# HOLISTICUNDERSTANDING PEACE EDUCATION: AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

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## INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the most powerful tools that we have to make this shift towards peace."Social conflict is a phenomenon of human creation, located in relationships."[1] That is people are actively involved in creating situations and interactions that they experience as conflict. These interactions are rooted in people's history, experiences, perception, interpretations, and expressions of their "realities". This intern is deeply linked to people's "common sense" or understanding and accumulated experiences, which allow them to react or respond to a conflict. Social conflict therefore is a "socially constructed cultural event".[2] It emerges through an interactive process based on a search for and creation of shared meaning. Shared knowledge and a group's ability to name the world and their reality are pivotal to its manifestation. In short, conflict leads to transforming and renaming of the world and its realities and thus not only is it evitable, but a necessary force for a dynamic society. If conflict leads to evolution of thought and action and is a positive, inevitable force in the world, then what is needed is not the mere reduction or conclusion of conflicts but innovative mechanisms and interactions to transform conflicts into positive forces of social change, which education systems can help build.

- The epistemological root of the word education is from the Latin word "educare" which means to draw or lead out. Thus education seeks to lead out the knowledge within each individual. Peace education more so emphasizes the need to draw out the instinct to live peacefully which resides in each individual as a response to the world they live in. These responses have been summed up beautifully by V. Cawagas and T. Swee-Hin (1991) into six categories:
- Dismantling a culture of war
- Living with justice and compassion
- Promoting human rights and responsibility

- Living in harmony with the earth
- Building a culture of respect reconciliation and solidarity
- Cultivating inner peace

To sum it up, "Peace education is the process of promoting knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed to bring about behavior changes that will enable children, youth and adults to prevent conflict and violence, both overt and structural; to resolve conflict peacefully; and to create the conditions conducive to peace, whether at an intrapersonal, interpersonal, inter-group, national or international level." (UNICEF).

To understand the goal of peace education we need to understand the meaning of culture of peace. According to Groff and Smoker (2003), there are six dimensions to the culture of peace:

**Absence of war** – This implies that conflicts between and within states that are wars and civil wars must end for peace to prevail. Thus, it argues that killing has to stop for people to get more out of life and is a necessary prerequisite to create a peaceful society.

**Balance of power** – Peace is a dynamic and delict balance of power. It is a "balance involving political, social, cultural and technological factors, and that war occurred when this balance broke down".

Negative peace and positive peace – Drawing from Galtung'sunderstanding of peace as both absence of physical violence (negative peace) and structural violence (positive peace).  This aspect insists the culture of peace to be one promoting both negative and positive peace.

**Feminist peace** – Pushing the limits of positive and negative peace, Brock-Utne includes violence against an individual as an important aspect of culture of peace. Thus "the new definition of peace then included not only the abolition of macro level organized violence, such as war, but also doing away with micro-level unorganized violence, such as rape in war or in the home" (Groff & Smoker).

 **Holistic peace** – Highlights the need for peace not only between human beings, but peace with the environment as well. This shifts the focus of peace from a merely anthropocentric concept to include all species in the world and peace with nature.  "Peace with the environment is seen as central for this type of holistic peace theory, where human beings are seen as one of many species inhabiting the earth, and the fate of the planet is seen as the most important goal" (Groff & Smoker).

**Holistic inner and outer peace**– This has been the latest addition to the concept of culture of peace as there has been much trepidation to add this sometimes controversial aspect to the field of peace studies. Though secularist may find it problematic, it is also recognised that peace without this aspect cannot exists. Many thinkers also believe that the world is the reflection of a person's inner being. Accordingly, this aspect is of great importance for building a culture of peace.

**The Five Principals of Peace Education in India:**

1) **Conscientisation and critical pedagogy**: freedom from the colonial legacy and banking system of education. According to Freire, oppressed (excluded) people need to develop

critical consciousness in order to challenge the ideas of dominant groups who are their oppressors. They need to be able to critically assess the kinds of ideas, contexts and relationships which are usually 'taken for granted' or accepted as inevitable, in order to question the root causes of their oppression .

2) **Systems thinking**:. The world is reduced to an inert, non-living being to be acted upon. Not denying the importance of the scientific method, one has to question its relevance and move towards a systems approach if we wish to create an education system, which is more capable of transforming conflict.

It is important to see analytical thinking and systems thinking as complementary rather than as a contradictory or an oppositional way of thinking.

Systems thinking also come with its assumption:

- It incorporates logic
- It assumes a living universe
- It values ecological thinking
- It recognises that we live in a participatory universe
- It is at the same time both local and global
- It honours the long-range view

The works of NGOs like Society For Integrated Development of the Himalayas (SIDH) in partnership with the SarvaShikshaAbhyan in Uttarancha, India and Urmul Trust in Rajasthan, India are powerful models for implementing the above. Encouraging non-formal centres of education and making education curriculum deeply linked to local knowledge not only increases student participation but also makes for a more responsive and community based learning process.

3) **Compassion, cooperation and co-existence:** Challenging competition as a tool to motivate learners. These values also challenge biases, suspicion of the "other" and man's constant conquest over nature drawing deeply from the Buddhist principle of Universal Responsibility and the Gandhian principle of Sanmati.  For too long, the fear of "communal" politics has led to an apprehension of using the existing cultural knowledge in this region which lends themselves to peace and social change.

4) **Curriculum, context and dialogical learning**: questions power, politics and pedagogy. What we teach is as important as how we teach. The content or the subject matter then becomes the lens from which you approach and view the given situation. Thus both the content and the method have to work hand in hand. Curriculum for pedagogy for peace has to be context sensitive and based on dialogical method of teaching which makes it dynamic and constantly being defined and redefined in the light of context. Curriculum has to free itself from prejudices at the same time not be apolitical and removed from reality.

5) **Contemplation and self-knowledge :** This aspect is normally missing or at best given lip

service to at schools. Education as viewed by Gandhi has to have all three components, that which is for the mind, the body and the spirit. Therefore in his NaiTalim model for education, he has tried to break the hierarchy of knowledge, which puts mind above body and spirit. Self-knowledge is the fulcrum or anchor, which helps us build relationships in the world. Most educators and teachers in this region have emphasised its importance in the creative process and learning. It is the basis of action, which is based in thought and reflection rather than reaction. Thus from Krishnamurti to Aurobindo and Tagore, all have emphasised its importance, especially during the formative years of a child's learning process. However, this aspect is normally restricted to what is known as "holistic school". The Krishanmurti Foundation India and the "new progressive schools" in the metros are examples of this model. The lack of encouragement to this aspect cannot be justified on the basis of lack of finances or infrastructure to do it. It is merely matter of priorities of the education system, which is geared towards building human capital. This needs to be challenged, for only a people anchored in themselves are capable of creating something new rather than just human being programmed to solve problems.

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