PEACE EDUCATION IN INDIA:
A PROPOSAL

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Abstract

Across the world, Peace Education programs are gaining popularity, as states, international agencies and civil society organizations increasingly recognize the importance of such education. However, with this growing recognition there are increasing contestations over both the broader objectives and the specificities of carrying out peace education programs. This article sketches out the various options that are available, and also looks at how a regional perspective on peace through education can be generated. While such a perspective would have to be sensitive to the history, the current reality and the future needs of the different South Asian states, given the shared cultural practices in South Asia, it may not be an impossible undertaking.

All over the world, a great deal of emphasis is currently being placed upon peace education, as the quest for peace necessitates extensive knowledge and unfailing assiduity. The widespread interest in preparing individuals for peace on earth makes us resort to the teaching-learning process. The inevitability of this emphasis upon education for peace has arisen not only from the need to educate the public opinion of the scourges of war, its prodigality or the danger of total annihilation etc, but also from the necessity to promote understanding, acceptance and friendship among all peoples and nations, and to strengthen respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Learning to make a living is not the sole reason for getting education; there is another, equally important byproduct: learning to make a life, a life that is beneficial, useful and peaceful. After all, humans are social animals; their success in life is largely a matter of successful social relations. Quite evidently, student age is the crucially important period which enriches one's personal life, nurtures social adjustments, fosters friendship and understanding and affects one's whole life

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pattern. Seen from this perspective, one could very well understand the critical necessity of teaching students, youth and young leaders the art of living together, in mutual respect, justice, love and peace.

Alfred North Whitehead calls education "the acquisition of the art of the utilization of knowledge." We need to tell our students, youth and young leaders about our world and its problems. We need to explain to them their part in the solutions. We need to instill in them a genuine appreciation of, and a profound liking towards, our humanitarian traditions and values such as non-violence, tolerance, understanding, cooperation and peace. To quote H.G. Wells, "human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe" and hence, we must educate the youth for peace. However, will any kind of education, given by anybody to anybody under any circumstances, bring about these results? It is highly unlikely.

Peace education itself is as abstruse a notion as peace. Any attempt to define peace education in strict terms, or to typify a set of programs for the purpose of generalization would prove futile, as the most important features that characterize the notion of peace education are many and varied. The aims and objectives, the perspectives of the subject, the working methods and other theoretical and practical approaches are decisive variables. Furthermore, place, period, local environment and other internal variations are major affective components in deciding the kind of peace education, its scope, its nature and the values one would attach to it. Owing to these factors, peace education varies from country to country, and even between regions within one country. However multifarious the approaches are, all educational programs and activities collected under peace education would seek to prepare the students for peace. To put it in a nutshell, peace education sees to the construction of defenses of peace and fences of justice in the minds of the younger generation, and to making the youth hold to peace individually in life.

Peace education covers a wide territory, and has many subsidiaries. Mitsuo Okamoto argues that disarmament education, international education, development education and the like can, by broad definition, be included as programs in peace education. The contents denominated by the various titles like world order education, global education, education for international understanding, education for justice, ecological education etc., have been categorized by Okamoto into four types of peace education.[1] The first sees peace education as criticism of war. The basic view here is that peace is the absence of war (negative peace). Content of this type includes teaching concerning the legacy of war experience, a scientific explanation of the

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[1] Mitsuo Okamoto, "Peace Education around the World," *Treatises*, *51*, March 1982, pp.230-42.

causes of war and conditions of peace, the promotion of international understanding as a preventive to war, etc. The second type considers peace education as liberation. Here, a new concept of peace, positive peace (which is defined as that social condition characterized by economic independence, a stable order, social justice, human rights and welfare), is presupposed. Liberation from poverty, ignorance, discrimination and oppression etc. is seen as the objective goal for peace education here.

The third type regards peace education as a learning process. In this type, peace education is grasped as a learning process towards inter-personal maturity on the basis of the unity between theory and practice on the one hand, and a critical understanding of history and society on the other. The fourth type holds peace education as life-style movements: it rests upon the realization that warfare and war preparations are intimately tied to the fact that the over-production and extravagance of the nations at the center have been gained at the expense of the wealth and development of nations at the periphery. Here, we can refer to a standard of values emphasizing a simple life, human scale, self-determination, ecological awareness and personal growth.

Disarmament education is a major development in the field of peace education. It implies education both for and about disarmament. All who engage in education or communication may contribute to disarmament education by being aware and creating an awareness of the factors underlying the production and acquisition of arms, of the social, political, economic and cultural repercussions of the arms race, and of the grave danger, to the survival of humanity, of the existence and potential use of nuclear weapons.[2] Development education explores development issues and focuses on the development process. Obviously, the content of development education in a developing country like India is entirely different from that of a developed country. Given the present situation in India, creating a deeper consciousness and awareness of our development problems among our students, and designing programs of personal involvement in development activities will open up new vistas in our development process. We can also find a very strong correlation between development education and environmental education.

