

Impact of Education for the Development of Peace and Non-violence

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ABSTRACT

This paper reveals to take great efforts to achieve the same. It can be achieved through collaborative efforts between families, colleagues, neighbours, classmates, governments and all other people in our world. Everyone can be involved in creating a culture of peace; even if in a minor way, there can be a major impact. If peace is achieved in all of our families there would be positive consequences of this seen in our societies, which would continue to extend throughout our world. If peace is reached in our schools and classrooms and children can extend a peaceful way of living into society, we will see the leaders of our world develop into individuals who understand how to resolve conflicts, have respect for other people and lifestyles, and who work towards the alleviation of poverty while contributing to a peaceful, productive, society.

Introduction

On November 10, 1998, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously voted to proclaim the first decade of the twenty-first century, an “International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World (2001-2010)”¹. The UN made this declaration specifically for children because they are the most vulnerable individuals and most likely victims of violence of all kinds. However vulnerable they are, children are also the leaders of our future. It is by educating and empowering children that we can achieve this culture of peace and non-violence. The idea of education as the means for developing a culture of peace and non-violence is reinforced by a statement once made by Gandhi, “If we are going to bring about peace in the world, we have to begin with the children”.

As there are many impediments to a culture of peace and non-violence it will take

great efforts to achieve the same. It can be achieved through collaborative efforts between families, colleagues, neighbours, classmates, governments and all other people in our world. Everyone can be involved in creating a culture of peace; even if in a minor way, there can be a major impact. If peace is achieved in all of our families there would be positive consequences of this seen in our societies, which would continue to extend throughout our world. If peace is reached in our schools and classrooms and children can extend a peaceful way of living into society, we will see the leaders of our world develop into individuals who understand how to resolve conflicts, have respect for other people and lifestyles, and who work towards the alleviation of poverty while contributing to a peaceful, productive, society.

Impediments to a Culture of Peace and Non-violence

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To be able to live a peaceful and non-violent life, an individual must first have their basic survival needs met. They must have food, shelter and water. Alleviating the poverty of our people in our world is one of the first steps to creating a culture of peace and non-violence. For this to ever happen, it has to be a worldwide effort, however it can start with individuals and on a small scale. The simplest step is sharing your own time and resources to help others. This can be done in our own lives, in our homes, at our workplaces, in classrooms. If everyone contributes a small amount of their time and resources to the cause of alleviating the poverty of others, there would be a drastic change in the number of impoverished people in our world.

Another impediment to peace is intolerance of other people. Intolerance can be to differences of race, religion, cultures and lifestyles. Through education this can be changed. By educating children about different religions, races, cultures and lifestyles in our world we can help them to understand the similarities between everyone. They will understand how insignificant these differences are, how they are not a reason for discrimination or prejudices. We can promote respect and tolerance of others.

Impact of Media

The media is a very influential source of information and learning. Peace journalism needs to be promoted and people need to question what they see and hear from the media. In North America, during the last several years, the media has begun to have greater impact on people's way of thinking, especially children. This is evident in many areas, such as how children view violence. The media tends to glamourise violence in several different mediums, through music, television, the Internet, movies and also children's toys and games. In the past, when

technology was not readily available to children, these topics were not such regular occurrences in children's lives. Now, the most common children's hobbies are playing video games, watching television and movies, listening to music, and surfing the net, all of which often contain themes of violence. The Internet has made it possible for children to access any information they want and without adult supervision they are able to view violent and even pornographic websites. Video games are also contributing widely to depicting violence as fun and exciting. The most popular games among youth include soldiers in war scenes to players as game members and criminals who may even purchase a prostitute for more points in the game. However, it can be thought that these are only cartoon like depictions and therefore children may realize that these ideals should not be extended into reality. Having real life role models who are involved in violent behaviour is particularly detrimental to creating a culture of peace. In music, the most popular songs often contain theses of violence, gang behaviour, criminal behaviour, and even violence towards women. With children striving to be like their role models that are involved in violent behaviour or just singing about it, how they know that this behaviour is widely unacceptable in our societies? When they are sensitized to conflict and violence, and even view it as exciting or glamorous, how can they understand the impact of violence on real lives?

Commitment to Creating a Culture of Peace and Non-violence

In 1974, Canada was party to the U.N. Declaration and Integrated Framework of Action on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Democracy. Canada signed the document and made a pledge to act on certain obligations,

such as including peace education in our formal and informal education systems. The Canadian government has made certain obligations to the United Nations with respect to peace education, and the United Nations International Year for a Culture of Peace, Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World, and UNESCO Culture of Peace Program suggest institutional changes to which the Canadian Government is a signatory.

