

## Learning to live together – what education systems can contribute

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It is easy to be despairing, given the many faults and fault-lines in our respective countries, and seeing the divisions being deepened by social media. This is the more discouraging for educators, making it harder for them to help their students to become peace-loving citizens contributing to a well-functioning and inclusive society.

The ideals of respecting each others' cultures and individuality were spelled out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Noteworthy landmarks more recently were the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. Human rights treaties of this kind commit signatory countries to education that builds respect for all. To help deal with religious intolerance, the Human Rights Council Resolution 16/18 and its sister UN General Assembly Resolution 66/167, adopted in 2011, focused on *Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against persons, based on religion or belief*. The UNGA Resolution 'Reiterates the call for ... actions to foster a domestic environment of religious tolerance, peace and respect ... [including by] strategizing and harmonizing actions at the local, national, regional and international levels through, inter alia, education and awareness-raising'.

The Istanbul Process, instituted in 2011 to follow up these resolutions, has comprised seven expert-level meetings hosted by different countries, attempting to use 16/18 and 66/167 as a tool to lessen social tensions linked to diversity of religious belief. The report of the Sixth Meeting of the Istanbul Process, in Singapore (2016), noted that participants highlighted 'the importance of education as a tool to combat religious intolerance'. Likewise, during the Seventh Meeting of the Istanbul Process, in The Hague (2019), there was repeated mention of education during discussions on building tolerant and inclusive societies and preventing negative stereotyping and discrimination.

While education has been mentioned often in these meetings, its central importance and potential in the upbringing of future generations merits more focused attention. The Karachi Workshop can play a key role in filling this gap. However, the challenge is immense. Education is embedded in society, and societies are infinitely complex, giving rise to many differing perspectives on what will be for the best. At country level, electoral considerations often make education a 'political football', with policies changing alongside changes of government. How can educators cope with this? In particular, how can they contribute to implementing the recommendations of Resolutions 16/18 and 66/167?

It is worth noting that governments have all signed onto the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030, including Target 4.7, which seeks a society without discrimination and with appreciation of diversity, in line with the above-mentioned Resolutions and the goals of the Istanbul Process.

### *SDG Target 4.7*

*By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for*

*>sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles,*

*>human rights,*

*>gender equality,*

*>promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence,  
>global citizenship and  
>appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.*

## **Terminology**

It is worth noting at this point that education aimed at combating intolerance, building respect for all and enhancing social cohesion has had many different titles, such as character education, education for grit, life skills, resilience, tolerance, human rights, environmental sustainability, gender equality, co-existence, citizenship, 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, peace, conflict resolution, and so on. Each country will develop its own formulation of such goals. For example, the 2020 Pakistan Single National Curriculum aims to inculcate a set of core values such as compassion and care, hard work, fairness, honesty, integrity, respect, humility and social responsibility (p. 9). The 'interweaving of goals for curriculum' should include:

- *To inculcate in all citizens the tolerance of difference of opinions and beliefs, culture of peace, resolution of conflicts through non-violent means, and equality of human beings*
- *To nurture passion for democracy, democratic norms, social justice, respect for law and prepare citizens having realization for civil rights and responsibilities (p. 19).*

Most of the education goals cited at global and national level have a common core of skills and values, with a slightly different flavour and emphasis. In recent years, the term 'social and emotional education' (SEL) has come to the fore, alongside 'life skills education', as an umbrella term for addressing these goals. A comparative analysis of the shared content of many such programmes is available at Harvard's 'Explore SEL' website (<http://exploresel.gse.harvard.edu/>). 'Packages' introducing social and emotional learning into US schools have been extensively evaluated and found to contribute to academic learning as well as long term success in terms of employment and social conduct.

As an example, 'peace education' at school level is often built around social and emotional learning, applied to living peacefully together, with mutual respect. With the focus on fragile and internally conflicted states in the 1990s, both UNICEF and UNHCR - among others, piloted initiatives to build skills and values for peaceful living and reconciliation, through offering explicit education to children in primary and sometimes secondary schools. UNICEF's Education for Conflict Resolution was introduced to teacher trainers in Rwanda, while UNHCR's Peace Education Programme, with which I was associated, was piloted in refugee schools in Kenya. The latter was successful for seven years, as long as there was funding to provide a full-time peace education teacher in each school. 'Peace education' in this case was about perception, empathy, self-management, two-way communication, avoiding stereotyping and exclusion, practicing inclusion, negotiation and conflict resolution. These are key social and emotional skills, as per current terminology, and were applied in the context of improving interpersonal relations and building peace. A variant of this programme developed for Kenyan schools was successful, but for a limited period and mainly in areas that had been affected by post-election violence. The Kenyan life skills programme and associated peace education programme were not examined subjects, however, and schools often used this timetable slot to teach examination subjects instead. This is a general problem in school systems with high stakes examinations.

