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Peace Education in the Lebanese Curriculum

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Abstract
This paper discusses the necessity of integrating peace education in the Lebanese Curriculum. Lebanon has at least 18 different religions and 19 different Political parties. The conflicts within religious and political groups have created tension that has shaped the recent political history. This has profound effects on Lebanon's economic, social, environmental and political performances. The conflicts that have existed amongst its various populations due to many factors cannot be resolved peacefully unless the young generation is educated and trained to resolve conflicts in a peaceful manner. This raises the need to put into practice education programs that introduce peace education into schools either as a separate curriculum or integrated into the curricula of other subjects.

Keywords: *Peace; education; Lebanon; curriculum.*

Introduction

Throughout history, the world has been through different devastating times. Many wars have killed millions of people. Many diseases have, so far, proven to be stronger than humans. Many natural disasters have caused the death of thousands of people and left so many others homeless. A few powerful people have deprived the citizens of many countries, sometimes including their own, from their rights as human beings and made them go through unbearable agony. The sad thing is that the violence of human beings towards each other and their violations towards nature are the major causes of almost all of the above mentioned problems, keeping in mind that some natural disasters are out of human control. The sadder thing is the fact that "violence is not innate in us. There is neither a biological basis for it nor is it genetically programmed into human nature" (Ghosn, 2005, p. 11). This leads us to the fact that violence and peace are both a result of a lifetime education that begins in the womb. As such, a new trend in the world has emerged calling for peace through a lifelong education. Many organizations were founded, and many conventions on peace and education for peace have been held on national and international levels. For instance, the Seville Statement on Violence (1993) concludes that "just as wars begin in the minds of men, so does peace settle there. The same species who invented war is capable of inventing peace. The responsibility lies with each of us." Moreover, the Hague Agenda in the Hague Appeal for Peace Civil Society Conference in the Netherlands in May 1999 states that "in order to combat the culture of violence that pervades our society, the coming generation deserves a radically different education – one that does not glorify war but educates for peace and non-violence and international cooperation." Such initiatives motivated many scholars all around the world, mainly in the West, to conduct more studies on what has been known as peace education.

Peace Education is a Necessity for Transformation

In "Towards an Integrative Theory of Peace Education," Danesh explains that "the universal presence of conflict and war in human history has always necessitated that priority be given to education for conflict management and war preparation, and for the preservation of the larger community, every new generation has been prepared to be sacrificed at the altar of war" (2006, p. 55). Consequently, peace

education is becoming more accepted as a necessary requirement in almost all, especially post-war, societies. Furthermore, Danesh says that "peace is a requirement for effective peace education, and peace education creates higher states of peace" (2006, p. 56). On an international level, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that:

> *"Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace" (Article 26.2, p. 98).*

The above article renders peace education a necessity in our modern world where ethical values are diminishing day after day. According to the Peace Education Network (Jan. 2006), "…learning for peace is a lifelong process and begins with the youngest children," and the reasons to educate for peace are to show that violence and war are learned and not intrinsic, to create a more peaceful world where all of us may become agents for change, to correct limited understanding of peace, and to create a better learning environment (pp. 1 and 3). Moreover, the purpose of peace education is "to draw out, enrich, deepen and place in context students' thinking about the concept of peace. The lesson to be learnt is not only the content of the concept but also its enactment and doing – that is the methodology of peace" (Bretherton, p. 3). Thus, when it comes to peace, one should put theory into practice, and one of the ways to do so is to introduce peace education into schools either as a separate curriculum or integrated into the curricula of other subjects.

Integrating Peace into Education

The International Schools Association (ISA) launched, in 1996, the International Education System Pilot Project (IESSP) in which one of the most essential outcomes was a 'framework for peace education.' One of the things that this project was based on is the fact that peace education is not to be considered as a separate curriculum. All the schools involved in this project felt that it is the duty of the teachers of all subjects to "plan their activities in favour of an effective programme of peace education," which was already demonstrating a positive effect. Furthermore, all the participants in this project consider education as the "principal vehicle for developing and inculcating the habits of peace in school-age children" (*Innovation*, Sept. 1999, pp. 2-3). What, then, is the proper way to integrate peace into education? Is peace education better introduced as a separate curriculum or integrated within different curricula of different subjects? What are the standards for peace education that educators should follow? On one hand, some research shows that peace education can be introduced as a separate curriculum, spread across the curricula of different subjects, or considered as an approach adopted by the school as a whole. Furthermore, it would probably be better to start with one subject as an example so that both students and teachers would "get a flavour of what specific skills, knowledge and experience are needed" (Bretherton, p. 2). On the other hand, Haavelsrud says that:

> *"If, however, the form of education is regarded as a problem, as well as the way knowledge has been divided into subjects, the peace educator runs into other problems of a structural nature, i.e. the peace education project might contradict the basic characteristics of the structure in which it is introduced. If, for instance, a peace education project is based on the principles of problem orientation and participatory decision-making, it could not, without problems, be introduced into a school system which rigidly practices the division into subjects, classes, and periods "(p. 4).*

Haavelsrud further explains that other than the above mentioned three obstacles—subject, class and time—the greatest barrier for peace education in some schools is the rigid evaluation system that is to be followed. In other words, the need to assess students and give them a grade might be a problem when integrating peace into the subject matter. Moreover, he mentions how some 'peace educators' believe that positive changes in society and justice cannot come from within rather than from outside the school where the major role belongs to the adult population (pp. 4-5). However, it is mentioned in *Education for Peace: A Guide* that "opportunities to introduce components of education for peace exist in all subjects," which seems to be what the majority of peace educators believe in (Jan. 2006, p. 3).

