

# Peace Education Within the Human Rights Framework: Curriculum by Grassroots Organizations in South Asia

Nasreen S. M. Contractor\*

---

**P**EACE EDUCATION is constrained by an apparent reluctance to define it precisely, perhaps because it is a multi-disciplinary field found in a variety of learning environments, practiced by educators with varying concerns and perspectives. The lack of definition may serve to preserve an element of creativity, which has been a source of pride among educators, but the lack of organizational structure that characterizes other fields of education, limits peace education to being something "innovative" and marginal from mainstream education. Based on my experience as an educator and my interactions with many community education organizations, I would argue that the lack of definition is precisely because peace education has sprung up in many parts of the world. Impelled by a range of socio-political concerns, the varied professional specializations of practitioners, the distinct circumstances that have led to the emergence of a variety of approaches and issue focuses, there is not one standard field, but a variety of sub-fields loosely held together by a few common purposes. This is amply demonstrated by the South Asia Toolkit for Peace Educators (South Asia Toolkit), published by the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE) in 2007, a compilation of a variety of lesson plans organized under several modules and bound together by a curriculum framework that was defined over a series of discussions between educators working in a variety of conflict zones across the sub-region.

We live in a world of disparities where few enjoy advantages, a world of "peacelessness". Unless respective populations are intentionally educated to understand and pursue what is mutually beneficial to their own groups and other diverse groups, in no circumstances will a society experience "peace". Peace then is possible when society agrees that the overarching purpose of public policies is the achievement and maintenance of mutually beneficial

\*Former Program Officer, Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE). Currently Co-Director, Women's Research & Action Group (WRAG), Mumbai, India.

circumstances that enhance the life possibilities of all. Such an agreement is identified as the universal respect for human rights. It is also an agreement to renounce the use of violence within society and to develop non-violent processes for dispute settlement and decision making.

## **ASPBAE**

ASPBAE is a regional association of more than two hundred organizations and individuals. It works towards promoting quality education for all and transformative and liberating, life-long adult education and learning. It strives to strengthen an Asia-Pacific movement to support community and people's organizations, national education coalitions, teachers unions, campaign networks, and other civil society groups and institutions in holding governments and the international donor community accountable in meeting education targets and commitments.

Through its work ASPBAE lobbies with governments to

- Ensure the right of all to an education
- Uphold education as an empowering tool to combat poverty and all forms of exclusion and discrimination
- Enable active and meaningful participation in governance
- Build a culture of peace and international understanding.

ASPBAE believes in the transformative function of adult and basic education, especially to promote the learning interests of the disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. It believes that education and adult learning are essential means to combat poverty, fight all forms of discrimination, equip citizens to actively participate in development and governance; empowers women and men, children and adults, individuals and communities to cope, survive and transform their position and conditions; and build a just peace.

ASPBAE is a network of organizations and individuals involved in formal and non-formal adult education, working with and through non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community organizations, government agencies, universities, trade unions, indigenous people, women's organizations, the media, and other institutions of civil society across the Asia Pacific.

It offers capacity-building programs such as the Basic Leadership Development Course (BLDC), Quality Adult Education and NeXT.

BLDC is a significant learning event for ASPBAE members. It is a six-day residential program and an induction to ASPBAE's network and to adult education work. It aims to expand the 'leadership corps' in the Asia South Pacific region committed to the right of all to learn, and to promote the learning needs and interests of marginalized groups.

BLDC provides opportunities for adult educators to

- Share, learn and apply adult learning principles and practices to development issues and challenges in the Asia Pacific region
- Develop leadership skills in policy advocacy
- Promote regional networks for adult education
- Focus on gender awareness, regional diversity, and cultural sensitivities
- Gain a better understanding of and develop a commitment to ASPBAE.

While ASPBAE's work is focused on ensuring basic and adult education in the region, it recognizes the importance of defining the components that make up good quality education and learning. ASPBAE aims to steer its thematic programs, such as women's political participation and indigenous education, around quality standards for adult education, or benchmarks, which are rights-based, gender just, and empowering. The Quality Adult Education initiative aims to:

- Help advocates for adult education deepen analysis and thinking on possible alternative policies especially on adult education governance and financing, away from a minimalist/residual approach to adult learning
- Assist adult education practitioners in setting guidelines or yardsticks from which to assess their own work - in the design, implementation, facilitation, evaluation, and contributing to individual and social change
- Contribute to building a more robust knowledge base on quality adult education, drawn from the very rich experience of NGOs and community educators in the Asia South Pacific.

