

Connecting Peace and Pedagogy in Pakistan

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Introduction

Climate change, pandemics, and protracted conflicts: the world seems to be teeming with more problems than humanity can handle. Most of these problems have been caused by humanity itself. While such dissensions pose significant threats, the number of complex conflicts continues to rise (Escola, 2021). Realizing that most of these conflicts stem from our ways of thinking and being, the global community has committed to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to address existing challenges and deal more productively with new ones. SDG 4 (i.e., Quality Education) is one of this United Nations-led initiative's most significant global goals. The Education 2030 vision under United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is a vehicle for this, which aims to educate future generations with the skills and knowledge requisite for sustainable living. It thus aims to incur sustainable peace and development through education. To this end, national educational policies and curricula reform have become important indicators of achieving the sustainable development goal of quality education (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], n.d.).

Curricula are now modeled to promote Peace Education (PE) and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). Both approaches attempt to build a *culture of peace* through holistic education. The culture of peace aims to promote peace by realizing cognitive, behavioral, and social transformations in humans through learning. Human transformation — both at individual and structural levels — is instrumental for broader conflict transformation (UNESCO, 2019). Hence, peace education explicitly promotes a *culture of peace* as part of the wider conflict transformation praxes (Sinclair, 2013)². Such practices are indeed vital in the case of Pakistan, where multiple cultures come together precariously in an overarching *culture of conflict* and intolerance.

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² It must be acknowledged at the outset that adopting a (rigid) universal definition of peace, education, or both poses the risk of exclusion. Yet any attempt to explore the subject must take such definitions as the bare minimum point for the departure.

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Pakistan has also made an effort to incorporate peace education into the national curriculum. Adherence to the SDGs and national policy has prompted the development of the Single National Curriculum (SNC), which aims to provide standardized education to improve the nation's human resources, and its potential to meet present and future demands (Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training [MOFEPT], n.d.). With the deadline for these policy commitments less than a decade away, reviewing the progress thus far is prudent. In addition to performing this task, this essay adds to the existing literature on peace education by exploring how context-specific efforts (in Pakistan) can affect conflict transformation. It focuses on *conscientization*, a process key to conflict transformation approaches. Specifically, it focuses on how the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) curriculum has incorporated this process and embedded core peace education values. Hence it situates the national efforts on the broader peace education praxes and explores the potential for conflict transformation through the discursive transformation of individuals and structures in conflict.

Conflict, Conscientization and Conflict Transformation

Conflict remains an inevitable part of the human condition. Several conflicts plague the world at the moment, with new ones emerging every other day. Additionally, such conflicts are becoming increasingly complex beyond the standard models of symmetric conflicts (United Nations [UN], n.d.; also Azar, 1990). While acknowledging such dismal facts, peace and conflict literature also points to the possibility of conflict transformation. Such conflict transformation is quintessentially about changing the dynamics that breed conflict. An important aspect of this is incurring transformations within the individuals and structures involved in the conflict. By accumulating at the broader level, these make up the cultures that allow or exacerbate conflict (Botes, 2003).

This notion of enacting conflict transformation through cultural transformation highlights the importance of pedagogical discourses. It is posited that peace education can encourage the enculturation of peaceful values through conscientization (see Montero, 2011). This is essentially a process of developing the kind of consciousness through which individuals can better respond to conflict. As part of conflict transformation, conscientization targets aggressive assumptions, beliefs, and behaviors directed at the self and others. It foregrounds parochial language, which contributes to different forms of cultural violence by encouraging such attitudes as xenophobia, racism, and intolerance. In its stead, conscientization promotes more constructive ways of thinking by developing a consciousness of one's own language and accompanying beliefs. It posits that despite the difference of opinions and "incompatibility of goals", individuals and structures (in conflict) can develop the ability for constructive communication (Galtung, 1996, p.32; Webel & Khaydari, 2015).

Peace, Education and the Culture of Peace

Peace education is defined broadly as education about human rights, environmental protection, and resilience to violence. It addresses ethical, ecological, and economic issues to sociopolitical, ethnic and religious spheres (Harris, 2008; Kester, 2012). The leading international body promoting peace education, UNESCO, aims to instrumentalize peace education to build *a culture of peace*. The culture of peace is envisioned as enabling the internalization of nonviolence from the individual (micro)

to the global (macro) level (UN, n.d.). Peace education is crucial in promoting such a culture, which directs the development of individuals' personalities towards respect, understanding, and tolerance for all. Thus peace education, as envisioned under the UN, consists of capacity-building for responding to discord in nondestructive ways (UNESCO, 2008) and leveraging human transformation as a means to conflict transformation (UNESCO, 2019).

