

Human Rights Education and Transformation Through the Arts

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The children laugh as a skit about conflict resolution comes to an end. As I look around the room I realize that a dream of mine is coming true. Children are processing their negative experiences of conflict, learning to interact in a more positive fashion and are doing so while having fun!

The tropical rain pounds on the tin roof of an orphanage in Timor-Leste (East Timor). Its pulse mesmerizes the entire classroom. It surges and fades and surges again. Finally, as the rain slows, the noise dies down and we can hear each other once again.

We pick up where we left off, Human Rights, Lesson II. The advertisement posters that the children are creating have taken form, each one representing a different article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights or the Convention on the Rights of the Child: “the right to education, the right to health...” Older children, thirteen through eighteen, are paired with younger children, eight through twelve, so that they can help each other.

The lesson gets back underway and the pitter-patter of rain resumes. So after hours of artistic educational activities, short lectures and interactive learning, we decide to call it a day. Some of the children follow us to Santa Bakhita orphanage’s oversized front door placing kisses on our cheeks to thank us on our way out.

We make our way down the trail, which has become a stream, and finally out of the winding pathway of roads to the main street where we can catch a Timor-style taxicab, decked out with

blaring pop music, stuffed animals and stickers on the windows.

Beginning of the program

At that time the Transformative Arts and Human Rights Education (TAHRE) program was just beginning to take shape. Our implementation of workshops at the Santa Bakhita Orphanage in Dili, Timor-Leste in 2004 was the first pilot of our TAHRE curriculum that has now been used with more than 10,000 children and youth in schools, orphanages, prisons, internally displaced person camps and community centers across Timor-Leste. The objective of these workshops is to educate young people about human rights and conflict resolution while helping them to recover from trauma caused by conflict. There are fourteen lessons in all, that we generally enact two to three days a week until they are finished.

Based on the success of the pilot we built an organization, called Ba Futuru, meaning “For the future”, through which to implement the TAHRE program. Ba Futuru has come a long way over the last three years. We began with just a few volunteers doing direct implementa-

tion with children in orphanages, then added teacher trainings on the TAHRE curriculum that were combined with positive discipline workshops to help stop the use of violence as discipline in schools. Now we have twenty staff and two regional offices, and have expanded our programming to community leaders, as they make the decisions that affect the entire community through the traditional justice system. The situation on the ground in Timor-Leste has changed since three years ago when the program began, now more than 10,000 people are living in hastily constructed internally displaced people (IDP) camps due to the ongoing unrest. Today Ba Futuru focuses on the most at-risk populations, those living in high-conflict areas, IDP camps, prisons and high-conflict areas.

Participatory method

Learning comes both through the way that activities are facilitated in the TAHRE program (the participatory method used is very different from Timor-Leste's traditional patriarchic education system), as well as from the content of the lessons. Moreover, the participants learn from each other. We wanted to incorporate extensive artistic programming, as we both knew from our experience that positive shifts could take place when altered states of consciousness are activated through artistic expression. Painting and drawing provide a safe place where feelings and memories are released in much the same way as they are in therapeutic sessions. Exploration and research led to the TAHRE program's innovative melding of art, conflict resolution and human rights pedagogies. Through providing participants with a venue for processing their traumatic past, the program helps them arrive at better understanding of themselves and their role in their society – this works well for people of all ages.

Need for peace education

Sadly, with the rise of conflict within states the number of children affected by conflict is skyrocketing. However, thoughtful and community-involved programming can help those affected by violence overcome trauma and actively participate in creating a better world. This will make conflict prevention and peace-building more feasible over the long run.

Timor-Leste's history of conflict and repression traces back to when it was a colony of Portugal for more than four hundred years, followed by the Japanese occupation of large areas of the island during World War II, and then its brutal annexation by its closest neighbor, Indonesia, between 1975 and 1999. As the world's newest country, Timor-Leste emerged from decades of violence and centuries of cultural repression on 20 May 2002.