To expand its vision to develop a wider pool of leaders in adult education, ASPBAE offers its members an intensive learning process called NeXT. NeXT is designed to build and nurture regional trainer-facilitators as well

as adult education policy advocates in the Asia South Pacific region. It is an 18-month learning program with built-in opportunities for learning and gaining in-depth knowledge of ASPBAE's programs at the regional, sub-regional and national levels through a mentoring process.

### **Peace Education**

ASPBAE's Peace Education curriculum is an activity based, participant-centered process, built on the foundation of Experiential Education (EE). The participants must DO something, be actively involved. Then after or even during the activity, the learners actively REFLECT on their experience. What did we do? What did we learn? How did I feel? The final and crucial part of the process for the participants is the discovery of how to APPLY their new knowledge or behavior to the world they live in.

Learning/education does not usually happen in a vacuum, which contains only the learner and a guide. Most of the time learning happens in a group. Therefore, Peace Education has to happen in a group. From the single student "Do, Reflect, Apply" learning, the Toolkit moves to a group learning process founded on building a safe community where the participants can explore, try new behaviors, take risks and learn from their experiences. Community-building is an integral part of the education process.

### **Developing a Toolkit**

There are several examples of pioneering and innovative practice of peace education in schools and colleges and by NGOs, youth groups and other civil society organizations in local communities in the South Asia subregion. ASPBAE brought together several leading peace educators from the diverse conflict areas of India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka in consultations and workshops, to deliberate on the essential components of a peace education program and to develop and share effective and creative training methods whereby young people would be able to develop skills and insights, to be able to better deal with fundamental issues affecting our society today. This led to the idea of developing a South Asian training kit for peace educators.

The preparation of the curriculum for the training kit took place in a workshop held in Colombo in 2005. Thereafter partners contributed select

activities that were developed through their practice and best suited the particular themes. These were crafted into lesson plans. The activities were then piloted in workshops that brought together a mix of participants at the regional and sub-regional levels. Hence activities that were context specific were used and tested in effectiveness for a regional and sub-regional mix of participants. Those found most effective were retained in the final collection of lesson plans contained in the Toolkit. Thereafter the Toolkit was widely disseminated in printed form and electronically. Several workshops to demonstrate the use of the Toolkit have been conducted. These have served as Training of Trainers workshops that have multiplied the number of users of the Toolkit. The Toolkit was released in a press conference organized in Kathmandu which was attended by the Secretary of the Department of Education. It has been adopted as part of the mainstream education curriculum by schools in Nepal.

The training kit brings together contributions from these leading peace education practitioners. It comprises exercises that have been developed/sourced and used effectively as training tools among teachers, students and community leaders in the different conflict areas of South Asia.

The activities in the Toolkit are all designed to facilitate a participative approach. It is important to encourage the participants to take the ownership of their learning. Hence the activities in this kit are designed to help participants share their knowledge and with everyone's contribution, together, create new knowledge.

The Toolkit also contains background notes and appendices which a facilitator will find useful to read as preparatory material before engaging with participants on these issues. It is particularly important to study the note on "facilitation skills for the peace educator". This note contains ideas that are drawn from experience in facilitation of workshops that have been organized specifically to address the sensitive and politically controversial themes of peace, conflict and justice issues.

To conduct a comprehensive education program on peace and conflict, several sessions are recommended in which the facilitator can take participants through at least one activity of each module.

Alternatively, the facilitator can select a blend of activities to suit the time available, objectives and profile of the group. Even if participants are familiar with each other, starting with ice-breaking games is recommended to help create a conducive environment for participatory work. The mix of

lessons must combine the essential core of peace education as well as the supportive substantive components.

### **Human Rights Content**

The “peace knowledge,” embedded in the curriculum of the South Asia Toolkit, is built on the components of human rights education which has developed out of a virtual crisis in human and social relations, manifested in repression, socio-economic deprivation, racism and sexism. The South Asia Toolkit brings together techniques for well-planned and guided learning that attempts to:

- Develop a definition of what is peace within a human rights and development frame
- Map conflict situations, analyzing types of conflict, causes, consequences
- Encourage an understanding of multi-culturalism to appreciate oneself and others
- Explore concepts like discrimination and prejudice to restore communication and build levels of trust between warring groups
- Provide opportunities to reflect on gender identities and think about how men and women are impacted by conflicts and other social issues
- Provide opportunities to experience and compare goal setting and problem solving through co-operation and competition
- Explore ways in dealing with conflict
- Draw out and enhance creative expressions of participants about issues and alternatives to conflict.

