

# PEACE EDUCATION AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION: ISSUES AND PROBLEMS

*F. N. Akubue, Ph.D*

## **Abstract**

The main purpose of this paper is to look at issues and problems of peace and conflict resolution. The paper explained the concept of peace and conflict resolution by different schools of thought. It also traced the development of peace studies to Europe and noted that peace studies is concerned with the understanding of the causes of violence and conditions for a peaceful world. The problems of peaceful co-existence in this 21<sup>st</sup> century were discussed. Another aspect of the paper dealt with the role of schools and teachers in peace education and conflict resolution. The importance of the subject curriculum content was highlighted. It was emphasized that a resourceful teacher could teach peace and conflict resolution through some other topics in Social Studies or any other subject. Suggestions were made on how to teach peace and conflict resolution in schools using holistic approach, dialogue, mediation and reconciliation. The paper concluded that a peaceful society is possible if peace education and conflict resolution are properly handled by the school through appropriate curriculum and effective teaching.

## **Introduction**

Peace has been explained by various schools of thought from different perspectives. To a sociologist, peace is simply a condition of social harmony in which there are no social antagonisms. In other words, peace is a condition in which there are no social conflicts and individuals and groups are able to meet their needs and expectations (Ibeanu, 2006). A structured functionalist is of the opinion that peace is achieved when structures (institutions) perform their functions according to their mandates. For the Marxist, peace is attained when everybody has equal access to community or country resources, thereby extinguishing class distinctions that result to exploitations and the domination of one class by the other which will give rise to antagonisms between the rich and the poor.

Conflict can be described as a phenomenon that is important for human existence. The purpose of conflict resolution is to provide an environment in which each individual can feel physically and psychologically free from threats and danger and can guide opportunities to work and learn with others for mutual achievement of all citizens, (Conflict Resolution Education Report, 2007).

Peace studies as an academic discipline was developed in Europe in the late 1940s, with a strong root in the Scandinavian countries. It is concerned with the understanding of the causes of violence and conditions for a peaceful world.

Initially, peace research focused on direct personal violence which means violence directed by one person to another as in the case of assaults, torture and terrorism, emphasizing more of conflict than peace. In the 1960s and 1970s, researchers shifted their attention from direct to indirect violence i.e. structural violence which points out that people may suffer as a result of social, cultural, political and economic systems. Structural violence includes poverty, hunger, discrimination, apartheid and many others. Structural violence is a major obstacle to peace (Ibanu, 2006). Peace education is concerned with the transformation of culture of war to a culture of peace and it emerged as a critique of a realist interpretation of war and conflict and also as an alternative academic study of politics and international relations, (Francis 2006). Francis, further pointed out that, the study of peace became institutionalized as polemology, that is, science of peace concerned with the cause and resolution of conflict.

This paper attempts to explain the concept of peace education and conflict resolution as well as problems of peaceful co-existence, whereby the issue of crime rate is highlighted. The role of the school and that of the teacher in peace building are discussed. The paper delved into curriculum issues and pointed out that there are some topics in Social Studies curriculum that could be used by resourceful teachers to teach peace and conflict resolution. Then the paper anchored on proposing some approaches for teaching peace and conflict resolution.

### **Problems of Peaceful Co-Existence**

In recent times, the problems of building peaceful relationships between and within nations, regions, and communities are complex and enormous. Many nations face persistent political conflicts caused by ethnic contests, religious intolerance, boundary disputes and resources control. The world is indeed, torn apart by war and terrorism in the Middle East and some parts of Africa. The very survival of humanity is threatened by nuclear arms race, the global spread of militarization and the deadly nuclear power. Hundreds of millions of children, women and men suffer malnourishment, sickness, hunger and poverty – a tragic manifestation of global peacelessness (Toh and Floresea – Cawagas (1999).

It is very easy to observe in this 21<sup>st</sup> century new forms of criminal violence within our localities and becoming a victim seems to be normal. Crime takes place anywhere both in public and private places. It can occur in such places as people's homes, neighbourhood, along the streets and at any time of the day. The victims may be strangers or members of a group. The multiplicity of forms of violence in contemporary societies which include social exclusion, gender violence, school violence, racisms and ecological violence has given rise to the disintegration of citizens of the world (Tavares – dos-Santos 2002). The above scenario portrays the urgent need and relevance of education for peace in our schools.