Although the government had made its commitment to the United Nations, after research, I have not yet discovered any formal government policies on peace education. Provincial school boards have worked toward the inclusion of peace education in school curriculums, for example, the province of Nova Scotia has integrated peace education into the social studies curriculum for certain grade levels. New steps have to be taken to ensure that schools across and in other countries include peace education into lesson plans and daily classroom activities.

A Focus on Techniques Used in Schools:

As educators of children we all have a role in teaching children about peaceful behaviour. We need to be positive role models for children by showing them peaceful ways of thinking and behaving. Cora Weiss, President of the Hague Appeal for Peace, while describing the Global Peace Education Campaign at the recent U.N. Millennium Forum, enforced the need for peace education initiatives³. She discussed the importance of the “The 4 E’s in school curriculums – reading, (w)riting, (a)rithmetic and reconciliation which will help children confront their biases, redirect their aggressive behaviour, learn to negotiate, and discover non-violent peaceful means to relate to one another. Peace education needs to be

included in school curriculums and it needs to be rated at the same importance as common subjects such as mathematics or science. Children need to learn about peace to be able to live and interact in our world, and peace education teaches valuable skills for their futures, as well as the future of our world. It is through peace education that a culture of peace and non-violence can be reached.

In the topic of peace is to be covered in each elementary school grade through our social studies curriculum goals and outcomes. Teachers strive to include peace education in daily classroom activities and we also do specific lesson plans covering the topics of peace education, such as studying peaceful movements or specific individuals who have had an impact on the development of peace in our world. Some of the ways in which peaceful behaviour and understanding is developed through daily classroom activities are as follows:

Teachers act as role models each day in the classroom. The educational philosopher John Dewey perceived the role of the educator as teaching basic values of peace and non-violence as correct social behaviour⁵. He stressed that learning should be by doing, teaching should be done in an instrumentalist way, as opposed to authoritarian teaching methods⁶. Teachers need to demonstrate peaceful living and behaviour and teach in ways that allow children to actively learn and express themselves. Teachers need to display peaceful behaviour at all times and particularly when managing a classroom. This should be done in the way a teacher acts, not just in the way a teacher tells the students to act. Gandhi had said “My life is my message” meaning that you have to actively live what you are saying you believe in, it is not enough to just talk about it.

Physical discipline technique should not be used in homes or schools as it only creates fear in children. Voice raising is another discipline technique that should not be used in homes or schools. If teachers constantly raise their voices, then students will follow this example and do so as well. There are many other strategies that can be used to discipline students and catch student's attention such as hand clapping, or asking the students to raise their hands and then not speaking until each child has done so. Consequences can be developed for breaking rules as alternatives to physical discipline or yelling. Other consequences, such as the removal of privileges, give children time to think about what they have done, work out alternative solutions if the situation were to occur again, and learn how to non-violently deal with their anger. Treating students respectfully is important as well. If a student is treated with respect by their teacher it gives them encouragement to treat others with respect as well.

Setting up classroom rules on the first day of the year is a way to begin establishing a peaceful environment in the classroom. This is done by asking the students to collaborate together on what rules they think need to be in place in order for the classroom to be a peaceful and productive working environment. The teacher may ask the children to describe or draw what a peaceful classroom looks like and then later these can be used as a reminder to the children. As well as developing the rules, the children with the teacher's guidance, should also decide on the consequences for breaking the rules. This way there is no misunderstanding about what is unacceptable behaviour and the students have determined and agreed on what are appropriate consequences for breaking a classroom rule. By involving the children in

developing these rules and consequences students have a means of actively participating in the development of a peaceful classroom. This idea can also be used with children in the home as an alternative. A parent has to simply decide what the rules and consequences for breaking them are.

Reward systems are commonly used in schools and classrooms. These reward systems come in various forms but the end goal is always to encourage positive behaviour. For example, in an elementary school in Halifax, Nova Scotia there is a school wide reward system in place. Students receive yellow forms from their teachers if they commit what is considered a minor offence (such as disruptive behaviour or uncompleted work) and a red form for what is considered a major offence (such as use of inappropriate language or anything involving violent behaviour). Three yellow forms are equivalent to one red form. The principal keeps track of the forms given to students. The students who receive these forms each time had to have a meeting with the principal to discuss what happened and how future situations can be handled better. The parents would also have to sign the form to show that they knew what had happened. At the end of each month there was a reward for the school children such as a school trip or an exciting event organized at the school. Any students who had received a red form that month were not permitted to attend the reward day, and instead had to complete schoolwork in their classroom. The reward system is working well. At the end of the school year the number of red forms was down significantly as compared to the start of the year. Students were encouraged to behave appropriately by this system, wanting to join their peers and enjoy the reward day as the others were doing so.

Students worked together on conflict and behaviour issues, helping each other make better choices so that all could attend the reward day. The children had the opportunity each month to participate in the reward day, based on their choices and their behaviour.

