits who continue to live in the state and those who have migrated out but are still state subjects, diverse groups within the Valley who are against complete azadi.
had a perspective formed on the basis of their lived experience. The students were also asked to reflect on how they would engage with the Kashmiri young people who have a very different lived reality from theirs.

Viewing the conflict in J&K from a gendered perspective, many students expressed concern during the ensuing discussion over the alarming rate of molestation and rape of women. Kakran explained that in most contexts of armed violence, women were vulnerable targets of sexual violence by all sides of armed groups. Rape is a weapon which has been used as a war tactic for centuries. Jani reiterated that since women have traditionally been acknowledged as the repositories of a communities’ honor, rape serves as a means of psychological warfare to humiliate and dishonor the community to defeat. Thus, wars have a differential impact on men and women.

Further responding to the confusion over the exact meaning of a ‘militant’, Kakran dispelled the idea that all militancy was labelled inherently negative. She cited the example of India’s independence struggle when a group of freedom fighters had been labeled as militants, including Bhagat Singh. This labeling changes once the society enters a post-conflict stage and a lot depends on which side is ‘victorious’. It is crucial to look beyond legal definitions or to immediately judge actions as moral or immoral, and instead focus on the larger reality, she noted. One must view militancy as a manifestation of broader systemic issues and focus on the conditions that nurture individuals to resort to violence. This does not mean condoning violence of certain actors or to compromise on justice but to recognize the presenting ‘problem in its context’. For this, one needs to look at fractured relationships, power dynamics and inequitable access to social justice, all falling within the purview of larger systemic/structural problems.

Since some of the students were hesitant to immediately share their opinions after viewing the film clips and tracing the evolution of the conflict with Kakran, Jani asked them to reflect on how they
would react when they met their Kashmiri peers. How could they help their peers to resolve the conflicting situation which had entrapped them all their lives? She encouraged the students that rather than counseling, as one of the students sympathetically suggested they could do, they should give their peers space to express themselves openly – they should try to listen with an open mind and empathize.

Further, Jani encouraged the students to engage with the question of what it means to be ‘an Indian’, pointing out that they often might hear in their homes and classrooms that Kashmiris are wrong and Indians are right. She noted that examining the meaning and process of formation of Indian identity would help them converse more deeply with the young people in Kashmir. She asserted that before forming opinions or blindly interacting with others, it is crucial to look for information and build one’s own perspective. This was what Gandhi said that before acting or opining one must read and digest. Uninformed reactions, which we are all guilty of – such as when we vaguely hear something, make an assumption and quickly post a statement on Facebook – promote hatred rather than understanding.

Some of the reticent students opened up and very candidly spoke about situations where they had seen negative stereotyping lead to such hasty and unexamined reactions. A student commented on a musical show on the Indian television whose purpose was to promote cooperation between India and Pakistan, by bringing together contestants from both countries to sing and perform on a common stage. However, clearly defeating its goal, the judges in the show always fought with each other and Indian contestants engaged in incessantly criticizing the Pakistani contestants and vice versa. While this acrimonious behavior was deliberately scripted to attract audience and increase viewership of the show, it formed negative images of individuals perceived as the ’other’ and allowed social approval for their public denigration. A student described that while engaging in a conversation with someone close to her she expressed her wish that one of the Pakistani singers should win the show
because she thought he was the better performer, and the reaction
she heard was ‘Yes, you’re right, but in my mind he is Pakistani so
he is not better than the Indian singers.’

Another student mentioned that at every instance when she speaks
in favor of Muslims she is questioned whether she is dating a Muslim
boy. One student expressed her bewilderment over the fact that while
no one actually wants to fight, yet fighting continues, and that the
messages transmitted in movies and even from our own parents play
a part in perpetuating this cycle.

At this point, Kakran interjected to share an example of stereotyping
from her own life, which got transformed over the years as she
allowed herself the space to shed the uninformed negativty and
bias and build perspective through acquiring knowledge about the
issue. Her story served to give the participants a sense of hope for
change. It is very important, Kakran emphasized, that we question,
interrogate, and challenge these entrenched stereotypes.