Six years after independence, Timor-Leste remains one of the poorest countries in Asia and has been experiencing civil and political unrest since April 2006. Some of the causes of the current conflict are lack of adequate education, unmet expectations, unemployment and the extremely high population of young people who are not in school or employed. Civil strife has caused anxiety and distress, creating an immediate need for psychosocial interventions in order to provide educational opportunities, create a sense of normalcy and recovery, promote peace building.

During the twenty-four years of Indonesian occupation, it is estimated that as many as 200,000 people, nearly a quarter of the population, died from violence, hunger and disease.¹ Endemic social trauma in Timor-Leste brought with it a widespread lack of self-confidence, stifling creativity and entrepreneurship, and perpetuating a cycle of violence and victimization.²

Timor-Leste's history has left a legacy that today manifests itself not only in civil unrest but also in pervasive domestic violence, sexual

violence against women, jealousy born out of extreme poverty, shame and a general sense of disempowerment. Trauma experienced in conflict has lasting negative consequences, creating a deficiency in human capacity for reconstruction just at the time when good leadership is essential. Despite the need for programming that addresses societal trauma and peace education, there was almost no programming of this kind taking place in Timor-Leste prior to the 2006 reemergence of violence and today there is still a serious dearth of this type of programming underway.

Rationale Behind the TAHRE Program

a) Psychosocial Approach

Psychological healing of those living in difficult circumstances is essential. This project aims to empower people to take an active role in determining the path of their lives. The knowledge and language of self worth that is provided through the curriculum from the TAHRE Guide³ fosters people's ability to create peace in their lives and in their communities.

The psychosocial approach looks at the relationship between psychological and social, and the aspects of each that continually influence the other. By using a psychosocial approach this project attempts to help support the individual participant in their process of coping with difficult circumstances as well as support healthy social relationships that are conducive to building community support for healthy minds and bodies. This project aims to help participants to come to terms with their feelings (fear, anxiety, loss, anger, etc.) and provide opportunities for them to learn how to express their feelings in positive ways (painting, drawing, open discussions, role-plays, etc.). So one component of this project works to help the participants better cope with their feeling through providing workshops for them directly (from the internal mind of the individual moving outward), while another part

of the program helps the community to better support for the participant by providing skill building on conflict resolution (from the outer community level moving inward).

b) Art as a Means of Transformation

The curriculum in the TAHRE Guide uses creative therapeutic techniques as they are often a more accessible and less threatening means of exploring issues than verbal mediums. Artistic expression is useful tools for those who have difficulty discussing their feelings or experiences in words. Moreover, creative techniques provide an avenue for participants to express negative emotions, such as anger, pain, and fear in more positive ways. Self-expression through the drawing, painting, music and movement activities provided during the implementation of the TAHRE Guide, helps to provide emotional catharsis and also impart skills and values that can guide children who are living in difficult circumstances with positive models of behavior.

c) Human Rights Education

With the aid of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, discussions about how rights and their corresponding responsibilities are relevant to the participants' lives, leaves the participants with more encouraging visions for themselves and their futures.

Due to the lack of an assessable and well-functioning national legal system much of the dispute resolution in Timor-Leste is done at the local level. This puts the onus for establishing justice on the community leaders. Knowledge of human rights is essential to empowerment, especially as many community leaders have yet to develop their understanding of human rights. The TAHRE Guide curriculum's exploration of the concepts of human worth and dignity creates a venue to discuss difficult questions around applying human rights standards at the

community level and helps to develop the skills, knowledge and attitudes of community leaders and youth to empower them to create a culture of peace. This can help improve community leaders' ability to make decisions at the local level that are more in conjunction with human rights standards, improving their lives and the lives of others, and to use human rights as the basis for resolving potential conflict.

d) Conflict Resolution Education

This project uses interactive conflict resolution activities, such as role-plays and trust exercises, to equip participants with the skills to build a positive and peaceful future for themselves, their families, and their communities. Participants learn how to resolve problems peacefully, developing essential conflict resolution skills.