### **South Asia Toolkit for Peace Educators<sup>1</sup>**

There are various interpretations and some contentions about what should and should not constitute peace education. The possibilities are many and cover aspects such as: educating about peace; learning skills for peace making; and educating for peace emphasizing attitudes and awareness of global problems and human diversity. To maximize the potential of all that peace education can accomplish within a human rights framework, ASPBAE’s

South Asia Toolkit provides a structure for addressing the development of a comprehensive set of values and skills in the learners.

These include:

**A) Core values and attitudes related to:**

1. Human rights and democracy
2. Co-operation and solidarity
3. Preservation of cultures
4. Self and others
5. Internationalism
6. Protection of the environment
7. Multiculturalism and interfaith beliefs

*a) Values and attitudes related to Human Rights and Democracy*

1. Dignity
2. Equality
3. Justice
4. Protection of the rights of all peoples
5. Participation
6. Freedom of speech and expression
7. Freedom of belief

*b) Values and attitudes related to Co-operation and Solidarity*

1. Love of peace and harmony
2. Interdependence
3. Conflict resolution by peaceful means
4. Mutual understanding, co-operation and respect among individuals and societies
5. Culture of peace and co-operation

*c) Values and attitudes related to the Preservation of Cultures*

1. Respect for the family and all its members
2. Appreciation of one's own culture
3. Appreciation of the world's cultural heritage and human achievement
4. Sensitivity to social and cultural change

*d) Values related to Self and Others*

1. Self-awareness, reliance, esteem, and self-discipline
2. Respect and empathy in our relationship to others; loving and caring

3. Moral courage
  4. Open-mindedness, trust, tolerance, equanimity and reconciliation
  5. Inquiry and creativity
- e) Values and attitudes related to Internationalism
1. Awareness of the rights and duties of citizenship
  2. Equality among nations
  3. Harmony between nationalism, regionalism and internationalism
  4. Awareness of global issues and their peaceful resolution
  5. Conflict resolution by peaceful means
  6. Respect and knowledge on International Law and International Humanitarian Law
- f) *Values and attitudes related to the Protection of the Environment*
1. Interdependence of people and nature
  2. Appreciation and commitment to maintain and improve the environment for the survival of all species
  3. Promotion of a sustainable environment
- g) *Values and attitudes related to Multiculturalism and Interfaith*
1. Freedom of thought, conscience and belief
  2. Freedom of religious practice
  3. Respect and appreciation for own culture and of others
  4. Mutual respect for the religious observance of others
  5. Equality of treatment of religions by the state.

## B) Skills

The goal of peace education is for learners to develop the skills necessary to be proactive and effective as global citizen. These can be summarized under the following headings: Thinking Skills, Communication Skills and Personal Skills.

### *Thinking Skills*

- **Critical Thinking:** The ability to distinguish fact, opinion and belief; to recognize bias and prejudice; to identify issues and problems as well as the assumptions in an argument; to reason correctly.
- **Information Handling:** The ability to form a hypothesis and test it; to know where to look for answers and how to select and reject information; to effectively weigh up evidence; to hypothesize eventual outcomes and consequences in order to be able to choose the most appropriate action.



- **Creative Thinking:** The ability to seek novel solutions and answers; to think laterally and approach problems for multiple perspectives.
- **Reflection:** The ability to stand back from a problem and identify its component parts; to effectively monitor thought processes and produce appropriate strategies for dealing with any particular problem.
- **Dialectical Thinking:** The ability to think about more than one point of view; understand both points of view; construct an argument from either point of view based on knowledge of the other.

### *Communication Skills*

- **Presentation:** The ability to clearly and coherently explain ideas
- **Active listening:** The ability to listen carefully, understand and acknowledge the views of others.
- **Negotiation:** The ability to recognize the role and limitations of compromise as a tool for the cessation of conflict; to carry on a productive dialogue towards the resolution of a dispute.
- **Non- Verbal Communication:** The ability to recognize the meaning and significance of body language and other languages (arts, for example).

### *Personal Skills*

- **Co-operation:** The ability to work effectively with others towards a common goal.
- **Adaptability:** The ability to change opinions in the light of evidence and reason.
- **Self- Discipline:** The ability to conduct one's self appropriately and manage time effectively.
- **Responsibility:** The ability to take on and complete tasks in an appropriate manner; being willing to assume a share of the responsibility.
- **Respect:** The ability to listen sensitively to others; make decisions based on fairness and equality; recognize that other's beliefs, views and ideas may differ from one's own.