Thus, whether we intend to educate for peace through a separate peace education curriculum or introduce peace into other subjects, we have to decide on the components of peace to be taught.

Components of Peace Education

Research shows that peace education encompasses the knowledge of certain themes, some skills to be acquired and certain actions to be taken. For example, in *Standards for Peace Education*, Carter says that students of peace education should be knowledgeable of several things such as personal values and history, diversity, human rights, methods of non-violent conflict resolution, democracy, the environment and non-violent service (2006, p. 3). Based on the knowledge of such components, students can start, with the help of educators, acquiring the necessary skills in order to be able to put theory into action; consequently, they start becoming responsible citizens in their communities. Another example, which demonstrates the importance of knowledge, skills and action in peace education, is the following figure:
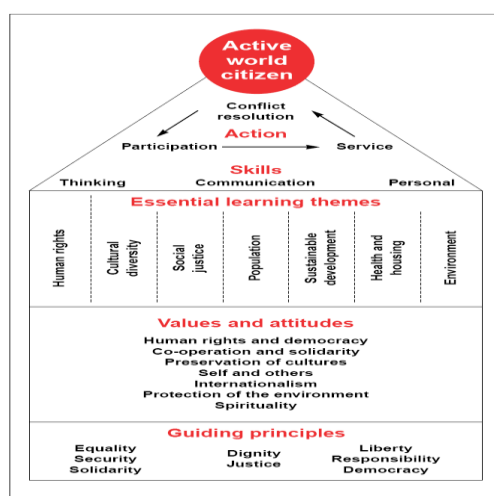

Figure 1. Education for Peace: the Curriculum Framework

The above figure reinforces Carter's triangle of peace education, knowledge, skills and action, which eventually leads to an 'active world citizen.' The figure clearly shows several themes, most of which are mentioned by Carter, that could be put into action (conflict resolution, participation and service) through the acquisition of certain skills (thinking, communication and personal). Thus, it is not enough to just learn the concepts of peace. Students have to learn how to apply these concepts, and here comes the crucial role of educators.

Opinions on Peace Education

Opinions on peace education vary. UNESCO, for example, states that "first and foremost, a culture of peace implies a global effort to change how people think and act in order to promote peace" and sees education as a main instrument to promote peace in the world (UNESCO, 1998, p. 1). Ian Harris (2002) identifies ten goals for effective peace education: "to appreciate the richness of the concept of peace; to address fears; to provide information about security systems; to understand violent behaviour; to develop intercultural understanding; to provide for a future orientation; to teach peace as a process; to promote a concept of peace accompanied by social justice; to stimulate a respect for life; and to end violence" (p. 20). Gavriel Salomon (2002) summarizes current peace education activities under four categories: peace education 'mainly as a matter of changing mindset', peace education 'mainly as a matter of cultivating a set of skills', peace education as 'mainly a matter of promoting human rights' and finally, peace education as a 'matter of environmentalism, disarmament, and the promotion of a culture of peace' (p. 4). Although there is a wide variety of opinions on this matter, in the end almost all of them have one thing in common: an "end product [who] is a person who should be an active world citizen ready to embrace his/her responsibility for building a more harmonious, just and peaceful world" (*Innovation*, Sept. 1999, p. 4).

Lebanon's Ethnic and Religious Diversity

Lebanon is a small democratic country with population less than 4 million and wide range of diversity. There are at least eighteen different religion sects, and nineteen different Political parties. Yet, instead of taking advantage of this situation to learn more about the other in order to understand more the Self and live in social harmony, the Lebanese people formed separate communities based on either religious or political affiliations that were and still are not open to the others. Understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups' are almost forgotten in Lebanon. This has created many conflicts where each groups wanted a Lebanon tailored to satisfy its needs disregarding the needs of the others. This created many conflicts in the country, some of which lead to civil wars.

Lebanon has witnessed two civil wars since its independence in 1943; a short one (1958), and a protracted one (1975-1990). Recently, Lebanon has managed to escape the threat of internal divisions and conflicts during the 2006 war and in 2008. Ever since the last civil war, the Lebanese people have become more attached to their religious and political affiliations than to their citizenship. In other words, their loyalty to their different religious and political leaders took over their loyalty to Lebanon.

