

Education for the Prevention of Intergroup Conflicts

Md Intekhab Alam Khan

Ph.D Research Scholar,
Nelson Mandela Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution
Jamia Millia Islamia University, New Delhi, INDIA.

(Received on: March 9, Accepted: March 12, 2017)

ABSTRACT

This research paper explains the role of education, especially emerging global emphasis on peace education for the prevention of conflicts. Through a brief discussion of the researches in the field, the paper aims to draw the attention toward the significance of peace education in developing a culture of peace in societies. Education transforms the mindset of individuals who organise into different groups and engage in violence. Through education aimed at overcoming prejudices, ignorance, wishful thinking, and a proclivity toward stereotyping, people can learn to live together amicably, and if disputes arise, they can resolve through problem-sharing approach. In conclusion, the paper emphasize the importance of peace education for children as they can inculcate the habit of living together peacefully and resolve differences with others amicably.

Keywords: Education transforms, intergroup conflicts, problem-sharing approach.

INTRODUCTION

Conflict begins in the mind of people. A transformation in the mindset ushers in metamorphosis in the psyche, which propels one to confront with other. How that transformation comes about? This paper argues that education especially peace education can help youths to cultivate a culture of peace which will make them capable of resolving their differences through pacific means.

What is conflict?

Conflict is an ambiguous notion that largely has negative connotation but also bears some positivity. It is imperative to understand what conflict means before explaining the different nuances. Merriam-Webster dictionary defines conflict as, “competitive or opposing action of incompatibles.” Here, incompatible is described as things or people not consistent

with each other or opposed to each other. In this explanation, inference of a negative connotation or something that may result in harm or malevolent form of overt expression cannot be deduced. Mere incompatibility or opposition does not include the probability of anything that may physically harm or damage someone or something.

Further explanation by Merriam-Webster includes “antagonistic state or action.” From this dissection of the word conflict, one can infer the possibility of overt expression as it includes the word “action”. Since the action(s) will be induced by incompatibility found among people, this necessarily involves harmful upshot. Thus, at times action becomes so intense and deadly that it brings misery to humankind.

A renowned scholar of international relations, Michael Nicholson, whose expertise areas include international conflicts, explains that for conflicts to occur, there requires incompatible interaction of two individuals or groups, or states (Nicholson, 1997). Nicholson further elucidates that conflict remains latent until parties involved decide to divert resources to arrive at a settlement favorable to them. Therefore, every conflict undergoes a phase of latency before the parties choose to engage in an overt behavior.

Connotations of Conflict

Conflict evokes negative connotation among human beings most of the time. But it is not always negative. Conflict has some positivity within itself. Going back to the definition offered by Merriam-Webster, it describes incompatibility between divergent ideas or interests. Incidence of divergent ideas or interests is necessary for bringing in positive changes in the society. John Paul Lederach, the proponent of conflict transformation theory, endeavoured to change the way conflicts are perceived. For him, “conflict is normal in human relationships, and conflict is a motor of change” (Lederach, 2003). Lederach’s contention was based on his experience of teaching conflict resolution and peacebuilding for over two decades. In social conflicts, he argued, conflict resolution offers quick solutions to “deep-political problems”, and cover up the changes that may be needed. Therefore, conflict transformation attempt to address those deeper problems that could usher in positive social change for the overall societal advantage.

Transformation implies getting to the root of problems (Ryan, 2007). Transforming a conflict for bringing about a positive change in the society, however, needs an investment in developing constituency for peace. In essence, conflict transformation aims to transform the incompatibility between groups by addressing the grievances, and it necessarily involves precluding the possibility of violence. Transformation through peaceful means brings about constructive change. But the peaceful transformation warrants a change in people’s mindset or groups involved in conflict. People ought to understand the value of peace, and peace should be made more attractive than violence. However, the understanding would not be developed among people on its own. Education, to a great extent, will help in developing such understanding among individuals.

Significance of Conflict Analysis

Conflict can be varied in nature. A country may face varied types of conflicts including ethno-national, ethno-linguistic, communal violence, and the most deadly form, civil war. An accurate analysis of the conflict is indispensable for undertaking any action for conflict prevention, conflict resolution, or conflict transformation. Many cases of failed preventive efforts point in the direction of either wrong conflict analysis or wrong choice of actions. Examples are aplenty. One such example is Somalia where large-scale violence took place during the 1980s and early 1990s because of wrong choices of actions emanating from wrong analysis or misreading of the ground situation (Menkhaus and Ortmaier, 2000).

Analytical tasks equip conflict prevention or resolution experts to understand the dynamics of internal conflicts. It helps in developing a better understanding of the parties' positions and their interests. Conflict analysis provides the basis of comprehending different kinds of conflicts and the stages in the course of the conflict (Kriesberg, 1973). Thus, a precise analysis of conflict is the primary step toward prevention or transformation of conflicts.