Jani pointed out that while often one’s mind makes the connection
between Pakistan as an Islamic state and an enemy, the students
should speak up when they hear hatred communicated. Unfortunately, she noted, the history of Kashmir can easily start to
sound like a story of Hindus versus Muslims, even when the story is
told very clinically. Jani too encouraged the students to challenge
these notions which lump people together, and to be very conscious
that who is the majority and who a minority changes in different
contexts. She pointed out that in India Muslims are constantly asked
to prove that they are Indian; that when we think of Muslim and
Pakistan as interchangeable we are promoting an idea that India is
homogenous, just as when we say “we” in India we assume we are
talking about Hindus. She said the students need to be careful, to
flag this tendency in conversations, and inform themselves better
about the conflicts and where they stand. They could break down
these stereotypes, for example, by asking: Why are some things and
not others seen as enemy actions? How can we learn to love our
country without hating the other? How can we learn to love India, but not unilaterally – rather we can learn to love while being aware of our deficiencies?

In the following session titled Effective Dialogue, Jani emphasized the significance of dialogue in building bridges of trust and understanding. She underscored the idea that it is unwise to assume the absolute truth of one’s own opinions and negate the value of others’ experiences and views. Engagement in a dialogue brings to the surface a multitude of underlying emotions, needs and beliefs, she noted. Jani asserted that through effective dialogue people are able to understand varied perspectives and embark towards empathy with the views of others. True dialogue helps to develop and elucidate one’s own views through constant reflection, discussion and validation, and together to find probable solutions to issues that lie at the heart of conflicts.

Drawing from some of the responses of the students, Jani first urged them to avoid the tendency to fix blame and talk in third person and using such words as “they, them, people” while discussing an issue. She prompted the students to view individuals and communities in a web of interdependent relationships. Jani further underscored the need to draw connections between the micro (self) and the macro (global environment) levels and connect systemic issues to oneself. She noted that while conflicts are physically restricted to a specific geographical location, their psychological repercussions are spread over a much wider area. For example, it is crucial to reflect over the impact of the conflict in J&K on the mindsets of the residents of Delhi. How does it shape our perception of other communities and ideas of competing nationalisms? What are the stereotypes and biases it engenders?

Alluding towards future interactions with students from different communities, Jani stressed that the students must make a conscious effort to mold an attitude of respect and tolerance for differences. She suggested that at the personal level, we could begin by looking
at our own behavior during the workshop and question if we were according equal respect to all. We must have the sensitivity to perceive and reflect over our own biases to keep them in check.

However, in recognition of the fact that some of the students were hesitant to express their opinions during the discussions, Jani acknowledged the complexity of dialogue by emphasizing that part of it is also taking a position. It’s also a disservice to the cause of resolution of conflict if “you don’t say what you want to say, when the time is right”. She encouraged the students to learn to disengage from their strong emotions, but to keep their humanity alive and speak what they feel.

She cautioned that their Kashmiri peers may assume that Delhi students harbor prejudice, and that therefore the Delhi students would need to ask sincerely for a chance for friendship and an opportunity to prove otherwise. Expanding on the previous discussion about the necessity of study and information-seeking before forming opinions, she brought to the forefront the importance of standing up for those you believe are right, providing the example of White people who stood up as allies in the civil rights struggle in the US and against apartheid in South Africa.

In response, one student asked why one should have to take a position if one does not agree with any of the three defined positions generally taken in the Kashmir conflict. Jani affirmed that the responsibility is not to choose a pre-defined position, but rather to examine the experience of the people, and to examine how basic human rights can be supported even while Kashmiris are trying to figure out what they want for themselves. Kakran also pointed out that though it may seem otherwise, there are some in Kashmir who haven’t taken a stance and are still in the process of exploring what their position should be.

Jani challenged the students to help provide a space for their peers from Kashmir so that then they can determine their future, in an
atmosphere not constantly marked with hostility and mistrust. There is a perception that young people in the Valley have not had the space to express their own opinions. Jani encouraged the students to recognize that as Delhiites they have had that space, and that they can be a friend to their Kashmiri peers who non-judgmentally listens and who assists them in finding their solutions by asking the right questions. At the same time, cautioned Jani, this is not to say that as a friend one should not share one’s difference of opinion.

To provide some clarity despite this complexity, Jani elucidated the difference between debate and dialogue, cautioning the students to avoid the former as it is characterized by rigid views. Dialogue, she noted, is marked with the willingness to listen and reflect, involving flexibility of views and minimizing preconceived notions. She stressed on active listening, which gets reflected through one’s body language and actions, as an important tool for building interpersonal relationships. Jani urged the students to respect differences in opinion which might emerge in the course of a conversation and put forth their views without offending the sentiments of the other. And, while it was good to empathize with others, one must translate this compassion and empathy into action.