The Lebanese constitution affirms human rights; however, after thirty years of war and violence, Lebanon failed to carry on the true meaning of democracy. Political violence includes physical, verbal and metal oppression becoming a common phenomenon, which affects the Lebanese family and society as well as institutions. Many of the government officials have strong political influence in their job sector. They greatly benefit from political power. Often they give the privilege to those who are in the same political party. Sometimes their appointment and promotion depends on their political activities, not their personal qualities; so when they recruit politically then they become biased and give privileges to a certain ethnic or religious group.

Educational institutions have been severely affected as well. Many students have been severely influenced by the political leaders and they are involved in different acts of violence, (Jabbour, K. 2012, p20). Most of the major political parties have students' organization in the educational institutions. Many schools and university are being closed for a long time because of political violence on campuses (Jabbour, K. 2012, p20). This raise the need to put into practice an educational programs that can contributing to peace and stability on every level, including the family, the society and the country as a whole. As a result of this unhealthy situation, it is obvious that there is a need for a program that helps young people understand their rights as citizens rather than followers, and only a peace education program can achieve such a goal.

The Need of Peace Education in Lebanon

Lebanon is in need to educate its young population about peace. Young people have to know that war is never the right solution. The conflicts that have existed amongst its various populations due to many factors cannot be resolved peacefully unless the young generation is educated and trained to resolve conflicts in a peaceful manner. Another reason why peace education programs have become a must in Lebanon is the fact that they focus on the importance of the environment. Lebanon has always been one of the best places to spend a vacation in due to its unique weather. This country has the four different seasons equally distributed throughout the year. This contributed to an amazing nature and turned Lebanon into probably the most touristic country in the Middle East. However, little by little the Lebanese people are destroying the gift that God has given them. They are becoming more and more indifferent to their environment. This is why we believe that a well-rounded peace education program integrated into the Lebanese official curriculum will help in educating the younger generation about the importance of what they already have and give them the chance to maintain whatever is left of our beautiful nature

The Role of Educator

It is the job of educators to help students understand the past and learn from it in order to prepare for a peaceful future, which demonstrates not only the absence of war but also "harmony at all levels of human endeavor" (Innovation, Sept. 1999, p. 3). It is the duty of educators to instill the values of peace into the present and future generations' minds through peace education. One of the ways to

accomplish this peaceful future is through what Dr. Diane Bretherton calls 'peace-building.' She defines peace-building as "a commitment to laying down the foundations for a more peaceful society...This approach needs not only buildings but also builders" (p. 2). In other words, anyone can be a peace-builder, especially educators. Thus, educators can lay down the foundations of a peaceful society through what is called peace education.

The role of educator is not only to teach my students the concepts of peace, but rather to provide them with the skills to apply peace. Educators have to become role models. Bretherton says that "the teacher who tries to convey peace culture without some practice, including peace action, is like 'a moral rascal teaching ethics'" (p. 3). In other words, a teacher who preaches for peace without demonstrating what is being taught becomes a hypocrite. Consequently, teaching peace concepts becomes meaningless. Bretherton further explains that "the teacher is important as a model of peaceful behaviour and his or her relationship with students is a powerful feature of the learning process. Through enacting the values of peace in relationship to the teacher, the students can experience 'actual/actuated culture of peace'" (p. 3). Therefore, the teacher is a very important factor in the process of peace education, which is considered a relatively 'modern invention' (Vriens, 1999).

Integrate Peace Education into Lebanese curricula

Irma-Kaarina Ghosn (2005) says that there are a lot of studies on peace education and its integration into the curricula; however, the majority of such studies have been developed in the West and represent "a Western orientation to issues" (p. 12). She further explains the danger of applying one program in different cultures not taking into consideration their different values, educational goals and pedagogies. Furthermore, Ghosn (2005) stresses on the fact that "any peace education program is context-sensitive from the outset, addressing specific issues relevant in that context and in ways that meet the needs and expectations of those involved" (p. 12). As such, taking the violent history of Lebanon into consideration, it is important not only to integrate peace education programs into our curricula but also to make sure that our multi-cultural background is taken into consideration. Peace education programs should enclose the uniqueness and richness of the Lebanese culture and structure; this is a necessary in the educational system of this country hoping that such programs will reestablish a healthy relationship amongst the different communities in order to secure a fruitful rather than devastating future for our children.

Conclusion

It is difficult to remove violence and make successful democracy in a short period. However, it is possible to some extent by taking some initiatives through peace education. Gandhi point out, "If we are to teach real peace in the world, we shall have to began with children", (Gandhi, 2005). Peace education can play a vital role in helping to bring peace, stability, political tolerance, religious harmony, successful democracy, and Intercultural solidarity to Lebanon as well as to the world. Peace education needs to be incorporate in the education curricula of the country. The Lebanese Education system should exposed Lebanese youth to diverse cultural in order to strengthening national affiliation and social coalition among students; providing the new generation with basic knowledge, skills and expertise to promote tolerance for a peaceful and prosperous civil society, and help to encourage social cohesion.

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