As regards terminology, it is less important what the skills and values are called and more important that they resonate with the concerned students, teachers and other stakeholders. Thus, the term 'peace education' resonates for refugees, because they would like to go back to their conflict-

affected home countries. But it doesn't resonate with societies without a recent history of violent conflict. Even in these societies, 'peace education' may be discontinued by political leaders, to show that there is no longer (in their opinion) any threat to peace. There is no good answer to the challenge of finding a good name for 'learning to live together' initiatives. The best message is undoubtedly to spend time with focus groups of students and of teachers in different national communities and regions, finding out what both resonates with the students and is acceptable to other stakeholders.

### **The trade-off between quality and coverage**

How should we approach the practicalities of teaching children the skills and values needed to avoid negative stereotyping of those who are different and the cruelty of exclusion and discrimination? Where the focus of students, teachers and families is on high stakes examinations, this will be a big challenge, as just noted. How in reality can we move from the high ideals set forth in national curriculum documents and human rights instruments to enacting change in classroom realities, especially in low- and middle-income countries where school resources are few and teachers undertrained?

In this regard, I have distinguished between 'intensive' and 'wide coverage' approaches. Both are good, and combining them is recommended:

>'Intensive' approaches: In schools and school networks which have an explicit and real commitment to the ideals of learning to live together, the 'school climate' can be designed to give very strong positive messages about needed skills, values and agency. Time can be found for explicit and contextualized learning across school grades that helps build a considerate and responsible person and citizen, who will seek to build harmony amongst all communities. In this model, teacher numbers are manageable and they can be provided with ongoing training and mentoring to enable success. The more inspirational of the teachers will be role models for life. This 'intensive' model reaches only some students but can touch them deeply.

>'Wide coverage (system-level)' approaches. Here, a different question is asked: what can be done to bring messages of respect for all and peaceful living to all children enrolled in the school system? What, for example, can be done through textbooks and teacher training? The individual impact may be less than in the 'intensive' model, because school systems are difficult to change, but the messages incorporated in textbooks, for example, will reach out to many more children and teachers.

### **Using textbooks to build skills and values for mutual respect**

Textbooks can constitute a wide-coverage tool for conveying the habit of respect towards inclusion and respect for other perspectives, and avoidance of negative stereotyping. Ideally, the content of textbooks should provide an age-appropriate set of learning experiences in this area, across subjects, while succeeding years build deeper understanding and commitment. In reality, syllabuses and textbooks for different subjects are often put together in isolation, and are based on what has gone before. If we wish to include a study unit on non-stereotyping, inclusion, conflict resolution and avoidance of bullying, for example, where does it fit? Not under history and geography, as we have known them, as separate subjects focused on space and time. It can indeed fit into 'social

studies', if a country has this subject title, and if space is allocated. It can fit well into language studies, since human feelings, behaviours and associated values underly literature and much of language studies. Use of the past or future tense can be taught alongside examples of social and emotional skills and values, for example. But does this type of collaborative planning between leaders of different subject curricula exist in the real world? Do we need to set up a process to engage with subject experts and seek their support on this?

Even if a topic such as inclusion and avoiding negative stereotyping is accepted in the curriculum, however, and if it is included in textbooks for each successive grade at a higher level of complexity, how can students know that these lessons are important for their lives and for their society, rather than just a set of definitions that need to be memorized for examinations? This is especially problematic in situations where rote learning is the norm. To fully engage with students, teachers must lead class discussions on such topics, and pairtalk is a valuable tool likewise, to enable the words like stereotyping to move from the printed page into the active vocabulary of the students. In discussions of 'backward design', Wiggins and McTighe emphasise that teachers must be clear on learning objectives, notably on students gaining fluency in confidently using what they have learned, in discussion and in application to relevant issues. This is the more true if the concepts are behavioural ones, where students need to discuss values and attitudes with each other and witnessed by each other, under the guidance of a wise and experienced teacher. One approach to helping teachers who are not comfortable creating questions and discussion around an unfamiliar (or sensitive) topic is to suggest relevant teacher questions and class activities within the body of the textbook itself ('teachers guides' are often not available or not used).

