

Role of Education in Building Peace in Afghanistan

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

The Department of Peace and Conflict Studies conducts an annual research on issues pertaining to peace and conflict. Each year, the topics are selected by the department and suggested to a workshop where the professors, researchers and representatives from civil society and government offices discuss the relevance and importance of each topic and prioritize them accordingly. The topic voted in such workshop to be researched in 2011 was 'the Role of Education in Building Peace in Afghanistan'. After some discussion with different professors, the department composed a team of researchers from Kabul University and University of Education (Kabul). The work on this research began in July 2011.

Three professors (Associate Pro. Abdul Samad Mushtaq and Assistant Pro. Mohammad Naim Wahdat from University of Education and Associate Pro. Mohammad Tahir Tahir from Kabul University) four students (M. Asghar Surush, Khadija Rezayi, Sediqa Taimori and Saeed Modasir Fazil Por, all from Kabul University) worked on the research. After consulting the available resources on peace and education, they came up with certain indicators that could show the relation between different factors that play an important role in breeding traits which are regarded peaceful. Using questionnaires, they collected data and analyzed it through SPSS. However, due to certain limitations (e.g. limited budget) the researchers decided to conduct the research only in Kabul, collecting data from a sample group of teachers in different districts of Kabul. The data was then analyzed and interpreted by the researchers. Below, you read the conclusion of this research which summarizes its findings:

Based on the findings of this research, the research team concludes that education is one of the most essential social institutions that can play different roles. One of the main functions of education is to create skills and abilities in younger generations of a society to foster social relationships. This means imprinting abilities in individuals that help them establish an environment that is free of violence and instability where people do not resort to force in order to meet their wants and do not use their power for coercion and imposition. In short, one of the functions of education is enabling individuals to establish a space where there is tranquility, appropriate rules to follow, respect of individuals' rights, and where one feels respected and trusted. An environment where there is no war and fighting, no shriek and shout and no threat and fright; a secure atmosphere, suitable to live a life in peace. This is what the overall majority of the survey population emphasized on.

In this research, we tried to comprehensively assess the peace-building activities and creation of abilities and skills that enable individuals to establish an environment and conditions in which the abovementioned characteristics are materialized in students' behaviors, and therefore expand to the whole society of Afghanistan. The findings reveal that the institution of education, along other institutions such as mass media, civil society and religious scholars plays a significant role in creating peaceful attitudes and behaviors in individuals. However, educational institutions assume the central role in this respect because the students spend one sixth of their time in educational centers daily. Additionally, schools according to preplanned programs try to imprint the required attitudes and skills in students. The findings of this research also show that each educational stage plays a role in forming the different aspects of students' characters, particularly in creation of a mentality that allows individuals to cultivate the main components of peace in themselves. Higher education and secondary education play the most significant role, since people at this age try to form their own independent personalities, thus a sense of seeking independence and modeling increase in them.

The findings indicate that the teaching methods and activities have an essential role in giving shape to world view in which peace and non-violent behaviors are embodied as paramount humane and social values in students. From amongst the methods and activities, participatory teaching activities, individual learning and reformative methods of evaluation play the pivotal role in fostering peaceful behaviors, while competitive methods of teaching are weakly conducive in this regard.

Curricula, as the main element of the process of education, have always been the subject of debate by planners, officers, teachers, parents and all those who are in charge of education, and the discussion around the content, the way it is arranged and implemented continues. The question is how the curricula can be geared to realizing the goals which are of interest for both, individual and society. However, what was assessed in this research include the level of needs for avoiding the inclusion of violent content in the curricula, the degree of necessity for contents and themes that reflect moral values of the society, the level of existence of themes that encourage philanthropies and mutual acceptance in school curricula in Afghanistan. Majority of the respondents affirmed the need for inclusion of contents with mentioned characteristics and avoiding those which encourage violence.

Differences between individuals in terms of their sex, culture, religion and ethnicity were assessed as another variable that affects the creation of views based on peace values. The participants in this research thought that observing and regarding these differences in educational activities were important; otherwise

individuals may resort to violent behaviors and take a defensive position against others' actions. Furthermore, disregarding and disrespecting individual differences and the inherent diversity in the society will increase a sense of grudge and hatred in people and lead them to seek the removal of those who are different. While regarding the differences in educational activities enable the students to accept the differences as the reality of their societies and therefor respect them as such and never attempt to intolerantly approach the cultural, ethnic and social diversities.

The result of this research reveals that majority of the teachers who are involved in educational activities believed that students could better learn the concepts and values of peace and the use of them in a comparative and competitive settings. Nonetheless, it seems that this view of the teachers does not help the creation of attitudes and skills in the light of which Afghans can have a more peaceful society. That is because in a competition someone wins and others seem to lose, the winners pose themselves in pride while the losers get a feeling of being defeated and a temptation to revenge. Therefore, we can conclude that one of the causes of violence and aggression by some of the students is the competitive attitudes and behaviors encouraged by the teachers who believe that competition and comparison have good educational outcomes.

According to the findings of this research, educational units, goals, and activities, to a great degree, can create attitudes and behaviors in students that result in establishing a society which is free of violence. However, we should not forget that a number of other participants in this research believed that the concepts, activities and goals which aim at building peace were so insignificant in our society. Similarly, the respondents have had a positive view about the amount of time and energy that teachers spend in taking purposeful activities to cultivate behaviors based on and resulting in peace.

The findings of this research also reveal that domestic violence and misunderstanding of the needs, wants and preferences of individuals in the family and, by the same token, violent behaviors and practice that have been embedded into the culture of our society are the main obstacles against the creation of a society based on tolerance and respect. The broadcast of some violent programs by a number of mass media and the parents' indifference to help children understand the positive messages of the media programs are also the effective factors which hinder the strengthening of peaceful attitudes in people of our society. State policies regarding criminals and violators, and the fact that criminals do not receive the punishment envisaged in the law for their crime, due to defects in legal and judicial agencies, have become the factors that disrupt the creation of a peace-seeking spirit.

As a desirable approach to bolster good social behavior, the families need to take appropriate measures that aim at developing peace-loving attitudes in children. In

addition, in line with the realities of our society, educational programs have to be suitably changed, both in content and methodology along with the reform of the whole educational settings of the schools.

Recommendations

Peace and peaceful life in the havoc of decades of war and conflict are the panacea that most of the people of Afghanistan seek. Peace is an ideal, aspired by the people of Afghanistan, especially the young generation of this country. Based on the importance and necessity of this subject and with due attention to the findings of this research, the following recommendations are given so that the wishes of the people of Afghanistan, namely, a stable justice-based peace be realized.

1. To cultivate skills of building healthy social relationships in which mutual acceptance, forgiveness and cooperation are embodied, an essential role has to be shouldered by education.
2. Concepts and contents that enhance a spirit of mutual acceptance have to be highlighted and emphasized in curricula and general settings of educational institutions.
3. Policy makers and those who handle broadcast policies of mass media, especially picture media, should pay due attention to the needs of peace and peaceful coexistence.
4. An emphasis should be put on the role of family in educating their children because the basis of behaviors and human character is laid in the family.
5. Specific chapters on peace have to be added in subjects such as history and social studies in all languages.
6. Each teacher has to talk on the benefits of peace for the country in his/her classes for five minutes each session.