

## Peace-building in the Minds of Early Childhood Education Teachers: Voices from Pakistan

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### Abstract

Peace-building initiatives from early years of life result in preventing violence in homes, schools and communities and plays a vital role in ensuring social cohesion, creating peaceful societies and promoting sustainable economic and social development. Against this background, Asia Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC) conducted a research study to explore what is in the minds of teachers regarding peace and peace-building. The study followed a qualitative research design, respondents were selected conveniently to conduct in-depth interviews. Teachers specified a wide range of description on meaning of peace including positive and negative peace. The findings put more emphasis on homes, schools and communities – all three in sync to create an impact on peace-building. Teachers also shared concerns about the negative impact of media, and the level of violence and intolerance among grownups. Teachers felt a need for having a broader understanding of what and how to enhance peace-building among children. Teachers were more concerned and interested in developing their capacities in knowing what can be done in schools and how the existing curriculum can be modified to introduce peace-building concepts. They also demanded capacity development of parents and teachers on peace education and conflict resolution, as it is the most neglected area in present situation.

**Keywords:** ECE teachers, peace-building, social cohesion, sustainable development

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## **Introduction**

Children growing up in many regions of the world are exposed to unstable and adverse living conditions creating uncertainty and insecurity for them and their families. Children are frequently exposed to aggression and violence in homes, schools, neighborhoods and media (Huesmann & Eron, 1986). Conflicts are generally considered detrimental, however, it is only the unattended or inappropriately attended conflicts, which become violent and may cause huge damages. On the other hand, conflicts are important ingredients for social change (Simmel, 1956) contributing substantially towards higher order thinking and development (Eckhardt, 1988). Violence is never desirable in any society, culture or religion; the dilemma is majority of people lack the ability to handle conflicts in a skillful manner.

Scholarship on early childhood development (ECD) provides compelling evidence for vulnerability during early years due to several environmental stressors. Early childhood is the time when children, even at the age of 3 and 4 begin to internalize dispositions of their own ethnic groups. They also develop certain prejudice and stereotypes based on social class, ethnic backgrounds and other major differences among the population (Connolly, 2011). War, violent conflicts and other forms of interpersonal and grouped violence have negative impacts on growth and development of young children. Exposure to violence increases the risk that children will engage in future violence and other antisocial acts (Cairns, 1996). These effects are not limited to mortality, disease, Injury, malnutrition and disability, it also damages the emotional wellbeing of children to a greater extent causing lasting impacts (McFarlane et al, 2017; Pereznieta, 2014; Anda, 2010; Evans, 2002; Felliti, 1998; WHO, 1998). The good thing is, there is compelling evidence which indicates that children during early years are capable of engaging in non-violent conflict resolution (Doppler, 2008).

Early learning contexts such as preschools and kindergartens represent the earliest social settings, outside of family. Schools often reflect the attitudes and behaviors of societies and communities and most often these institutions fail to promote mutual respect, tolerance and critical thinking. Instead these institutions instill disrespect, intolerance, and prejudice, which pushes societies towards extremes (Education for All, Global Monitoring Report, 2011). Whether victims, perpetrators, or bystanders, children often feels and demonstrate that violence is the only way to get whatever they want, and being peaceful shows they are weak.

The Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC) is a network established *to build strong partnerships* across sectors and different disciplines, organisations, agencies and institutions in the Asia-Pacific region *to advance the agenda and investment in early childhood*. ARNEC in recent years is paying more attention to peace-building efforts in the region. Some important contributions towards this cause are; formation of ECD and peace-building working group, a research synthesis of violence against children in the region and literature review on ECD and peace-building to pave new possibilities in the region. Projects underway by ARNEC involves peace-building curriculum for young children and peace-building parental guidelines for ECD parenting programmes. The work on peace-building survey presented here involved 8 countries and was initiated by ARNEC, countries agreed to be part of this project were Bangladesh, Bhutan, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Timor-Leste. The findings presented in this article are solely from preschool teachers of Pakistan.

