

Ensuring Stable and Peaceful Societies

"Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by understanding!"

-Albert Einstein

SUMMARY

The root causes of conflict and violence need to be examined, and educational programs developed to deal with these at the root. There are existing 'tried and tested' educational programs available, including humane education – which creates a culture of empathy and caring by stimulating the moral development of individuals to form a compassionate, responsible and just society.

BACKGROUND

Key Sources of Conflict

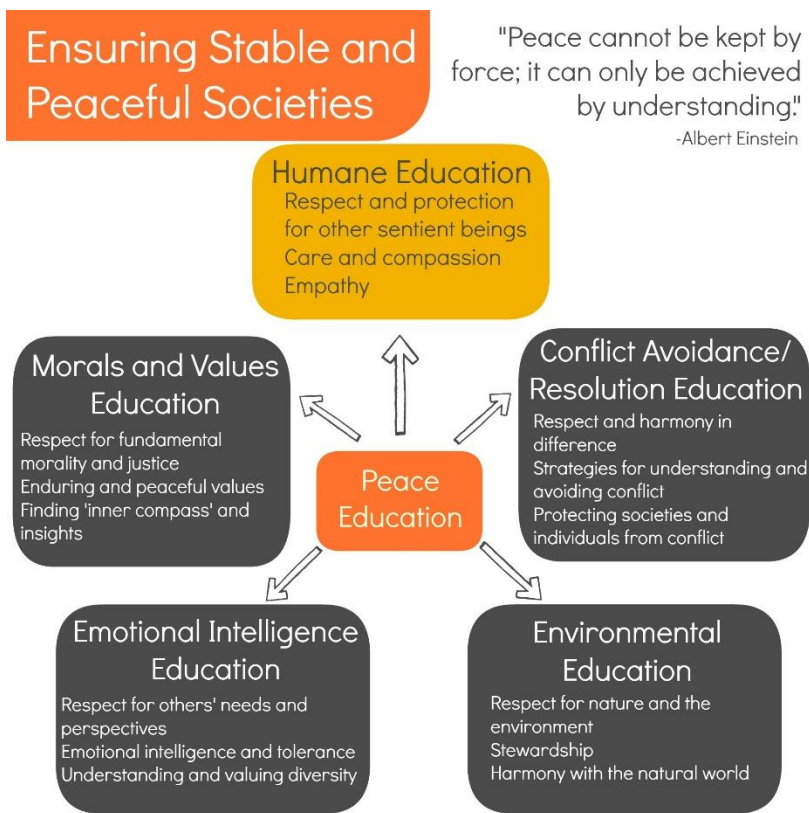
The concept note refers to the increase of conflict and violence in societies. This is scarcely surprising, given the current focus, priorities and direction of many societies across the world. We are becoming more materialistic, more individualistic and selfish, and increasingly driven by the quest for worldly success and prosperity. Growth of economies and acquisitive personal aspirations lead to conflicts over scarce resources. Lack of equity can also contribute to conflict ... but even this would not be a problem if these was a spirit of interconnectedness and giving in society. But our priorities and values are changing – mostly to the detriment of wisdom, compassion and – ultimately - our own happiness. We increasingly communicate through trite, short-hand phrases, adopting and justifying ideologies, instead of developing our own insights and wisdom. Soul-searching and personal development are no longer prioritized, as conformity is easier and more likely to gain peer acceptance.

Importantly, we are also becoming more urbanized, and losing our deep connection to nature and animals – and often to our human support systems (our families and communities).

Working at the Root

Peace will not be achieved by patchwork reforms. The development of peace has to begin with understanding ourselves and the nature of the world we live in.

We humans have a built in code in our DNA that speaks to us of right and wrong. Our duty to our learners is to assist them to reach inside and interpret this code, so its guidance can be used when they are faced with hard decisions and difficult situations. The wisdom they are developing will affect their character, values, and morality. Values that come



from the heart provide a foundation of strength and goodness that lasts a lifetime, and can be brought into play whenever new challenges arise. In our new fast-moving world, the development of wisdom is crucial.

Conventional education is the transfer of knowledge to pass examinations and – sometimes – to gain employment. This is significantly lacking for the development of the whole human. In many ‘developing’ countries, education is still by rote, passing on formulaic learning with no development of insights, intelligence and values. In such cases, Universal Primary Education is of little value in providing much-needed life skills?

World Animal Net strongly advocates the educational approach for the development of peaceful societies, working at the root of the problem for sustainable change.