The TAHRE Guide includes group problem-solving activities (such as linking hands and working together to unwind the circle), providing a physical, visual way of showing the benefits of a cooperative—rather than competitive—approach to problem solving. Participants explore different means of conflict resolution through role-plays in which they act out common disputes and creative, non-violent means of resolving them. By practicing their responses this way, in a supported environment, participants are able to build the confidence to make positive changes to their behavior in everyday situations.

After participating in Ba Futuru's TAHRE training, Inocencio de Jesus Xavier, a 25-year old youth living in Becora, said, "I learned many things in this program such as human rights, child rights, how to overcome feelings of fear and sadness, as well as respecting others' rights to create peace in my family, neighborhood and community. I feel that the most important thing that I learned is conflict resolution including how to resolve problems peacefully and creatively as well as how to be a good mediator that is impartial."

e) Community Capacity Development

This project will use interactive dialogue with youth and community leaders, to strengthen local support for building peace in communities. This project aims to foster a more cohesive and peaceful family and community life.

Chefe de Sucos and Chefe de Aldeias (village and sub-village leaders), have a large impact on the well-being of women, children and other members of their communities. Due to the predominant use of the traditional justice system, these community leaders make decisions that impact the lives of people everyday. Studies on the traditional justice system in Timor-Leste have concluded that many decisions made go against human rights principles. This project will work with community leaders to strengthen support for enhanced understanding of human rights and needs, and the importance of not using violence.

Each community has elected community leaders as well as those that are natural leaders and command the respect of the community. It is important that these individuals are brought together and equipped with conflict resolution skills and have an understanding of human rights. The TAHRE training will bring these individuals together and provide capacity development that will allow for ongoing peace building work.

Laurindo R. Fernandes, community leader from Same District, after participating in a Ba Futuru Training of Trainers on the TAHRE Guide reported

I feel very happy with this training because I learned a lot from it, specifically about conflict resolution at the Win/Win approach. This method of conflict resolution will enable me to resolve problems, whereby one person doesn't have to win while the other feels that they've lost, but both are satisfied with the solution. So, I will implement this method in my village. If possible I would like Ba Futuru to come to my village to provide this training.

Since then Ba Futuru staff have gone to Same District and worked with a group of more than thirty community leaders, providing training and a venue for practicing conflict resolution skills.

Training Materials

During the implementation of the TAHRE program various training materials are used. The children receive journals, and the childcare workers, teachers or community leaders receive TAHRE Guides and Positive Discipline manuals. Other materials that are used for the workshops include: guitars, drawing books, notebooks, pencils, crayons, paint, brushes, tape, paper and newspapers, as well as copies of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The methods used to implement this curriculum include participatory lectures, role-plays and discussions based on human rights and conflict resolution as well as various play activities including the use of art, physical activities, song and drama.

a) TAHRE Guide for use with children

Each adult and youth participant in orphanages, schools and community centers received a TAHRE Guide detailing facilitation suggestions (including sections on preparation, facilitation, role plays and difficult issues) and fourteen lessons for facilitating psychosocial programming with children. Lessons I & II are designed to introduce the facilitators and the students and to establish ground rules that will set up a safe environment for the children to share their experiences and ideas. These lessons include activities about cooperation and communication. Lessons III, IV and V are an introduction to human rights and the rights of the child. Lesson VI, VII and VIII are on conflict resolution, and lessons IX, X are on overcoming the negative affects of conflict. Lessons XI and XII

deal with the convergence of human rights and conflict resolution. The closing lessons XIII and XIV look to the future and discuss peaceful interaction. They also include an assessment survey to gauge children's progress and review what they have learned over the entirety of the TAHRE program.

The TAHRE Guide has been successfully used as a teaching manual as it details methodology, curriculum and implementation procedures, along with information on effective interactive artistic methods of working with children around the negative effects of conflict, human rights and conflict resolution. The TAHRE Guide has been continually revised and additional activities have been added to augment what was developed for the first and second pilot programs. These changes and additions are based on lessons learned and feedback from staff and participants.