An exploratory research was conducted to capture what is in the minds of preschool teachers regarding peace and peace-building. The study was carried out to (i) explore how the concepts of peace and peace-building (PB) are defined and interpreted by teachers (ii) what are the strategies practiced by them to resolve to non-violent conflicts in schools, and, (iii) to pave the way forward for designing projects and programs on ECD and PB in schools and communities.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study draws upon the work by Johan Galtung, who developed the concept of positive and negative peace, referring to structural changes targeting social injustice which is a significant cause of violence and indicates a strong need to address the root causes of violent conflicts. (Lederach & Maiese, 2009; Galtung, 1990). Considering positive and negative peace concepts, this research will try to explore both these aspects from the perspectives of teachers.

### **Methodology**

Qualitative research approach and exploratory research design was found to be the most appropriate mode of inquiry for the research questions under review. Inquiry approach used here was case study. According to Bromley (1990), "(Case study is) systematic inquiry into an event or a set of related events which aims to describe and explain the

phenomenon of interest”. According to Yin (2010), case study may be exploratory, descriptive or explanatory. For this research, exploratory seems more appropriate.

The study was conducted in Pakistan. Data collection was based on 10 in-depth Interviews (IDIs) from Sindh, Punjab and Gilgit – Baltistan (GB) Provinces. Table 1 shows the details and geographical distribution of sample.

Table 1

*Geographical Distribution of Sample*

Study Sites	Teachers
Sindh	2
Gilgit – Baltistan (GB)	4
Punjab	4
Total	10

The selection of sample was based on convenient sampling. We were being able to involve research participants from diverse backgrounds, such as urban, rural and suburban areas representing diverse socioeconomic strata and gender. For each site a designated Research Coordinator (RC), conducted in-depth Interviews (IDIs), transcribed recordings and then translated transcriptions in to English. The study tool was translated in Urdu and also piloted before data collection. Each IDI lasted for about 45 - 90 minutes.

### **Data Analysis**

The analysis was done manually; analysis approach employed was in reference to Yin (2011) and Harry (2005). According to Yin (2011) and Harry (2005), analysis is based on 5 levels out of which 3 were efficiently captured from the data. The first level tabbed open codes from transcripts, out of which, 63 open codes were generated. These codes were then clustered into categories based on common features and this was considered level two analysis. Some 11 categories evolved out of this process and the rest of uncommon open codes were categorized as emerging codes. The categories were then subsumed to evolve the major themes - the 3rd level of analysis.

## Result and Discussion

### Meaning of Peace

Teachers shared a wide range of description on meaning of peace. According to one teacher, the meaning of peace in past times, which was “period between two wars” is no more applicable today; he also added that peace is more than just the absence of war. According to most common research findings from teachers, the meaning of peace is freedom of expression (2)<sup>11</sup> and, ethical, moral and empathetic behavior towards fellow beings. Teachers also articulated peace as tolerance, respect for each other, safety and security (law and order), absence of physical and mental harm and sufferings, absence of terrorist activities and no more energy crises.

*“(Peace is) When one is mentally free from all kind of fears or threats about unforeseen (catastrophic) events”.*

(Teacher – PT1)

Teachers endorsed peace as self-regulation, calmness, inner and outer tranquility, organization, equity, justice, quality of education and availability of basic human needs (food, health and quality of life) (2). They also indicated that peace is about ensuring Human Rights (2) as well as ensuring opportunities for each individual to live an optimal life. According to one teacher,

*“Peace is an agreement to end hostility against each other”.*

(Teacher – PT5)

Teachers also articulated that peace ensures satisfaction, happiness, child survival as well as greater opportunities for educating people. As accounted by one teacher, peace is a state of mind and mainly has two broader levels; firstly, when there are no worries and problems, and everyone is happy, satisfied and content with self and family. Secondly, peace is living in harmony in communities despite diversity and differences within community members. The biggest shortcoming shared by teachers is the lack of understanding of the concept and a comprehensive and agreed upon definition of peace.

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<sup>11</sup> Numbers in brackets indicate frequency of responses.