### **The Role of School and the Teacher**

Peace and conflict resolution should actually be a separate subject in primary and secondary schools instead of being just a topic in Social Studies. Some tertiary institutions have even incorporated peace and conflict resolution as part of their General Studies (G.S) Programme and University of Nigeria Nsukka is one of such institutions.

One pertinent question to ask is – to what extent do teachers perform their functions of educating children/students properly by inculcating in them the right values and norms such as tolerance, patience and love? If they really do, the society will be more peaceful than what we are experiencing in recent times. The school definitely, has a significant role to play by starting to teach the children early enough in life to adopt the culture of peace and not that of violence.

Peace is implicitly part of education but the peace element must be made more explicit. A peace centred curriculum is necessary to raise the consciousness of poor citizens regarding the roots of poverty. Peace education empowers ordinary citizens to seek greater social justice and a fairer distribution of national wealth and income (Toh and Floresca-Cawagas 1999). One of the aims of education for peace is to develop the knowledge, attitudes and skills which are needed in order to enquire into the obstacles of peace and the causes of peacelessness, both in individuals, institutions, and societies.

Issues relating to peace education and conflict resolution are diversified. Better awareness of the causes of conflicts, violence and peacelessness at the global, national, community and interpersonal levels could be taught by a resourceful teacher through other topics in the Social Studies curriculum. The crux of the matter is that education for peace is now becoming more and more urgent in our schools throughout the world, especially in Nigeria which in recent, times has become a country where conflict and violence have taken a new dimension and almost getting to the level of terrorism. Compartmentalization of teaching with reference to peace and conflict resolution is not very necessary so as to enable resourceful teachers who teach other subjects use relevant topics to illustrate to students the concept of peace and conflict resolution.

It is a well known fact that the curriculum is the base of all school activities and it is also true that the curriculum suggests the method by which it will be implemented. On the basis of this, the writer examined the Junior Secondary School Social Studies Curriculum and found out that the topics on Peace and Conflict Resolution were very vague and did not contain enough substance that would make much impact in inculcation of culture of peace in the students. A resourceful teacher however, could use other Social Studies topics to teach peace and conflict resolution. Such topics include:

- the study of Human Rights

- the study of the constitution and rights of citizens in democracy
- tolerance and social justice
- co-operation and conflict
- compromise

The issue really is that peace education and conflict resolution should be fundamental to a whole life of a school by integrating them into school subjects' especially Social Studies and Religious and moral Instructions.

### **Conflict Resolution**

The essential process of conflict resolution was identified to be dialogue, negotiation, mediation, and consensus of decision making. The foremost among them is dialogue. The process of building a culture of dialogue is through personal dynamic commitment of those who live and promote this highest mechanism that becomes a powerful energy for growth of individuals and societies in times of conflict (D' Ambra 2004).

More attention should be paid to conflict education in schools especially in this time and age where conflict and violence are rampant in our society. But the question is – how effective is conflict resolution education in reaching its goals of eliminating verbal and physical violence in schools? According to Cromwell(1999), research findings have shown that it is possible for conflict resolution programme to change the social environment of a school. For example, the Clark County Social Service School Mediation Programme in Nevada (USA) during 1992 – 1993 school years reduced conflict among students in two participating elementary schools and helped prevent fights among students. After the programme, the number of teachers who spent less than 20 percent of their time on discipline increased by 18 percent. In New York City, five out of six high schools that participated in School Mediator Alternative Resolution Team (SMART) had 45 to 70 percent reduction in suspensions for fighting during the programme's first year of operation. Evaluation of the Impact of the Resolving Conflict Creatively Programme (RCCP) in four multiracial, multiethnic school districts in New York City showed that 84 percent of teachers who responded to a survey reported positive changes in classroom climate; 71 percent reported significant decreases in physical violence in the classroom and 66 percent observed less name calling and few verbal insults. More than 98 percent of respondents said that mediation gave children a significant tool for handling conflicts (Cromwell, 1999).