The curriculum also includes group problem-solving activities (such as linking hands and working together to 'unwind the circle'), providing a physical, visual way of showing the benefits of a cooperative rather than competitive approach to problem solving. Children also explore different means of conflict resolution through role-plays in which they act out common disputes and alternative means of resolving them. By practicing their responses this way in a supported environment, children are able to build the confidence to make positive changes to their behavior in everyday real-life situations. Similarly, working through the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and discussing how rights and corresponding responsibilities are relevant to their lives brings new understanding to the children's visions for themselves and their future.

b) TAHRE Guide for use with youth and adults

During 2007 Ba Futuru developed a new version of the TAHRE Guide for use with adults. This manual is based on the previous

TAHRE Guide for children but also includes new activities on mediation, non-violent social change, decision making, peace education, child abuse, trauma and counseling. Ba Futuru has encountered positive results using this new training manual with youth, NGO workers, and community leaders and plans to continue providing trainings based on this manual throughout the years to come.

c) Positive Discipline Manual

In Timor-Leste where the use of physical discipline is extremely prevalent, the facilitation of dialogue about healthy interpersonal relationships between children and those who care for children can significantly help to protect children from all forms of violence and abuse.

The 2002 joint report of UNICEF and Plan International on Timor-Leste called “Speak Nicely To Me,” cites the use of physical punishment by teachers:

Two-thirds of children (67 per cent) reported teachers beating them with a stick and almost four out of every ten children (38.7 per cent) reported teachers slapping them in the face.⁴

In order to help reduce the prevalence of violent discipline practices Ba Futuru has developed a training curriculum and resource materials on positive discipline. This initiative was taken after childcare center staff in orphanages expressed a need for more information on non-violent ways to discipline children. The Positive Discipline manual and corresponding training modules are used in attempt to reduce the use of physical discipline as well as provide positive discipline strategies.

The Positive Discipline manual cites the reasons why physical punishment with children as disciplinary measure is not correct:

- It teaches children to react with violence
- It is not productive to create behavioral change
- It reinforces negative behavior
- It is an abuse
- It can cause long-term psychosocial damage

- It hinders education
- It disregards more effective discipline methods.

The ideas from this manual and the corresponding trainings have been remarkably well-received. Teachers feel that these discussions provide important new information that they had not been exposed to before and they showed enthusiasm about wanting to stop using physical discipline after realizing that it can have negative impacts on children.

One training participant, Graciela do Rosario, said that, “The Positive Discipline training is very important because through sharing this information we can help to decrease the violence that is happening in our daily lives.”

Another participant, Elias da Cruz, said that, “The training on Positive Discipline has value because I can now better understand not to use physical punishment with children.”

This type of training for adults is instrumental to stopping the cycle of violence in homes, schools and communities. Hence, positive discipline trainings have become an integral way for Ba Futuru to achieve its mission of peace building in Timor-Leste.

Outcomes of the TAHRE Program

Hundreds of at-risk children and youth have:

- Enhanced their conflict resolution and peace building skills
- Processed loss and grief through physical and artistic activities
- Engaged in psychosocial activities for coping with, and overcoming, their experiences of violent conflict
- Practiced problem solving in groups
- Been equipped with the language of human rights and self-worth
- Learned to better respect the rights of others.

Hundreds of teachers, community leaders, youth and other child caregivers have:

- Learned that using physical discipline and violence with children can have both long and short term negative impacts
- Been equipped with positive discipline strategies
- Learned participatory education techniques
- Developed plans for enhanced child protection in their communities
- Learned to better respect the rights of children
- Developed mediation and conflict resolution skills.