### **Forms of Violence in Schools**

Teachers highlighted physical punishment as the most common form of action taken up by teachers to resolve conflict situations in classroom settings. Teachers also tended to share their concern that violence can never be prevented with physical (corporal) punishment. Bullying is another form of violence among children as shared by teachers which is very much prevalent in schools. According to one teacher,

*“Often physical violence (corporal punishment) from teachers plant seed of hatred among children”*

(Teacher: PT3)

### **Significance of Peace Education During Early Years**

According to findings from teachers' awareness on importance of early years was more than adequate. There was consensus among teachers for the benefits of a great start during early years and a positive experience during early years to instigate better outcomes later in life. One of the participant also shared that without peace education; children are more vulnerable to crimes later in life. All teachers endorsed the need for teaching and practicing non –violent conflict resolution from an early age. They firmly believed that early years experiences provide an ability to reject violence later in life (2).

*“We need to bring up our children in such an environment where they like peace, work on peace, create a peaceful society and become peace leaders later in life.”*

(Teacher ST1)

### **Approaches for Creating Peace in the Lives of Young Children**

According to research participants peace education during early years should be mandatory, the key to which is providing love and care during early years at the level of home, school and community. The findings put more emphasis on home, school and community – all three were stated to have a major impact on peace creation among children.

*“Loving and caring environment during early years, at school, home and neighborhood is crucial.”*

(Teacher ST3)

With this claim teachers also shared their reservations and limitations regarding peace education with the current unrest of law and order situation in the country,

*“But everything is not in our (teachers’) control, especially the environment which is outside home and school.”*

(Teacher K5)

## **Home**

Based on the interview findings from teachers, home environment has a major impact on children for creation of peace. Teachers reinforced the importance of parental involvement for peace-building as no option but mandatory (3). Teachers also highlighted the significance of raising parental awareness on peace building concepts.

*“The family plays important role during early years, if they (children) witness violence in families, they will also show the same attitude and behavior”*

(Teacher ST5)

*“Parental involvement for peace building is not an option”*

(Teacher ST1, ST2 & ST3)

## **School**

The findings provided more insights on role of school and its involvement in peace-building; more particularly for teachers’ involvement for imparting conflict resolution education in classroom. Teachers also shared their concerns that non-violent conflict resolution approaches are not being taught or practiced in schools (2).

*“Children should be effectively taught steps of conflict resolution from an early age”*

(Teacher KT6)

*“We have tremendous challenges in our society, such as, poverty and societal divides, more especially absence of a conducive environment which breeds peace, but parents and teachers should concentrate and strive on establishing peace among children.”*

(Teacher: PT4)

*“Schools can play a greater role in raising awareness among students .....and being Pakistani we (teachers) should respect other religions and promote tolerance and interfaith harmony in the society.*

(Teacher: PT1)

## **Community**

Research findings from teachers at large had greater concerns on media and its negative impact among children; especially, programs like wrestling and cartoons were looked upon as promoters of violence among children. Teachers also brought up ideas suggesting the use of media as an effective tool for promotion of peace among young children (2).

*“Media can be very effectively used for promotion of peace among young children”*

(Teacher ST3 & ST4)

Teachers also shared some barriers which are significantly restricting the implementation of peace; according to one teacher, creating peace in the life of young children is easier said than done. More especially in a society whose masses are totally intolerant, left alone children. They also expressed compelling need to create peace awareness among grownups first, without which it would be very difficult to create peace among children.

## **ECE Curriculum and Peace-building**

According to teachers, the main purpose of early years education is to create tolerance, acceptance, humanity, dignity and love among children. Peace education is the most important need of the day especially during early years.



*“The broad aim of ECE education is to make children civilized and fruitful for society for later life.”*

(Teacher ST1)

Teachers also shared deep concerns requiring a top down approach regarding peace education starting from education policy moving down to ECE curriculum, lesson plans, activities, assessments and indicators as a complete and comprehensive framework. They also emphasized that literacy and numeracy should not be the only area of focus, it is most imperative to work on the attitudes and behaviors of children. Holistic development of children should also entail promotion of peace. Teachers stressed an urgent need to introduce peace-building concepts in ECE curriculum.

According to teachers, activities on peace-building should be part of the curriculum as well as imparted formally and informally on daily basis in schools. Themes on peace-building activities should be part of ECE curriculum. Reliable Indicators to measure and evaluate peace-building outcomes among children are also required.