Accordingly, the literature argues that such capacity building must be based on a holistic approach that develops dynamic potential in the learners to see the *other* in a more humane and tolerable light (Shapiro, 2015). Page (2008), for instance, suggests that peace education may be viewed as a scrutiny of the results of individual and collective in/actions. Peace education, therefore, must enable cognition of underlying values and attitudes that lead to certain behaviors in societies (p.185). This is further supported by literature illustrating that in certain contexts, participant identity and collective narratives interact to pose significant resistance to untailored peace education initiatives. Here peace education must strive to influence strongly-held collective narratives and deeply embedded values (Salomon, 2006). Peace education thus requires context-specificity to challenge existing *cultures of conflict* based on complex psychosocial orientations and belief systems (Worchel, 2005) to equip individuals (as products and producers of culture) with more nuanced ways of thinking.

Such concerns are indeed vital in the case of Pakistan, where multiple cultures come together precariously to produce an overarching *culture of conflict*. Despite existing legal safeguards, the required social change has not followed suit. Growing intolerance and wanton violence against the vulnerable have taken firm roots in the country; children, women and minorities are some of the usual victims of most violent incidents (Alavi, 1989; Hafeez, 2021; Nekokara, 2021). Peace education — through the common discourse of the national curriculum — can thus be instrumentalized for enacting social change in such a violence-prone culture. Embedding a process of constant conscientization can help replace negative and parochial beliefs with unaffected ways of thinking, which materialize the possibility of positive cultural *peace* (Galtung, 1996, p.32). Such positive (cultural) peace legitimizes peace in place of violence by influencing actors and structures at the very foundational levels (Jäger, 2015).

Peace Education in Pakistan

Here it must be noted that peace education efforts in Pakistan are not a novel phenomenon. Several indigenous and international peace education programs have been active in the country (Saeed, 2016; Zainab et al., 2021). Yet most of these programs have failed to drive a concerted, sustainable approach to peace education. This is largely because of the disconnect between such programs at the national level. The lack of public trust also poses a significant challenge.

Additionally, the presence of three parallel education systems in the country further challenges continuity and sustainability (Ahmed, 2017). The SNC has thus come at an opportune time to fill such gaps by creating a unified front to the challenges of violence and conflict at the ideological level. The SNC (guided by the SDG 4 alongside other goals) aspires to inculcate values of “respect and appreciation” (MOFEPT, n.d.), which are vital to combat the growing intolerance in the country, by connecting conflict transformation efforts to Pakistan’s unique context.

Key Arguments and Concluding Remarks

The findings illustrate that the ECCE does indeed embed the process of conscientization in its content. This is achieved through a focus on *competencies* that aim to build self-awareness in the children through personal, social, and emotional interventions (Early Childhood Care and Education [ECCE] Grade Pre-1, 2020, p.20). Specifically, learning about the similarities and differences (in religion, culture, and language) between people is inculcated (ECCE Grade Pre-1, 2020, pp. 21-22). Concomitantly, values of respect and tolerance for such differences and similarities are incorporated. The ECCE encourages the use of appropriate language and cooperative activities to teach peaceful coexistence (ECCE Grade Pre-1, 2020, p.24). This constitutes a major share of personal and interpersonal competencies (ECCE Grade Pre-1, 2020). Under these competencies, skills such as *recognizing, respecting, and associating* are developed; correspondingly, it teaches constructive conflict resolution through the use of dialogue and *turn-taking*. It addresses the ecological dimension of learning under the “world around us” (ECCE, 2020, p.38), focusing on understanding other living and non-living beings. It further teaches responsible behavior towards all living and non-living things (ECCE Grade Pre-1, 2020, p.39).

These competencies teach tolerance and communication with others. Meaningful conflict transformation in Pakistan requires dialogue and communication to expose and address complex psychosocial orientations and belief systems. The ECCE has incorporated these skills into its syllabus. Introducing and maintaining these skills throughout the learners’ lives can become a powerful discursive tool for both human transformation and conflict transformation.

The ECCE has demonstrated the required comprehensiveness in its content by building competencies across the three important dimensions of personal, interpersonal, and ecological learning. Yet its implementation method will be decisive in bringing about any desired changes. What remains to be seen is how the ECCE can act against the existing social indoctrination systems and how educators can instill these competencies. The complexity of current and coming conflicts demonstrates the pervasiveness of discord not just as a relegated reality to peace but also as a cohabiting constant, especially in the case of Pakistan. While a curriculum teaching peace cannot be the complete cure for an increasingly intolerant society, it can at least become a starting point for some form of emancipation.

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