The above reports show that conflict resolution education programme can have influence on the behaviour of the children. They also show that children's moral and social development can be enhanced by the appropriate curriculum, teaching methods, classroom management, relationships in the classroom and school as a whole.

Schools are not immune to the problems of the society. The disorder of the world surfaces in schools in many ways. Any school can become a community which models how the world may be. For example, each person is respected and honoured, mutuality exists in all relationships, and resources are used mindfully and justly thereby, creating an atmosphere where people can be fulfilled.

### **Suggestions on How to Teach Peace and Conflict Resolution in Schools**

The school is an agent of socialization, transmission of knowledge and an agent of social change. The goals of the school as an organisation include instruction in different subject areas, moral and social training and training for adult status, (Akubue and Okolo, 2008). The success of peace education and conflict resolution depends on how far the school authorities emphasize the teaching and learning of the topic and also, the method of teaching adopted by the teachers.

Method of teaching is an issue that should really be taken very seriously because of its importance in the learning process and also, effective teaching produces effective result. The problem is the ability of the teachers to teach peace and conflict resolution in such a way that the students will understand the different levels and modes of conflict, and also employ peaceful resolutions. Building a culture of peace involves changing attitudes, beliefs and behaviours from everyday life situation to high level of negotiations between countries, (Moawad, 1996).

This paper suggests four approaches to teaching and learning of peace and conflict resolution in schools, namely;

- (a) Holistic approach
- (b) Dialogue
- (c) Mediation
- (d) Reconciliation approach

#### **a. Holistic Approach**

Any proposed resolutions for peace have to take into account the dynamic relationships which connect various levels and kinds of conflicts. A peace-oriented curriculum seeks to draw a learner's understanding of various conflicts into a holistic frame work, (Toh and Floresca-Cawagas 1999). Partial analysis which overlooks the wider and deeper roots of the problem will render proposed resolutions ineffective. For example, if there are intercultural problems, there may be economic, religious and political injustices at the base of inter ethnic conflict. In this case, trust will sooner or later turn to disillusionment unless structural reforms are implemented. In peace education, the diverse issues of conflict and violence should be viewed with a holistic vision because; human rights, social justice, economic justice, personal peace and harmony are interrelated.

### **b. Dialogue**

To educate for peace, it is not enough to just raise issues and problems of conflict or violence. Teachers have to make use of teaching and learning processes that are peaceful. Peaceful teachers engage their learners in dialogue, in order that basic assumptions underlying any issue are critically analyzed and not passively accepted. Peace education should aim at developing critical and democratic thinking in their students. Peace education flourishes best in classrooms and other educational environments where creative and active learning is fostered. Toh and Florence-Cawagas (1999) pointed that, it is not good to stifle the learning initiative by an excessive examination syndrome or by the spoon feeding of “truths” and facts dispensed by teachers, experts and other authority figures. They went further to say that peace educators can now draw upon an increasing body of knowledge in co-operative creative styles of learning, as well as nonviolent strategies of conflict resolution.

Most curricular tend to be purely academic and irrelevant to local, social, economic and cultural realities. The challenge of the students should be to see how their knowledge can be applied to solve community problems and help them to cope with daily problems. Dialogue becomes a culture when people who are sincere are convinced and committed to it in all levels of society.

### **c. Mediation**

This calls for a third party intervention to resolve the conflict. The third party will seek for satisfactory solutions by trying to minimize obstacles to the negotiation process and thereby, reaching a compromise.

### **d. Reconciliation**

This approach goes beyond solving the conflict but tries to bring mutual change of attitude from resentment to friendship. The people involved in the conflict will be ready to see the positive effect of forgiving each other and starting afresh. Toh (2010) reiterated that unless individuals are encouraged from an early age to respect cultural differences and to learn to live together peacefully, it is likely that seeds of discrimination will grow to bear fruits marked by racist attitudes and conduct, which can lead to extremist hatred and even violence.

### **Conclusion**

Education for peace necessitates a constant balance between critical reflection and critical action. If it is to play its rightful role in building a more peaceful, just, and compassionate world peace education cannot merely project the vision of noble ideals and goals which most of the time remain on paper but should be implemented. The issue really is that for peace and conflict resolution to prosper, there is need for a critical reorientation of the curriculum across all

disciplines and at all education levels so as to highlight people's oriented analysis of peace and conflict and also the practice of personal and social peace.