Reiterating the learnings of the day, Jani encouraged every student to make a conscious effort to cultivate peaceful links with his/her surroundings. She highlighted that building a culture of peace entails:

- Reducing direct violence
- Upholding human rights at the individual and community levels
- Understanding ecology as an interconnected web of relationships and ensuring its sustenance
- Establishing bridges of trust and respect between different cultures and communities
- Reducing economic disparity by checking one’s pattern of consumption so that it is sustainable
• Building inner peace through constant self-reflection and introspection

Concluding the workshop, Jani asked the students to return home that day with many questions buzzing in their minds. It is only by engaging with the messiness of confusion and muddled thoughts that clarity and progression of knowledge can occur. In the ensuing days, she prompted them to critically reflect and introspect over the ideas shared at the workshop and build a better understanding of the issues discussed. Encouraging them to tread on the path of \textit{swadhyaya}\textsuperscript{8}, Jani urged the students to engage in sensitization and self-learning, problematize conflicts to study their varying layers and dimensions and cultivate a spirit of inner and outer peace.

\textsuperscript{8} \textit{Swadhyaya} literally means study of self for a spiritual quest.
Programme Schedule

Understanding Dialogue
Workshops for Youth Leaders

December 8, 2012, Bluebells School International
&
January 19, 2013, St. Mary’s School

9:00 a.m. – 9:10 a.m. Welcome and Introductions
9:10 a.m. – 9:30 a.m. Ice Breakers
9:30 a.m.– 9:45 a.m. What is Peace?
9:45 a.m. – 11:15 a.m. Silent Dialogue
11:15 a.m. – 11:45 a.m. Lunch
11:45 a.m. – 1:15 p.m. Film Screening and Discussion
1:15 p.m. – 1:45 p.m. Effective Dialogue
1:45 p.m. – 2:00 p.m. Wrap up and Feedback
Profiles of Resource Persons

**Shreya Jani** is the Managing Trustee of Standing Together to Enable Peace (STEP) Trust, one of the few organizations actively working towards educating and training for building a culture of peace. This organization is the force behind Delhi’s annual Peace Festival. Ms. Jani works as a curriculum developer, campaigner, trainer and researcher for various NGOs, government institutions and private schools across India. Her specialization is in the areas of ecology, education and human rights. She holds a Masters’ degree in Peace Education from UN Mandated University of Peace and a Bachelors’ degree in Political Science from Lady Shri Ram College and Bachelors in Education from CIE – University of Delhi.

**Seema Kakran** is Assistant Director, Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace (WISCOMP), an Initiative of the Foundation for Universal Responsibility of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. She holds an M. Phil degree in Political Science from Jawaharlal Nehru University and a Masters’ Degree in Political Science from University of Delhi. Her M.Phil dissertation is titled “Police and Social Violence a Study of Communal Riots in Uttar Pradesh-1981-1990”. Ms. Kakran has also completed a Graduate Certificate in Public Policy Analysis from University of Nebraska- Lincoln. She has previously taught Public Administration, International Relations and Political Theory at colleges in Delhi University and at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln.
Participating Students

**Bluebells School International**

**Eighth Grade:**
- Atieve Wadhwa
- Ghazal Abdullah
- Harshini Rajesh
- Muskaan Bose
- Pulkit Gera
- Sugandh Saneja
- Ushni Dasgupta

**Ninth Grade:**
- Aakrita Kumar
- Aditi Sinha
- Amrita Sood
- Arnav Gupta
- Harina Oberoi
- Janvi Mathur
- Kiki Marcam
- Mugdha
- Payal Arora
- Sanya Kapoor
- Simran Narang
- Tanvi Akhauri
- Tanya Ghai

**Eleventh Grade:**
- Aarshiya Bhatia
- Abhay Sharda
- Ahan Penkar
- Dhwani Mittal
- Drishti Mendiratta
- Manveen Kaur

- Mridul Kataria
- Nikita Nanda
- Pranati Panda
- Rukmani Menga
- Shivansh
- Shruti Gandhi
- Takfique Shoogufan

**St. Mary’s School**

**Tenth Grade:**
- Kush Gaur
- Apoorva Sharma
- Atharva Puranak
- Sneha Arora
- Ekta Sulodia
- Ashmita Phukan
- Mahima Kanojio
- Kunal Ahuja
- Kavya Sharma
- Pratibhu Rawat
- Christie.G. Mathew
- Anmol Anand
- Siddharth Menoki
- Dev Anand
- Naveen Gupta
- Samanpreet Singh
- Deepanshu Joshi
- Tanish Chachra
- Charu Nanda
- Divya Chauhan
- Pooja Sapra
- Jyot Karan Singh
Glimpses