

The Art Of Better Living Through Non-formal Education

BY

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Pakistan seems to fail in tackling the consequences of unplanned urbanisation and urban growth. In the past, threats to peace have come mainly from the military aggressive and ambitious states, will now come mainly from dislocated communities and individuals alienated by uncontrolled urbanisation¹. We already have created a lot of negativity and suffering both personally and collectively in a non-formal way. This causes us to harm our society, our country and ourselves. Is there any need to stress the importance of and suggest the great need to develop *Non-formal education* alongside the development of our normal education systems in Pakistan. What are the important things we need to do, to make our cities better places to live in? Is there any importance to educate the present and future generations in inner peace and non-violence through both formal and non-formal education? How the non-formal education becomes the only antidote for better living?

What is Non-formal education

Non-formal education is something very far away from most people's minds, so firstly I would like to explain what non-formal education is. We are all familiar with formal education, which helps us to gain vocational skills and teaches us to use the logical, rational, cognitive and intellectual part of our brain. However we are not familiar with non-formal education. non-formal education is an innovation of this century. Coombs defines it as "any organized learning activity outside the structure of the formal education system that is consciously aimed at meeting specific learning needs."² It helps us to deal with the intuitive, emotional, instinctive, artistic and subconscious aspects of our mind, all of which help us to develop our social, interpersonal, psychological and emotional life skills³. Whilst the formal system of education prepares us very well for the world of work, its limitation is that it does not teach us how to deal with the emotions that

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arise during times of stress and life crisis, or how to unite abstract concepts with everyday life. It also could not help the people to solve the problems of their daily life⁴. Through integrating non-formal education into the formal education system we harmoniously develop both the left and right hemispheres of our brain. This integration creates individuals who are more balanced and who can make and even maintain social peace and harmony in our cities, people who are interested in taking care of the urban and natural environments. Non-formal education is a life long education and not something that finishes when we leave educational institution.

There is no doubt that in the future, due to the intense competition among the people of Pakistan for human resources such as work, money, living space, nutritious food, clean water and air, that the external sources of urban stress is/will greatly increase.⁵ This is the reason why we have to start integrating now non-formal education into the formal school and vocational education systems. By doing this, the next generations will be able to deal with the additional burden of social and urban stress in a more relaxed and peaceful way⁶. Non-formal education is very necessary as it gives us the emotional education, which enables us to deal with modern life. If we follow non-formal education, then our lives will be less costing on the economic, energetic and emotional levels. This kind of emotional education is something that people of all cultures and faiths need. In previous generations, these ideas were found mainly within the teachings of the world religions. Therefore, it would be appropriate to try and extract the essence of the good ideas relating to emotional intelligence, interpersonal relationships, peace healing and environmental care which are within all the religious and spiritual traditions and present them all to modern society as a part of non-formal education.⁷

Non-formal education is important at all stages of our life and development; at the time of conception, in the mother's WOMB, throughout school years, during working life, when we are sick and suffering, at the time of our retirement and as we experience the effects of aging and at the time of death. It is something appropriate for all the different groups in our society; the young, old, teenagers, business people, the terminally ill, prisoners and so on — it is for every social group in our society. Regardless of their other needs, everyone needs non-formal education as it helps us to pacify our uncontrolled emotions and psychological disturbances so that we can function in an effective, peaceful and happy way whatever the situation⁸. Non-formal education gives us positive company and a different perspective as well as many beautiful solutions to our difficulties.

BIRTH

The way we behave affects unborn children in an emotional and energetic way, therefore we need to begin non-formal education at the prenatal stage.⁹ For example, unplanned children whilst in the womb experience on a very subtle level their parents' feelings of rejection and this affects the child's emotional and physical development. Scientists have discovered that if infants are deprived of affection, that the neural development of the brain is affected.¹⁰ What we need to begin non-formal education at the prenatal stage is to teach and guide the parents, especially the mothers, through Radio, TV and newspapers or by holding seminars, conferences and conventions at the local bodies levels. Even AIOU could conduct refresher courses for spreading awareness about the incoming generation.

CHILDHOOD

Children are educated from the beginning of their school life into a culture of fear. Many find their first experiences of school life to be very stressful. Some of the things which we take for granted in daily life cause a lot of anxiety to children, such as the busy morning traffic, animals, teachers, being liked and accepted by the other children, being academically successful and so on. These psychological factors of fear, aggression, feeling victimised or shy, emotional neglect by parents and so on, greatly hinder the child's emotional development, and if not remedied may produce alienated and violent individuals.

Non-formal education is implemented in very simple ways. For example, at the start of the school day a few minutes are given to a peace class or assembly where children develop together a peaceful mind and good motivation for the day. I suggest that everybody, no matter of their age, has a few minutes of peace in the morning. A time when they just relax and internalise the idea not to be stressed or fearful¹. Starting the day in such a positive way helps children to study in a much more effective way and helps adults to deal with work and urban stress. Non-formal education can also deal with educating children in specific problem areas, such as how to cope with bullying, discrimination, aggression, interpersonal relationships, conflict resolution and so on.

¹ Through Prayer we can get the same result.

ADULTHOOD

There is a lot of competition in our societies due to the pressurised ambitious to succeed. After many years of education, when we finish school or university we have already created mental habits of fear, competitiveness and bad self-image and so we end up living with traumas which diminish our possibilities and development.