From preschool and primary levels, a Nigerian child should learn to appreciate values, attitudes, and practices of non-violence, compassion and justice in conducting his/her personal and interpersonal relationship. At secondary school level, students who are already well grounded in peace education will try to integrate theory and critical reflection with relevant social practices such as getting involved in community service and fostering the growth of democratic and patriotic principles. By the time they get to tertiary levels the students must have acquired a sound foundation in peace consciousness and commitment. The university curriculum will be such that it will produce graduates who are likely to enthusiastically place their skills at the service of humanity, especially the less privileged in the society. The issue is that educational institutions need to guide students to understand and respect cultural and faith diversity, and to promote peace in their societies and the world at large.

Teachers are the hub of the curriculum; they are the people who will implement the curriculum at all levels of education. All these expectations of a peace-oriented curriculum will not be realized without the willingness and commitment of teachers, curriculum planners and school administrators. They need to support innovations towards peace education and sincerely attempt to practice personal and social peace in the presence of the new generation of youths.

Peace education and conflict resolution if properly handled by the school through appropriate curriculum and effective teaching, a peaceful society will be possible. Peace education does not promote only objective understanding of social issues and problems; most importantly, it should help students to be creative, non-violent and make their social, cultural and political environment peaceful and habitable.

### **Recommendation**

Based on the issues raised the following recommendations were made:

1. Some other relevant topics in Social Studies curriculum should be used to teach about peace and conflict resolution.
2. More teachers should be part of the solution to the problem of peace in our society by using the relevant topics in their subject areas to illustrate to students the concept of peace and conflict resolution.
3. Holistic approach to teaching of peace and conflict resolution is recommended. Others include dialogue, mediation and reconciliation
4. The entire school system should create a cordial atmosphere where peace, justice and equity prevail.
5. There should be a critical re-orientation of the curriculum across all disciplines and at all levels of education to reflect peace and conflict resolution.

**References**

- Akubue, F. N. & Okolo Ann N. (2008). *Sociology of education* Nsukka: Great AP Express Publishers Ltd.
- Cromwell, S. (1999). *Curriculum: Conflict resolution education; Four Approaches* Education World.
- Francis, D.J (2006). Peace and Conflict Studies: An African overview of basic concepts. In Shedrack, G.B.(Ed), *University for peace: Introduction to peace and conflict studies in West Africa*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd.
- Ibeanu, Oke (2006). Conceptualising peace. In Shedrack, G.B(Ed), *University for Peace: Introduction to peace and conflict studies in West Africa*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd.
- Learn Peace: Which way to peace? Educating for peace. Retrieved 30/12/2007 [http://www.ppu.org.uk/learn/peaceed/\pe\\_which.html](http://www.ppu.org.uk/learn/peaceed/\pe_which.html)
- Moawad, N. (1996). An agenda for peace and culture of peace. In Fumiyo Kagawa (2004). Wholeness and hope: An exploration of the world view of peace education in Ontario. *International journal of curriculum and instruction*, 5(1) 3-19.
- D' Ambra, S. (2004). From conflict to a sustainable dialogue and peace (active-harmony approach). *International Journal of Curriculum and Instruction*, 5, (1) 114-115
- Tavares-dos-Santos, J.V. (2002). Worldization of Violence and Injustice, Current Sociology. *Journal of the international Sociological Association (ISA)*. SAGE Publishers. 50, (1) p(1-3)
- Toh Swee-Hin & Floresca-Cawagas, V. (1999). *Peace education: A Framework for the Philippines*. Quezon City: Phoenix Publishing House, INC.
- Toh, Siwee – Hin (2010). Enhancing the dialogue and alliance of civilizations: Perspectives from Peace Education. *International Journal of Curriculum and Instruction*. 7(1) 3-36.
- Federal Ministry of Education. 9-Year Basic Education Curriculum Social Studies for JS1-3 (2007).Nigeria Education Research and Development Council (NERDC)