Schools in Canada often have peer mediator programs. In each classroom in the upper elementary levels a teacher is asked to choose three or four students to act as peer mediators for that classroom. A member of the schools' staff, usually the guidance counsellor, trains these peer mediators. They are trained in conflict prevention and resolution and it becomes their role to use their new skills in the classroom, on the playground, even outside of school. When a conflict develops between students these peer mediators try to help the students to resolve the issue before it develops into a greater problem. Peer mediators work with teachers to resolve conflicts, often through group meetings between the two individuals in conflict, a teacher and one or two peer mediators. Peer mediator programs have taught children the skills they need for conflict prevention and resolution. Often having a peer classmate help resolve an issue can be much more effective than having an authority figure doing so. It teaches children the skills needed to live peacefully and how to resolve conflicts without violence. These peer mediator programs have been very successful in resolving conflicts and often the peer mediators share their skills with other children and even family members.

Many schools also have what is called zero tolerance policies for violent behaviour. This means that there is a consequence in place for violent behaviour and if a student violates a rule, there is a consequence that immediately applies

to that student, regardless of any reasons why the student may feel the act was justified. For example, there may be a zero tolerance policy for physical fighting with the consequence of suspension for 2 days. If a student is involved in a physical fight, the consequence will always be a suspension of at least 2 days, even if they were just defending themselves and do not feel they deserve the consequence. Zero tolerance policies cause students to understand what is acceptable behaviour. They are aware that there is no tolerance for this behaviour in school, which can be extended into understanding how there is no tolerance for certain behaviours in our society and world.

Teaching children empathy is something that we are striving to do. Empathy is the ability to put yourself in another person's position and understand how they feel. There are different ways to teach children this and one way that has been effective in the education system is creating awareness in children about other people and conditions in the world and through this developing an understanding of diversity and concern for human rights and justice. Reading children books about world issues is one simple way to promote discussion and thought on issues they may not face in their daily lives but should still be conscious of, for example, books about what life may be like for children in other parts of the world where there is war can be a real eye opener for children who all their lives have lived in a peaceful society.

Inclusion is a major goal for the education system. We strive to include all children in classrooms and activities, despite whatever differences or difficulties may be present. For example, in the past 15 years there has been a move from having students with exceptionalities in specialized classrooms and schools (for

example, disabled students or students with learning disabilities) to having these students in the general classroom with other children of their age group. Canada is still a multi-cultural society with a high number of immigrants from various countries around the world, mainly people from countries in Europe, Asia, and Africa. Classrooms are usually very mixed in terms of ethnicity, religion, races, and cultures. It is very common for a teacher in an urban setting to have a classroom consisting of children of many different abilities, cultures, family backgrounds, religions and even languages. Inclusion of all students is promoted because it has benefits for all involved. A student with a disability gains from the opportunity to interact with other children, whereas the other children acquire experience and appreciation for diversity. However, the able to have so much diversity in one classroom and have everyone working together takes patience. A friendly open-minded atmosphere has to be created so that everyone feels safe and comfortable with each other. All opinions have to be respected as well as individual differences tolerated. By exposure and understanding of differences, children become more open-minded, tolerant members of society.

Conclusion:

The above ideas are just some of the small steps towards a culture of peace we are taking in schools. By putting ideas like this into practice we are hoping to create ideas about peaceful living for the children of our society. It is also important to do specific lessons on peace related topics to help children understand why peaceful living must be extended from the classroom to society and to the world. The importance of peace education in schools cannot be denied, as well as the need to have all people of our

world involved in creating a culture of peace and non-violence. If everyone considers how they can make an impact on the creation of a peace for world and then acts on these ideas great changes can be made. Starting with the children of our world is one way to get closer to the goal of a culture of peace and non-violence. Our children are the leaders for our future and it is through them we will create a culture of peace.

References:

1. United Nations General Assembly Fifty-third session Agenda item 31, 19th November 1998.
2. See Notes for a Speech to the Canadian Peace Researchers & Educators Association (“CPREA”) Annual General Meeting June 3, 2000 by Robert Stewart, C.A., C.M.C., Director, Canadian Centers for Teaching
3. See Notes for a Speech to the Canadian Peace Researchers & Educators Association (“CPREA”) Annual General Meeting June 3, 2000 by Robert Stewart, C.A., C.M.C., Director, Canadian Centers for Teaching
4. See Notes for a Speech to the Canadian Peace Researchers & Educators Association (“CPREA”) Annual General Meeting June 3, 2000 by Robert Stewart, C.A., C.M.C., Director, Canadian Centers for Teaching
5. Charles Howlett. “The Pragmatist as Pacifist: John Dewey’s Views on Peace Education” *Teachers College Record*, Vol. 83, No. 3, Spr 1982, pp 435-51.
6. See John Dewey (1859-1952), *Gale Encyclopedia of Psychology*, 2nd ed. Gale Group, 2001.