When the TAHRE program began it was after the 1999 devastation of Timor-Leste but prior to the current civil strife that has been ongoing since the crisis in April and May of 2006. At the time we began we worked primarily with children who had lost one or both of their parents during the Indonesian occupation of Timor-Leste. The TAHRE curriculum draws on the experience of similar programming done in Kosovo, which found that organizing creative activities for children in post-conflict areas contributes substantially to their well-being. This type of psychosocial programming offers participants the chance to be children, regain their self-confidence and joy, in order to help them look to the future.⁵

The curriculum breaks down into segments of five-, ten-, fifteen-, twenty- and thirty-minute activities. In one activity, staff engage children in creating life-size sketches of children and drawing or writing the characteristics that they would like the child to have when they are adults. Then children add pictures of the things that they believe children need now in order to become competent adults. This activity leads into a discussion on child rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Recent research shows that this type of psychosocial programming can help chil-

dren bounce back from the trauma caused by violence. The research of Angela Pirisi laid out in her article “Healing the Minds of War Exposed Children” states that, “children showed a 70 percent improvement in concentration at school after four weeks of a school-based program that integrated educational and emotional needs, using storytelling, drawing, drama, writing, music and games.”⁶

During the implementation of the TAHRE program we have found an increased ability of children to articulate their interests and needs, and built self-confidence and awareness about their role in creating a better world. The children and youth that Ba Futuru has worked with have shown appreciation for the time Ba Futuru staff have spent sharing new ideas and activities with them.

At the last lesson of each set of workshops, we asked participants to do an exercise based on what they studied during the TAHRE program. In the exercise we ask their opinion of the values we sought to develop and what they felt they had learned.

Quotes from children regarding what they learned from the TAHRE program:

“I would like to live my life like this: We should respect each other; we should find love together; we shouldn't fight together.”

“Before I liked fighting with friends and my brothers, but now I don't want to fight any more.”

“In the past I cried a lot, but I do not cry as often now.”

“When faced conflict in my daily life, I now ask what is happening or I will try to find out what the conflict is about. I try to find a way to solve the conflict by not using violence but to solve the conflict by using words.”

“Human rights are the things that everyone has from the time of birth and others have no right to take away from us. Also, human rights are for everyone, of all races, religions, nationalities and ages.”

Using personal and group transformation activities the program constructs a safe environment for children to face and process their trauma from the threat of violence, human rights abuse and death of loved ones.

“In the short term, the children have a respite from boredom and devastation, and are able to participate in otherwise unavailable fun and educational activities,” said Danielle Lelani Ujvari, the program’s co-founder.

Those who care for children have also repeatedly reported positive changes in children’s behavior due to the TAHRE program’s implementation, a great example was at Santa Rafaela center in Oedebe Bebonuk, Dili.

There were thirty-four young children that attended TAHRE program in Santa Rafaela-Oedebe Bebonuk: eighteen boys and sixteen girls. The implementation of TAHRE program for the children at Santa Rafaela-Oedebe Bebonuk started on 3 February 2006, with twice-weekly sessions. The program finished on 27 March 2006.

According to research done by Dr. Phyllis Ferguson, a previous Ba Futuru Advisor and Trainer, a significant number of the children in Bebonuk have parents from different districts. These children represent every district of Timor-Leste; some have parents from Flores and Alor as well. They are living in a mixed neighborhood, which was settled along the river as families of refugees returned from West Timor in 1999. Many of these families moved into burned out abandoned houses. The village has been the scene of frequent fights and violence due the mix of people and the economic and social deprivation of these settlers; many of the adult men are illiterate and unemployed. Some women work arduously crushing rocks, others are kiosk traders and vegetable sellers.

Sister Monica from Bebonuk said that due to the TAHRE program the children have changed, with significant improvements in their behavior. Before when they would gather the young children together for activities, the children were very wild and undisciplined but

now they are much more respectful of each other and to the sisters. Parents of the children in Bebonuk said that after the TAHRE program was implemented, their children can better manage their time to study, better respect each other and are more diligent in school.