Humane Education

Humane education is one tried and tested educational approach which could be used for this purpose. It is defined as:

“A process that encourages an understanding of the need for compassion and respect for people, animals and the environment and recognizes the interdependence of all living things”.¹

The aim of humane education is to create a culture of empathy and caring by stimulating the moral development of individuals to form a compassionate, responsible and just society. It is a means of introducing children to the reactions and emotions of animals, as well as linking this to an understanding of environmental issues and ecosystems. It has the potential to change hearts and minds – and ultimately our society.

There is a well-documented correlation between childhood cruelty to animals and later violence and criminality. Humane education is needed to develop an enlightened society that has empathy and respect for life, thus breaking the cycle of abuse.

The following claims were made for humane education by the US National Parent-Teacher Association Congress in 1933:

"Children trained to extend justice, kindness, and mercy to animals become more just, kind and considerate in their relations to one another. Character training along these lines in youths will result in men and women of broader sympathies; more humane, more law-abiding - in every respect more valuable - citizens. Humane education is the teaching in schools and colleges of the nations the principles of justice, goodwill, and humanity towards all life. The cultivation of the spirit of kindness to animals is but the starting point toward that larger humanity that includes one's fellow of every race and clime. A generation of people trained in these principles will solve their international difficulties as neighbors and not as enemies."

Humane education is the building block of a humane and ethically responsible society. When educators carry out this process using successfully tried and tested methods, what they do for learners is to:

- Help them to develop a personal understanding of ‘who they are’ – recognizing their own special skills, talents, abilities and fostering in them a sense of self-worth.
- Help them to develop a deep feeling for animals, the environment and other people, based on empathy, understanding and respect.
- Help them to develop their own personal beliefs and values, based on wisdom, justice, and compassion.

¹ See CARA Welfare Philippines, Humane Education, <http://www.caraphil.org/mainsite/our-projects/humane-education/> (last visited, Mar. 28, 2014).

- Foster a sense of responsibility that makes them want to affirm and to act upon their personal beliefs.

In essence, it sets learners upon a valuable life path, based on firm moral values.

Through humane education, teachers are able to reach into the hearts of learners, begin by kindling their natural interest in animals, and move towards developing a mind-set of empathy, care and respect for all life. Rekindling the spirit of care and respect for life, learners find a new sense of self-esteem and confidence.

Simon Baron-Cohen, Professor of Developmental Psychopathology at the University of Cambridge, UK:

Empathy is the most valuable social resource in our world. It is puzzling that in school or parenting curricula empathy figures hardly at all, and in politics, business, the courts, or policing, it is rarely, if ever, on the agenda. The erosion of empathy is a critical global issue of our time.

Research has shown that humane education has a wide range of positive social and educational outcomes. The empathy generated extends to people of a different gender, ethnic group, race, culture or nation. It is also a sound investment - working on the prevention of criminality and antisocial behavior, which can have a massive societal cost, both in terms of reduction in 'quality of life' and in financial costs incurred through criminal damage, maintenance of law enforcement systems, court costs, prison systems and juvenile work.

Cape Town school teacher, Vivienne Rutgers:

“As a teacher with 30 years of experience, I do not believe that we can solve violence in our society with high fences and razor wire. If we are to fight violence effectively and uplift our communities for a sustainable future, we will have to reach into the hearts of learners and develop that vital quality called 'empathy'.”

World Animal Net believes that humane education should be an essential part of a student's education as it reduces violence and builds moral character. It can also play a significant role in the development of stable, caring and peaceful societies.

There are also other educational initiatives that could help, including peace education and values education.

Human Trafficking and the Illegal Wildlife Trade

The concept note makes specific mention of the illegal trade in wildlife, in the same vein as human trafficking, – pointing to both as ‘external stresses’. As an animal welfare organization, World Animal Net is greatly concerned about the illegal wildlife trade. However, we feel that these are probably both symptomatic of the wider problem in current society: the erosion of values and respect for human life, and the prioritization of economic gains and acquisition (i.e. an effect, rather than a cause).

CALL TO ACTION

World Animal Net urges the inclusion of humane education, and peace education more broadly, in the post-2015 development agenda, as a sustainable intervention towards the development of stable, caring and peaceful societies. This work could be coordinated and examined, to include all tried and tested educational initiatives (including: peace education, humane education, environmental education and values education) in the search for integrated educational solutions. Programs could then be developed and piloted, using best practice, evaluated and subsequently rolled out with the support of donors and development partners.