Teachers also shared their concerns regarding the current status of peace-building curriculum; they stated that peace-building is not directly addressed in ECE curriculum, majority teachers shared their concerns regarding these gaps,

*“According to my knowledge, there are no contents/activities on peace in national ECE curriculum. There is a greater need that the government should take steps in this direction.”*

(Teacher S2, S3, S4 & PT1)

Another teacher shared,

*“ECD curriculum entails various stories which promotes friendship and diversity among children”.*

(Teachers S1)

Teachers articulated that social and emotional domain of ECE curriculum, which mainly involves social behaviors, attitudes, communication skills is indirectly linked to peace education. They also shared that peace at times is informally taught as moral and ethical

domain. Teachers also highlighted that there are some areas in curriculum, which promotes indifference among children. They also shared that things are improving but it is far from satisfactory and require much more efforts.

### **Themes and Activities Currently In Use by Teachers for Peace Promotion**

According to teachers, the themes currently used for promotion of peace-building for early years involves; cleanliness, sharing, caring, helping, respecting parents, energy conservation and how to greet adults.

Teachers highlighted the use of flash cards for greetings and courtesy words, morning presentations. Movies downloaded from YouTube (2) was found to be the most commonly used source currently in place for early years education. Presentations and demonstrations for ‘thank you’ and ‘sorry’ are the most widely used forms of peace education during early years. Religious believes sometimes is used as a source of motivation in avoiding violence (God is always watching), similarly, fear of God is used to stop / prevent violence in classrooms.

### **Peace Building Strategies Proposed by Teachers for Promotion of Peace Building**

Participants emphasized the importance of teachers to be a role model for young children, as their behavior and attitude has major impact on children (3). The most important thing according to research participants was to create a calm, cooperative and collaborative environment in the class. Another important suggestion from teachers was appreciation and promotion of peace building efforts by teachers.

*“Teacher should know about peace concepts and have a good command on knowledge and skills. S/he (teacher) should be a role model and demonstrate humbleness and treat children with care and love.”*

(Teacher ST3)

*“They (teachers) should teach students about tolerance and humanity in an objective and logical way for dealing with their prejudice without being swayed away by emotions.”*

(Teacher PT4)

Based on research findings, teachers proposed number of activities to practice peace-building and conflict resolution in schools. Stories and real-life examples were suggested as the best way to promote peace among children. According to teachers, role-plays and puppets is another effective way to teach non-violent conflict resolution (2). Silent game is yet another approach. According to teachers, audio visual resources / movies / media has a major role in these efforts. Activities during circle time can be effectively used to create awareness on peace. Sharing and discussing simple problems and finding solutions with children is another effective way to promote peace-building. Peer -Buddy is another strategy, which can be used to intervene. Group work and sharing and learning together is yet another way to improve peace among children (2). Instructions centered around problem-based learning (PBL) on various situations may also help in creating peaceful environment.

*“Teachers should share and discuss simple problems and try to find solutions with the help of children. In this way we can possibly promote peace, love, dignity and decision-making in our children.”*

(Teacher KT5)

Teachers also stressed creating an awareness of people with different needs as a way to promote peace among children (diversity / people with different abilities). Teachers also emphasized parental involvement on getting a broader understanding of peace issues and to strategize their efforts in home environment as well for maximum benefits.

### **Teachers’ Concerns Regarding Peace Education**

Teachers also shared some concerns; some of them found peace-building as a difficult concept to teach during early years (2). They also shared that ECE curriculum does not directly address peace-building concepts (3). Teachers had many questions about peace. They also shared need for having a broader understanding of what can be done to enhance peace-building among children. More especially they were more concerned and interested in developing their capacities to contribute and eliminate war like situations in the country. They were more interested in knowing what can be done in schools and how the existing curriculum can be modified to introduce peace-building concepts.

*“What we (teachers) can do to enhance peace-building in our children to contribute towards society in such a critical situation where we are very much like in war situation?”*

(Teacher ST1)

Teachers also shared a greater need for the capacity development of teachers on peace education and conflict resolution, as it is the most neglected area in present situation.