Role of Education in Conflict Prevention

Education serves a special purpose in human society. It emancipates individual from the depth of ignorance to higher echelons of enlightenment. Ignorance about others develops perceptions that drive individuals or groups to stereotype those unlike them. Stereotyping leads to nurturing a feeling of hatred over a period of time. In this backdrop, any incompatible issue between two groups creates dichotomous relationship of "us versus them". Human needs theory intervenes in such unfolding crisis in which interests transform into needs (Burton, 1990). This theory clarifies between dispute and conflict, which says disputes occur over interests whilst conflicts happen over needs.

In such situations, education plays a key role in containing the entrenchment of a dispute and its transformation into conflict. As conflict occurs over needs, it becomes more complex to resolve as it will necessarily involve compromise or giving up certain demands. If the evolving crisis left to escalate it converge into violence after specific time period.

Education contributes to shaping and transforming society and therefore plays a key role in peacebuilding (IIEP, 2012). The question here arises, how does education help in preventing conflicts from becoming violent or intractable? Education focused on peace aims to transform the mindset of people from being antagonistic to accommodative. David A. Hamburg, a distinguished scholar at Weill Cornell Medical College, New York and former Co-chair of the Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict, has done extensive research on education as a means of preventing violent conflict. Education helps in learning to live together amicably, which is "neither simple, nor easy, nor anything we can take for granted" (Hamburg, 2013). Hamburg notes, "Sustained education for this purpose is not only important for economic benefit and good health but also fundamentally for human survival."

In his research, Hamburg has emphasized on peace education as it helps inculcate a habit of collaborative problem-solving among children. It helps in overcoming the prejudices that engender hatred among people. Children, from their early years, if trained to overcome

the differences through creative thinking, inquisitive bent of mind, and problem-solving approach, they can help in mitigating the issues that draw battle lines among them. However, it cannot be guaranteed that they will never indulge in conflicting behavior but through peace education they could be equipped to resolve the disputes through pacific means.

For Hamburg, education will help people in learning to live together, developing prosocial behaviour, overcoming intergroup hatred, complacency, prejudice, ignorance, and wishful thinking.

A research paper published by the Paris based International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) in collaboration with United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) expressed great optimism in the emerging field of peace education for conflict prevention and peacebuilding. In its paper, IIEP emphasized on creating a structured approach that focuses both on structural prevention (entails mitigating deep-rooted causes of conflict) and operational prevention (entails targeting the proximate factors triggering violence). The paper notes, "Education can alter societal contradictions (structural), improve relations and interactions (behavioural) and encourage changes in attitudes (attitudinal) in ways that can reduce the risk of conflict and help build a sustainable peace" (IIEP, 2012:13).

IIEP exhorts undertaking capacity development for conflict prevention, education programmes for peacebuilding, education to build responsible citizenship through human rights education, democratic principles, disarmament education, education for cultural diversity, and education for climate change and disaster risk reduction. IIEP recommends that conflict prevention should be made a permanent aspect of immediate and long-term educational planning. For this purpose, special initiatives can be taken at system level, institutional level and community level.

CONCLUSION

Experiences from the history of deadly conflicts explicate a number of causes behind violence and killing. Hatred, prejudice, wrong perceptions, misguided notions, ignorance, and stereotyping are some of the widely prevalent causes of intergroup violence. The cases of Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda, Rakhine Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, Bosnian Muslims and Serbs during the dissolution of Yugoslavia, and a large number of other violent conflicts bring to the fore the hate-filled intergroup relations. Intermittent communal violence between Hindus and Muslims in India is also a product of historical animosity rooted in hatred for each other.

Peace education aims at mitigating the causes that pitch different groups against each other. One of the main aims of peace education is helping people to learn to live together. This naturally involves exhorting individuals or groups to resolve their differences, disputes, or incompatibilities through a problem-sharing approach. Education aimed at preventing conflicts and peacebuilding must emphasize on educating the children the values of peace. Young minds are like clean slates; whatever is written first will bear an impression for the rest of life.

Possibly, over a period of certain years a new generation with a belief in mutual co-existence and shared living will build a new dominant social order across the world.

REFERENCES

1. Burton, John (ed). 1990. *Conflict: Human Needs Theory*. Hampshire: The Macmillan Press Ltd.
2. Hamburg, David A. and Eric Hamburg. 2013. *Give Peace a Chance: Preventing Mass Violence*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.
3. Kotite, Phyllis. 2012. *Education for Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding: Meeting the Global Challenges of the 21st Century*. IIEP Occasional Paper. Paris: International Institute for Educational Planning.
4. Kriesberg, Louis. 1973. *The Sociology of Social Conflicts*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
5. Lederach, John Paul. 2003. *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation*. New York: Good Books.
6. Menkhaus, Kenneth and Louis Ortmayer. 2000. *Somalia: Misread Crises and Missed Opportunities*. In Jentleson, Bruce W. *Opportunities Missed, Opportunities Seized: Preventive Diplomacy in the Post-Cold War World*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
7. Nicholson, Michael. 1997. *Rationality and the Analysis of International Conflict*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
8. Ryan, Stephen. 2007. *The Transformation of Violent Intercommunal Conflict*. Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited.