



## CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND PEACE EDUCATION

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### **Abstract**

*The word conflict conjures up associations of tension, disruption, and violence with the expectation of anything from uncomfortable to life-threatening situations. From such a perspective conflict is something to be avoided or even suppressed. A common definition of conflict in the literature on conflict analysis is a situation in which two or more individuals or groups perceive that they possess mutually incompatible goals. P&CRE contributes to the creation of peaceful environment in schools and community by: Revealing the concepts of peace and conflict, discussing their definitions, analyzing positive and negative meanings of the conflict; Teaching skills in analyzing conflicts, including understanding the causes of conflict, identification of the levels of conflict escalation, finding possible ways for conflict resolution, clarification of the positions of conflicting sides, conflict mapping; Helping schoolchildren understand the difference between their own behavior and behavior of separate individuals in different conflict situations and their impact on conflict escalation;*

**Key words:** Conflict, Peace Education.

### **Introduction**

The word conflict conjures up associations of tension, disruption, and violence with the expectation of anything from uncomfortable to life-threatening situations. From such a perspective conflict is something to be avoided or even suppressed. However, there is another

side to - the bringing of a unjust situation to the surface or public arena, the stimulation to look for creative solutions and the challenging of outmoded ideas and patterns of thinking. In this way conflict can be a spur to creativity and development and can lead to a higher synthesis beyond contending views or positions. So conflict in itself is not to be eliminated but ways need to be developed to handle conflict which liberate its creative potential and curtail its destructive manifestations.

A common definition of conflict in the literature on conflict analysis is a situation in which two or more individuals or groups perceive that they possess mutually incompatible goals. C. R. Mitchell puts forward a composite definition of conflict which is analytically useful. He distinguishes between: the conflict situation; conflict behaviour; and conflict attitudes and perceptions. Each of these aspects of conflict are interacting and affecting each other shaping the development of the conflict.

Conflicts can be seen as possessing objective and subjective elements. By objective is meant the basis for the conflict situation in terms of competition for resources or positions e.g. positions of power or control, land, oil, budgets, etc. The subjective elements are those attitudes and perceptions which may have a role in determining the course of the conflict and are in turn affected by behaviour in the course of the conflict e.g. feelings about and perceptions (or misperceptions) of the opponent or other conflict party. Conflicts are most often a mix of these two elements and it is generally agreed that the subjective elements seldom cause conflict without some objective basis. Mitchell formulates the relationship between the objective and subjective elements of conflict thus: ' While a conflict may be objective at a particular point in time, changes in the preferences, evaluations, and calculations that occur over a period of time render it a changeable and hence an intensely subjective phenomenon. conflict may be described as subjective, then, in the sense that changes occur within the parties themselves (and in their orientations to the dispute forming part of their environment), rather than in the 'objective' situation external to them from which the originally mutually incompatible goals arose.' These subjective aspects play an increasingly important role the longer the conflict continues to the extent that they may constitute the major obstacle to reaching an amelioration or resolution of the conflict. Therefore, it is not sufficient to deal with the objective base of the conflict situation but also to deal with the perceptions and feelings of the conflict parties in order to have a hope of reaching a resolution of the conflict. Conflicts are not static but possess their own dynamics including spirals of escalation and deescalation. By observing and reviewing conflicts it is

possible to identify phases and turning points in their development which form a general pattern. This is a useful exercises for awareness raising and sensitizing oneself to the consequences of one's action or behaviour in a conflict situation. It can also form the basis for an understanding of what type of approaches or interventions are appropriate at particular stages of a conflict. In addition to the elements and dynamics of the conflict are the levels at which the conflict can be addressed. Once a conflict situation has arisen conflict parties tend to present their positions (or to represent their interests) i.e. what they wish to gain or achieve. However, these are the result of a combination of factors - emotional attachments, calculations of advantage, hard bargaining stances - which can be altered in the course of a negotiation or mediation process. At a deeper level are the needs of the individuals or groups involved and it is necessary to probe beyond the level of positions to discover what are the real needs that lie behind them. Only by seeking solutions at this level (where the sources of the conflict can be found) can a lasting resolution be found. Values, whether ideological, moral, religious or other, also play a role in conflict. Where there is a value-based conflict it is likely to be much more difficult to resolve as values are part of the core identity of the person and are not to be bargained away in a negotiation process. It is also important to try to understand the fears of the conflict parties which may be fuelling the conflict or forming an insuperable barrier to resolution and seek to respond to them in the search for solutions. In some situations conflict is latent. It has not yet come to the surface or it has not been recognized. The identification and acknowledgement of conflict is the first step in handling it. An analysis of the conflict including the conflict situation, identification of the parties to the conflict, the issues involved at the level of positions and needs and the development of the conflict so far should be undertaken. On the basis of such an analysis constructive approaches for handling the situation can be developed.

We all face conflicts and handle them the best way we can when they arise but training can help us to be more effective and constructive in our approaches. Through a combination of increased selfawareness and skills training we can learn to be more effective agents of conflict transformation or possibly even make useful interventions in conflicts in which we are not directly involved. A training for constructive conflict handling would include:

- strengthening self esteem - a feeling of low self-worth or helplessness on the part of an individual or a group can lead to inappropriate passive or aggressive responses to conflicts which serve to maintain the status quo or even exacerbate the conflict.

- developing reflection skills - developing an ability to reflect on one's own strengths and weaknesses, examine one's motivations and behaviour in a critical light with a view to learning from experience.
- improving communication skills - training in the skills of listening and assertiveness, and developing the ability to empathize. This is necessary to minimize misunderstanding, to clearly express thoughts and feelings and to be able to work together towards solutions.
- sharpening analytical skills - necessary for a clear understanding of the conflict.
- stimulating creative thinking and encouraging a problem-solving orientation - necessary in seeking alternative solutions that take into account the needs of all parties involved
- In addition there may be the need for external intervention in the form of a mediator. The same basis of training is required for a mediator in order for s/he to be able to carry out the tasks effectively.

Even after a conflict has been resolved there may often be damage left behind physical and/or psychological. The post conflict period is characterized by work for reconstruction and reconciliation including the healing of psychological wounds and the re-establishment of relationships (and possibly the re-building of structures and institutions). Ideally post conflict action should at the same time be conflict prevention action. When conflicts are not seen as isolated incidents to which one seeks resolution, when they are not seen as an aberration from the norm, then one can begin to speak of processes of conflict transformation where the handling of a particular conflict broadens to include a conflict prevention perspective. Such a perspective seeks to establish procedures and institutions, but also attitudes and behaviour, which will allow any re-occurrence of the conflict, or any new conflicts that develop, to be handled in a constructive and co-operative way. In conflict transformation the aim is a broader based change in the social and political reality. Work at the school level can begin the consciousness-raising process with regard to conflict and the formation of skills and attitudes conducive to the constructive handling of conflict and, in the longer term, contribute to conflict transformation and peace building on a broader social scale.

### **Preparation of the teacher**

Before starting to teach the student's conflict management training the teacher has to be trained in basic communication and conflict management skills. Reading about conflict skills, methods and ideas is not a sufficient base on which to build the project. Teaching young people about conflicts and helping them to understand something of the complexity of peace

processes, cannot be done by providing cognitive knowledge of conflicts and conflict resolution alone, especially when the conflicts they are dealing with are rooted in their own experience. Since in “normal“ situations children are seldom confronted with world wide conflicts peace education has to use other conflicts, which can be recognized by them. To be effective peace education has to go beyond the present conflict, to offer pupils a better and farther reaching understanding of conflict in general, both at the micro level of personal life and the macro level of political interaction. This understanding includes all levels of human knowledge:• the affective level which contains the domain of values, norms, intuitions:• the cognitive level which contains knowledge, insight, analysis and integration• the practical level which includes action and skills So peace education in practice tries to elaborate a sensitivity for „peace values“ such as nonviolence, social justice, tolerance for other groups (cultural, religious, etc.) and responsibility for a humane future.

### **Curriculum**

We have emphasized the importance of peace education and conflict resolution curricula as a preventive means of teaching students alternatives to conflict and violence and promoting the skills, values, beliefs, and efficacy expectations involved in peacebuilding. Curricula are part of a comprehensive approach that we advocate to influence change in the school community. The middle school curricula should provide developmentally appropriate instruction in the areas of orientation abilities, perception abilities, emotion abilities, communication abilities, creative thinking abilities, and critical thinking abilities as proposed by Bodine and Crawford (1998). Additionally, specific problem-solving methods (i.e., negotiation, mediation, consensus decision-making) need to be taught to students using a variety of pedagogical techniques such as role playing, cooperative learning activities, and guided discussions with attention given to the needs of students for privacy and comfort in sharing information. The six peace education and conflict resolution curricula reviewed vary in the degree to which they accomplish these objectives and utilize these pedagogical techniques. Conflict Resolution in the Middle School was regarded by reviewer's as taking a positive stance toward adolescents' peacemaking and conflict resolution abilities, having high pedagogic standards, and best imparting guidance on the inclusion of colleagues and parents and the infusion of conflict resolution instruction in the regular academic curriculum. In addition, it provided helpful guidelines for teachers, supplied an opportunity for further teacher training, and furnished a comprehensive bibliography. Five of the curricula address interpersonal conflict while one (Viewpoints) primarily addresses intrapersonal conflict. All

six curricula fail to address intergroup and international conflict; Given that many middle school students learn about both intergroup and international conflict (e.g., the Civil Rights Movement, World Wars) in their academic classes, the lack of attention to these types of conflict represent a missed opportunity to infuse conflict resolution principles into the academic curriculum.

### **Concept of peace and conflict resolution education**

P&CRE contributes to the creation of peaceful environment in schools and community by:

Revealing the concepts of peace and conflict, discussing their definitions, analyzing positive and negative meanings of the conflict;

Teaching skills in analyzing conflicts, including understanding the causes of conflict, identification of the levels of conflict escalation, finding possible ways for conflict resolution, clarification of the positions of conflicting sides, conflict mapping;

Helping schoolchildren understand the difference between their own behavior and behavior of separate individuals in different conflict situations and their impact on conflict escalation;

Teaching conflict resolution skills and principles both in theory and practice;

Developing theoretical knowledge and practical skills in various styles of conflict resolution including negotiations and mediation;

Helping students develop communication skills;

Developing skills in listening, asking questions and expressing own opinion through activities and games;

Providing the schoolchildren trained in P&CRE with an opportunity to transfer their knowledge and skills to their peers by organizing peer-to-peer education in schools;

Helping teachers acquire conflict management skills;

### **P&CRE helps schoolchildren become full-fledged citizens of the future by:**

Transferring historical facts about the disastrous consequences of wars;

Teaching to respect the history of various nations and to criticize the consequences of wars through the story .

Educating schoolchildren in becoming bearers of the culture of peace as opposed to the culture of war;

Teaching the belief that peace culture begins from each and single one of us; that it is possible to create peace by beginning the changes in one's own behavior and interactions with both family and friends;

Disseminating information about the activities of such international organizations as the UN, European Union, Red Cross and their peace building missions;

Discussing the famous symbols of peace and proposing to create own symbols;

Developing self-confidence among the schoolchildren by teaching leadership skills;

Transferring knowledge on gender equality;

Teaching child rights and paying special attention to the fact that along with their rights children also have responsibilities which may contribute to peaceful conflict resolution as well;

Raising awareness on the role of mass media in the democracy and its impact in terms of initiating conflicts; Providing knowledge on personal hygiene, issues related to puberty, HIV/AIDS and its prevention; Teaching skills in living and socializing in the multicultural world. Providing teachers with new methodological skills which will help them teach peace and conflict resolution education during delivering various subject materials to pupils; Providing schoolchildren and teachers with skills which will help them resolve the problems arising during the study process; Promoting positive changes in personal behavior as well as interpersonal relations; Teaching respect towards peers and teachers; Teaching constructive criticism and open dialogue skills.

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