*“I (teacher) want to ask that how can we do peace activities in our schools and how we can include it in our curriculum for next year.”*

(Teacher ST2)

They also raised concerns regarding capacity development of parents as an essential foundation, without which targets cannot be achieved.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The research findings provided some great insights on peace and peace-building from ECE teachers of Pakistan. Their shared perceptions on peace and peace-building is having a major contribution towards future research agenda on peace-building, as well as designing ECD projects and programs in schools and communities. The following model very briefly and concisely summarizes teachers' findings at various level of social environment present around children. According to teachers, intervention at all these levels would help bring change in making peace.

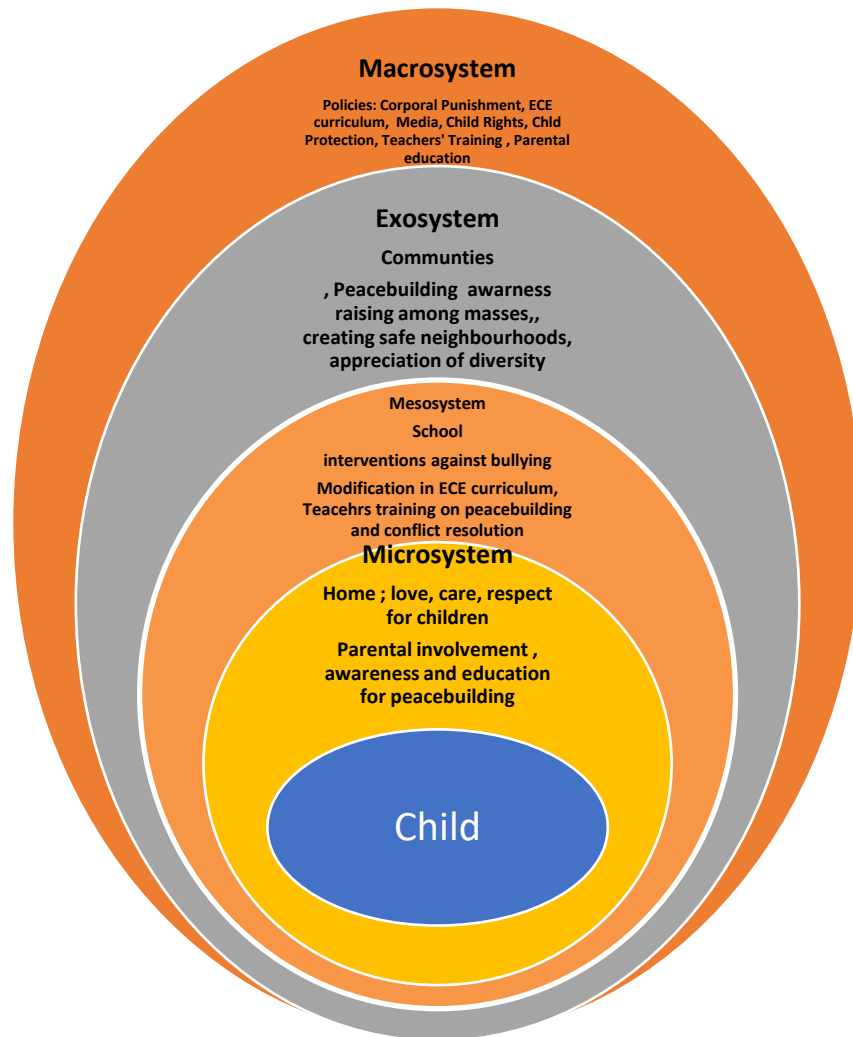


Figure 1: Social environment present around children (Adapted from Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory)

A three-pronged approach; taking in to consideration home, school and community (micro, meso, exo and macro system) is required to improve the status of peace and peace-building in Pakistan. ECD projects and programs focusing all three would only be able to bring maximum

effects. Secondly, the current media is creating a lot of negative influence in the minds of young children; media policies and efficient use of media for peace and peacebuilding is essential. Research findings also stressed compelling need to create peace awareness among grownups first, without which it would be very difficult to create peace among children. In this regard parental education and community awareness on peace-building is crucial. There is a greater need for capacity development of teachers on peace education and conflict resolution, as it is the most neglected area in present situation. Parental involvement is also an essential foundation, without which these targets cannot be achieved. Teachers also recommended review of ECE national curriculum to introduce peace-building elements. Saying no to corporal punishment and discouraging bullying in schools is also recommended for reducing violence among children.

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