A review of the forty-eight lesson plans in the South Asia Toolkit, though appearing simplistic, do lead the facilitator and the learner to stimulate reflection and discussion that tap into building the value and skill sets listed above.

The lesson plans are organized into the following modules:

1. Defining Peace
2. Identifying the major conflicts in South Asia
3. Diversity and Tolerance
4. Understanding and dealing with conflict
5. Religion and Peace Building
6. Social Sector Needs and Defense Spending
7. Gender, Peace & Justice
8. Working for Conflict Transformation.

Activities from the Diversity and Tolerance and Gender, Peace & Justice modules of the South Asia Toolkit are presented in the Annexes.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Education is the process of permanent learning with includes several stages of life of people and has as its goal achieving spiritual, ethical, moral, affective, intellectual, artistic, and physical development, through the transmission and cultivation of values, knowledge, and skills. It is framed in respect for and valuing of human rights and fundamental liberties, multicultural diversity and peace, and national identity. It is empowering people to conduct their lives fully, to live together peacefully and to participate in forms that are responsible, tolerant, democratic, supportive of solidarity, and active in the community, and also work for and contributes to the development of the country. This definition of education is consistent with Paolo Friere's definition of education as "problem solving education" as different from "instrumentalist education." To take a real worldview, there needs to be a combination of both. Unfortunately the capitalist ideology of the world economy singularly supports a model of education that feeds the engine of material growth. What is needed to enrich the lives of youth is investing in education that also develops social capital - wherein we strive to develop future generations that can enjoy a society that provides life of quality beyond just material terms. Peace education is a component of humanistic education that can build humanistic minds, communities and societies.

### **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> The ASPBAE South Asia Toolkit for Peace Educators is downloadable in the Publication and Reports section of ASPBAE's website, [www.aspbae.org/node/66](http://www.aspbae.org/node/66).

## **Annex A**

### **Module on Diversity & Tolerance (ASPBAE South Asia Toolkit for Peace Educators, 2007)**

**Activity Title:** Sharing Stories: Prejudice Activity

**Time:** One hour

**Aims:**

- To help individuals explore how they first became conscious of prejudice and discrimination and the feelings associated with it
- To make participants [become] aware that everyone has experienced prejudice and discrimination and that it comes in a variety of forms (not just racial).

**Materials:** None

**Worksheets:** None

**Procedure:**

- Facilitators should divide the class into small groups of no larger than 10 members.
- Each participant should be given the opportunity to relate a story in which they felt discriminated against, or in which they felt they had discriminated against someone else.
- Be sure that everyone has an equal opportunity to tell his or her story.

(Contributor: Community Outreach Project of the Diamond Jubilee High School, Mumbai, India)

**Debrief and Notes:**

- It is vital to continually relate stories back to how they made the person feel.
- Participants will often not offer this information without being asked by the facilitator.

- Remind participants about confidentiality.
- Also, mention that it is better not to refer to people in the class by name in their story.
- It is also unfair to indict someone who is not there to offer his or her perspective.
- It is important to acknowledge the fact that we cannot change what happened five minutes ago, let alone several years ago. The point is to figure out exactly what we are doing and then decide for ourselves if we want to continue doing the same things.
- Participants are often reluctant to volunteer to begin this activity. A good strategy is the facilitator; tell her/his own story first. This will help with the trust factor as well.

## **Annex B**

### **Module on Diversity & Tolerance (ASPBAE South Asia Toolkit for Peace Educators, 2007)**

**Activity Title:** Difference Posters

**Time:** One hour plus possible work at home

**Aims:**

- To think about all the ways in which people are different from each other
- To promote tolerance

**Materials:** Poster-size paper, pencil, coloured pens

**Worksheets:** None

**Procedure:**

- Tell the participants that they are going to be designing posters to be displayed later, and that the theme of the poster will be ‘difference’.
- To start, do a quick brainstorm with the participants about how we are similar and how we are different to each other (see notes below).
- In order to make their posters the participants will have to think carefully about what they will write and draw. To help, ask them about the kinds of messages they would like to convey through their posters (for examples, see notes below).
- They also need to think of a title or slogan for their poster.
- Ask the participants to make their posters. They may need to complete their posters for homework.
- When the posters are ready, display them in a suitable place.
- If time permits, discuss the posters with the participants: why did they draw or write a particular thing? What issues are most important to them? Why?