The wider view of the meaning of peace gives rise to several innovations in the domain of peace education, viz. the teaching of human rights and fundamental freedoms, education for international understanding, education about the UN, its

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[2] World Congress on Disarmament Education, Report and Final Document (SS/MD/35; Paris, UNESCO, 9-13 June, 1980), p.8.

other non-formal peace education programs, such as the UN students' association, UNESCO clubs, UNESCO Associated Schools Project and so forth. Both the conceptual and the practical approaches must be quite conspicuously delineated. Having developed a theoretical framework and drawn up policy prescriptions for carrying out peace education programs and activities, we should attend to curriculum change. Indeed, peace education demands the modification of the existing educational system, rather than mere expansion of it.

In the case of India, although caste oppression, untouchability, gender discrimination and other cruelties existed (and continue to exist), the culture has been marked by acceptance, catholicity and an innate inclusiveness which refuses to be taken away by doctrinal divergences. All these factors have facilitated the commingling and constant cultural exchanges of tribes, races, religions and ethnic groups with grave doctrinal, philosophical and ideological differences.

Islam, which came to conquer, compromised and became Indianized in the form of Sufism, and Islam influenced Hindu reformation thoughts of the nineteenth century. Indian culture, characterized by a profound understanding of the nature of humans and their relations with other beings and the universe, is absorbing all the essentials in the Western scientific civilization, and the inherent Europeanism in it has made it possible to understand the Christian culture. This ancient culture of India was taken to many contiguous lands in Asia. When improved means of communication like the printing press and the rail road were about to hasten cultural communication, the advent of political changes and aspirations, the movement for independence, fears of dominance and dependence and all such sorts of influences gave rise to an insistence on cultural independence and actual divide. The South Asian scene, which was once described as a 'harmony of contrasts', gave a different picture. The contrasts with strong political and psychological undercurrents became violent and caused recurrent divisions.

Recently, however, there has been a rejuvenated will to see harmony through regional cooperation efforts, and bilateral transactions and dialogues. After all, there are many cross-cutting alliances and allegiances. One of the main philosophic-religious schools of Indian culture, Buddhism, reigns supreme in Sri Lanka, where the minority Tamils share their language and religion with the people of Tamil Nadu in India. Besides the Tamils, there are other 'language-culture' groups represented by the Urdu-speakers in Pakistan and India, Bengali-speakers in Bangladesh and West Bengal (India), and Sindhi, Punjabi and Nepali speakers across the borders of Pakistan, India and Nepal. If Pakistan, Bangladesh, or the Maldives claims a preponderance of Islam, India too possesses eminence in Islamic culture as it has

the second largest Muslim population in the world. Signaling India's unique identity, Hinduism and Buddhism offer a basis of understanding with the Himalayan kingdoms of Nepal and Bhutan.

Furthermore, there is ample scope to define commonalities on the foundations of philosophy, ethics and religion, literature, theater, music, dancing, painting, sculpture, architecture and even minor arts such as wood-carving, copper and cloisonne work, carpet making, earthenware etc. The wind and the limbs, the brush and the chisel, the trowel, the pen and the very spirit itself strengthen the fabric of the rich cultural milieu of South Asia with some basic character – emphasis on melody in music, traditional and stylized form in dance, free variations in painting, monumentalism in sculpture, lyricism in poems, and realism in stories. Religious fervor, fervent wedlock, strong affinity to family, respect for elders, and a host of other cultural habits and customs, too, contribute to the spinning of the regional cultural web. In spite of all these, South Asian countries cannot be simply lumped together culturally; it is even less likely, under the present circumstances marked by divided politics, diverse allegiances, differing perspectives and cultural policies etc. Maybe a good compromise would be engaging in peace education activities in one's country without overlooking the larger regional backdrop.

The peace education we plan should be carefully adapted in kind, in amount and in distribution. The major point we have to reckon with, while deciding the quality of teaching to be given, is to understand the subcultures of India as a prerequisite to develop world-mindedness. It is highly difficult to specify the exact amount of peace education. But it is worth taking note of some of the basic questions in distribution. First, too few teachers are capable of meeting the requirements and values dictated by peace education which are crucial for favorably affecting the awareness and behavior of young minds. Second, a trite description and vague discussion will prove as useless as mere cramming up details, unless a solution is specifically mentioned and the means of implementation are spelt out. Third, the form and content of peace education is quite unique and so it does not go with conventional treatment. Evaluation, for example, is a rather difficult process as the teaching aims at the essence of individuals. There are many more related things which demand our prudent concern.

It is important to remember that peace education is not an additional academic subject we add to the existing system. Instead, it is the general orientation that we introduce in the existing subjects, textbooks and teacher discourses. For instance, the Sociology textbooks could underscore the fact that peaceful coexistence is an objective requirement for peaceful development, and vice versa. In the Physics

textbooks, emphasis could be laid on the need to fight for a ban on nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and international agreements in this field. Biology books could explain, among other things, the deadly effects of exposure to radioactivity on human beings. Needless to say, one who wills the end wills the means. Though international comparisons are difficult, general lessons and indicative suggestions can be taken from international experiences also.

The challenge for educators all over the globe is to choose between going ahead with the present effete educational system, or preparing our younger generation for the kind of life each and every one of us aspires towards. To use Swami Vivekananda's categorization, should we teach them just 'to know' or 'to be'?