Many teachers will still hesitate to take advantage of opportunities in a textbook to develop new approaches such as modelling positive social and emotional learning as part of pedagogy and will be shy of 'new' topics such as avoiding stereotyping. Unless they themselves have experienced teaching which models these ideas and approaches, they may not be motivated or feel competent to give life to the lesson texts and will stick to dry definitions. Thus, the introduction of learning to live together, alias social and emotional learning and such, is a priority for teacher training programmes, provided that the skills and values can be taught experientially, perhaps with the help of specialist NGOs. If teachers are convinced, they may then wish to draw the best personal skills and values out of the school textbooks, whether the latter are old-style or reformed.

### **Developing a mind-set for prioritization of content**

As an outsider, I am not addressing the political aspects of the SNC. However, I would mention the practical aspects, that there may be overloading of the curriculum, if new content is added without subtracting some of the prior content. This is a widespread problem, that policy makers want to add new content, but subject specialists do not want to give up one iota of what is there already. It is like going through one's old personal papers (or clothes) and trying to dispose of them. Each one seems precious in some way. Or setting off on a journey - if one has to pack a briefcase or a suitcase, one prioritises to stay within the weight limit.

Thus, another key issue for curriculum research is to pull out key concepts and content and offer guidance to textbook writers and to teachers on how to make space for engaging the higher cognitive skills as well as life and societal relevance in relation to these key concepts and topics. The remaining non-prioritised content must be treated with the 'Honey, I shrunk the kids' miniaturization process, and given less prominence. This effort to identify key messages is as important in the religious studies sections of the curriculum as elsewhere.

For social studies and for science, the range of possible content is infinite. Research on what children retain from their lessons in these subjects can help guide prioritization of key take-away learning. Thus, education researchers need to identify key concepts and good practice for teaching them under typical classroom conditions experienced in the country. The teaching process itself can model caring and inclusion, and seeing and respecting different points of view, even if the topic itself is not directly relevant to religious and ethnic tolerance, and textbooks can offer signposts to teachers to help with this. Research can show how often this happens and develop guidance on good practice.

### **Creating a stronger professional discourse around social and emotional learning, including the avoidance of negative stereotyping and respect for all**

Textbook renewal takes place at quite long intervals, and the process is limited to a relatively small number of professionals. How then can a process of reform aligned to national and global policy goals take root? If, for example, we wish to teach the harms of negative stereotyping and exclusion and give practice in respect for all and inclusion – how can we create momentum for these issues to be highlighted in new editions of social studies or language textbooks? One answer is raise the level of professional discourse and research on this challenge. Can the national education community develop more case studies and analyses of existing materials, and how they work for students and teachers, as regards ‘learning to live together’ dimensions? Another avenue for study is how schooling achieves these objectives in self-organised school networks that place strong emphasis on building personal and social responsibility and social cohesion. Research into teachers’ views and experiences, and into teacher training that does and does not highlight these dimensions can likewise help build up an informed national dialogue and discourse. Such research can help empower textbook writers to address these concerns, using good practice examples revealed by the research that are viable and effective within the society.

Research by Prof Fatima Dar, Director of the Centre for Teaching Excellence and Learning Innovation at Iqra University, Karachi, exemplifies the potential contribution of research. She concluded that empathy and prosocial skills were underrepresented in primary school textbooks, and that cognitive-affective treatment of texts in English lessons could teach children to ‘care and share’ while enhancing academic interest and producing more thoughtful expressions during writing tasks (<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1200365.pdf>).

I have been happy to see that CELL (Conflict and Education Learning Laboratory) has set in motion research of this kind by the Masters’ students at Maastricht University, where CELL is based; and has plans for a global platform to bring to the fore examples of current practice in this area. Likewise, NISSEM (Networking to Integrate SDG 4.7 and SEL into Education Materials) has raised awareness of the potential of textbooks as a carrier for social and emotional learning and SDG 4.7 aspirations. There is a need for networking of such networks to build momentum for change.

The goals of Resolutions 16/18 and 66/167 will not be achieved quickly, but progress is possible if there is political will and professional commitment. Likewise, SDG Target 4.7, like many of the Sustainable Development Goals, will not expire in 2030. We will always need to work towards these values-based aspirations, as part of education policy. As we make progress higher up the first hill, we will see further slopes to challenge us. My hope is that enough states make progress towards creating examples of positive progress by 2030 that a stronger target can be adopted for the post-2030 statement of education goals. I trust that the Karachi workshop and the Istanbul Process will spur collaborative action that will help justify the inclusion of an updated version of SDG 4.7 in the post-2030 vision, drawing upon the 16/18 vision. I look forward, meanwhile, to seeing much

strengthened networking on the practical aspects of education to combat negative stereotyping and intolerance and to build strong social and emotional skills and values throughout schooling.