(Contributor: Human Rights Education Programme, Pakistan)

**Debrief:**

Some of the ways in which people could be different from each other: colour of hair/skin/eyes, shape and size, language, religion, ethnic origins, class, where we live, where we go to school, profession, interests, likes and dislikes, etc.

Possible theme points of the poster: people are different from each other; it is all right to be different from others; they may be as different to us as we are different to them; we should not be horrible to someone because they are different in some way or the other.

## **Annex C**

### **Module on Gender, Peace & Justice (ASPBAE South Asia Toolkit for Peace Educators, 2007)**

**Activity Title:** The New Girl in Class

**Time:** One hour

**Aims:**

- To explore concepts like discrimination and prejudice
- To help the participants realise how it feels to be discriminated against, by getting them to empathize with the girl in the story
- To reflect on our individual prejudices.

**Materials:** None

**Worksheets:** None

**Procedure:**

Slowly read the story below to the participants. You may have to read it twice so that they fully understand the main points.

### **The New Girl in Class**

This is her first day in the new school. She has just transferred because her parents moved here from the south. She looks a bit different from the others and is a very quiet girl. Her family has moved into a not-so-good neighbourhood in town, as that was the only place they could get immediately. But they plan to move as soon as they find something better. The rumour of where she lives has already reached and circulated in class when she arrives on her first day.

As the day goes by, things just get worse. Nobody talks to her and they all give her strange looks and whisper while pointing and looking at her. She is rather uncomfortable about this and on several occasions she tries to talk to her classmates but they either walk away or look the other way.

Nobody answers her questions about the new school and nobody helps her find the cafeteria and other places she has to go during the day. Nobody gives her any attention at all. Everybody seems to be avoiding her. She is very uncomfortable and unhappy. Everybody looks away when asked by the teacher who will team up with her. Suddenly from the back of the classroom a girl gets up and says "I'll team up with her for this assignment." Now there are even more whispers around the classroom and everybody looks at the two girls. The girl who stood up is one of the better students and is generally liked by her classmates. During this assignment the two girls end up having a good time together. The other students in class find out that the new girl is a very nice person and she is finally accepted.

Ask the participants to recap the main points of the story and write them down in bullet points on the board. Hold a discussion about the story (see notes below).

(Contributor: Centre for Dialogue and Reconciliation, India)

#### **Debrief and Notes:**

Begin a discussion by referring to the notes written on the board. The discussion could revolve around the following issues:

- Why were all the girls discriminating against the new girl?
- Did they have a good basis for their prejudice?
- How do you think the new girl felt when she faced the discrimination?
- Would anyone like to share a story of how they faced discrimination and how they felt?



## **Annex D**

### **Module on Gender, Peace & Justice (ASPBAE South Asia Toolkit for Peace Educators, 2007)**

**Activity Title:** Gender and Discrimination

**Time:** One hour

**Aims:**

- To think about the various forms of discrimination faced by women on a daily basis
- To empathize with the problems women face and consider solutions to these problems.

**Materials:** None

**Worksheets:** None

**Procedure:**

Explain to the participants that the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has enumerated four categories or forms of discrimination against women:

- Denial of human capabilities
- Denial of economic opportunities
- Denial of political power
- Legal inequality + inadequate social protection from violence.

Divide the participants into groups of 5-8. Ask each group to look at the statistics below (1995) and identify the category of discrimination that is operating in that instance.

Once they have done this, they can get into the whole group and compare their perceptions and analysis.

(Contributor: Asmita, India)

**Debrief and Notes:**

[Substitute with recent statistics if available]:

- 70% of 1.3 billion poor are women
- Women's wages are less than men by 30-40%
- Women's non-monetized, invisible labor is worth US \$ 11 trillion a year!
- Women are small percentage of borrowers from banks
- 2/3rds of 900 million illiterates in South Asia are women
- 60% of 130 million children without primary school access are girls
- 1/2 a million female deaths are due to maternal mortality. 99% in South Asia
- 100 million women "missing" due to discrimination
- Women occupy 10% of parliamentary seats and 6% of cabinet positions [world wide]
- 50 % of women experience sexual violence
- 80% of refugees and internally displaced (of 24 million) are women
- In India the Sex Ratio is 1000:929
- Literacy: Male - 65.5; Female - 37.7.