Dr. Ferguson reported that the children at Bebonuk were clearly very attached to the facilitators and to the program. Dr. Ferguson said:

The children made special efforts to be clean and well dressed, taking pride in their personal appearances. They were eager to participate, also showing much greater peer respect than I have witnessed in government primary schools across East Timor. They responded positively to participatory activities and worked cooperatively in small groups. Due to their reported prior bad behavior and to the difficulties in the community in which they live, it was particularly heartening to observe the respect and tolerance the children have come to practice with each other through learning and sharing the TAHRE principles.

Working with youth is also integral to transforming communities, especially in Timor-Leste where young people make up such a large part of the population. More than sixty percent of the population is under age eighteen, and the unemployment rate of young urban males is forty three percent.⁷

Ba Futuru also runs the *Youth Integration and Development Initiative* in conjunction with Edge-ucate.org (an international NGO with gang engagement experience) and the government of Timor-Leste to actively and positively engage youth, by providing outlets and activities that afford them opportunities to enhance their personal and social development. This project combines training programs, like the TAHRE program, with personal development and self-esteem building activities to prepare youth for integration into the economy in order to create a long-term peace-building mechanism that will keep Timorese youth off the street and engaged in positive activities while processing the negative impacts of conflict.

As part of this initiative Ba Futuru has done training with youth across Dili and has with the help of Edge-ucate.org established Seroja Youth Center in a high-conflict area in Rai Kotu, Comoro near the Dili International Airport. The Seroja Center has skill building courses as well as community built spaces for sports (skateboarding park, basketball courts and volleyball court) dance, art, music, yoga and peace education. This center provides a positive, self-esteem enhancing, educational environment in which individual independence and collective interdependence can be learned.

Amelia da Costa a 17-year old in Becora-Dalan Klot said: "Now my behavior is different from before because I have learned about human rights, and with this knowledge my friends and I have learnt to better respect each other."

Juvita Pereira Faria, age 14, in St. Bakhita Orphanage said: "I will implement the knowledge from Ba Futuru in the orphanage where I live; specifically I want to become a good mediator and counselor for the other children here."

Sustainability of the TAHRE program will come through the increased understanding by children, youth, child caregivers, community leaders and Ba Futuru staff through the trainings received. Their knowledge of peace building, conflict resolution and human rights as well as civil education will inform their lives and work in the future. Ba Futuru will continue to widen the impact of the TAHRE program in 2008. If enough funding becomes available we will continue in Dili and Baucau while also expanding into new districts including Lautem, Cova Lima, Ermera, Oecusse and Ainaro.

The TAHRE Program provides critical momentum toward the peace, reconciliation and nation-building process by fostering a positive attitude toward human rights in Timorese children and through building local capacity for conflict prevention. TAHRE programming is a step toward the implementation of the international human rights instruments that Timor-Leste has signed (including the International

Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women).

By facilitating healing among those affected by the conflict, raising knowledge of international human rights standards and their relevance in day-to-day living and by encouraging creative expression and co-operation, the TAHRE program will help to break the cycle of violence in East Timor and contribute to a strong, democratic and human-rights-based society.

Endnotes

¹ Dunn, J. 2001 (February 14). *Crimes Against Humanity in East Timor, January to October 1999: Their Nature and Causes*. Retrieved from <http://www.etan.org/news/2001a/dunn1.htm>.

² Ujvari, D. 2004. *Social impact assessment: the likely social impacts of Ba Futuru's Transformative Arts and Human Rights Education program*. Melbourne University.

³ The TAHRE Guide can be downloaded at this address: <http://bafuturu.homestead.com/Publications.html>

⁴ UNICEF and Plan International. 2006. *Speak Nicely to Me*. Timor-Leste.

⁵ WarChild. 1999. *Children's Buses in Kosovo*. WarChild Netherlands. Retrieved from <http://www.warchild.com/projects/kinderbus.html>.

⁶ Pirisi, A. 2001. "Healing the Minds of War Exposed Children" in *The Journal of Addiction and Mental Health*, 4, 6, 2-3.

⁷ UNICEF. 2007. *The State of the World's Children Report*. Retrieved from <http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/Timorleste.html>.