Our whole urban lifestyle reflects these kinds of problems. For example, when running our business, we always have a lot of fear and blockages, these cause us to waste a lot of time and energy at work. I suggest that we develop many different levels of peace education programmes, both at local and state levels. This is not only for children, it is also for adults. Of course, it is very important that children get the peace habit when they are young, in their formative years, because they are destined to be the men and women of the cities of tomorrow.

The usual pattern is that children receive a formal education preparing them for a life of work and they leave home to become independent generally between the ages of 20 and 30. Between the ages of 30 to 50, most people experience some kind of enjoyment in their lives but after that they start to experience many problems which their formal education did not prepare them for such as growing old, sickness, retirement, loneliness, death and so on.¹¹ These problems will increase living in a dense urban environments, due to the lack of traditional social networks, stress, unemployment, competitiveness and the alienation of city life.

Every moment of our normal busy lives, our minds' reflect many different emotional and perceptual realities. For example, we might project a very fearful attitude and so feel very threatened at work or we might project aggression and so experience the city as a very hostile place. Due to our belief in the external reflections of our own negative emotional states, we get upset or react inappropriately with our friends, family and colleagues as well as with strangers. If we integrate non-formal education into our daily life it can really help us to identify and transform these negative emotional responses which could otherwise destroy our relationships, health, friendships or capacity to work.¹²

We always act with fear, we are always subconsciously scared to lose our job or that something bad is going to happen to us. This is due to

the fear, which we have internalised. In the workplace everybody has some kind of fear and stress, especially those financially having the whole liabilities. In many ways our whole lives, from birth to death, are stressful and uncomfortable. Perhaps this is partially due to the lack of emotional and psychological education. For example, when we wake up in the morning we immediately think about work. We take breakfast and feel nervous and stressed from the moment we wake up. It is much better if instead of that automatic stress reaction, we spend the first few minutes of the day developing a peaceful mind. What to do, for imparting this type of education into society, would be varied from place to place, depending upon the local cultures, environment, peoples' beliefs and religions. For example, in a religious society, non-formal education could be imparted through Prayer (religious gatherings) and in a non-believing society, some sorts of exercises like Yoga etc., could be applied. In this way our whole day and our work will unfold much more positively.

SICKNESS

When we are sick, we have a lot of fear, stress and pain. Non-formal education helps us to overcome the mental stress and suffering that goes with those painful physical experiences. Our body may suffer extreme pain, but non-formal education helps us to accept this situation and so we remain cheerful and optimistic. What mode of study we could need to be adopted is to conduct 'Doctors & Nurses' meetings with the patients and general public at the hospitals or at the local bodies level i.e. at the Union Council, District Council, Town/Municipal Committees' levels in a well organized way. This purpose could also be met through publishing handouts, pamphlets and other health material to be freely distributed to the general public so that awareness could be spread. This is a very important factor in speeding up the process of healing or in the case of terminally ill patients it extends their life span and improves their quality of life.¹³

RETIREMENT

It is natural that at some point in life our job will finish and so it is important to do this without fear. Although some people look forward to their retirement, many people when they retire feel dis-empowered because most of the skills and education, which they acquired over so many years have become irrelevant.¹⁴ For them retirement means spending their time with their memories, watching television and reading newspa-

pers. Many old people live alone because they have no relatives and things to take care of them. This leaves many older people feeling that life has failed them and thus they become very sensitive and easily shocked. Non-formal education (Adult Education)² should be offered to pensioners and retired persons through organizing their get together meeting and other healthy activities to equip them with the psychological skills that they need to deal with their new situation.

DEATH

When we finally come to die, non-formal education can help us to die in a very relaxed and comfortable way. At death we have to leave behind all our emotional and material supports, we even have to leave our body and speech behind. The only thing that we can take with us into and beyond the death experience is our mind. For this reason before we face death our mind has to be well prepared and peaceful. This objective could easily be achieved through religious teachings at the Jumma Prayer. The only thing, which helped in this situation was the sensation of inner peace.

Coma is also similar to near death experience as the person's body and speech is paralysed but their mind is actually in a very sensitive state. If we give a coma patient peaceful and positive energies and information it greatly helps them even if they appear not to be responding.

CONCLUSION

We have to develop a feeling for inner peace. It is our inner-light our most important company, the most important knowledge we can have, the most important power. People these days have a mistaken idea about peace — they think that peace makes us weak³. This is absolutely not true; peace actually makes us much more powerful. Some people believe that peace can only be made through violence and warfare, but we know from our national experiences that this brings only a lot of suffering and violent experiences to many people without solving any fundamental problems. For ready reference, we can and read in the newspapers the recently ongoing Opposition Parties rallies and strikes. We should try the new experience of the peace deterrent.

² To avoid any ambiguity in the use of the word 'adult', the term non-formal education is being used. (Edwin K.Townsend Coles: p.7)

³ For ready reference you can see all national newspapers (Dailies) for the month of August, 1999, in which most of the political parties of the country are of that viewpoint.

Edwin K. townsend says that the inner peace is the true foundation of world peace, and that to achieve inner peace we need *Non-formal Education*.¹⁵ Through this we can increase our love, compassion, patience, equanimity, kind heartedness, inner peace and other positive emotional states which can help us to deal with the stressful and difficult situations which confront us throughout our life. If we collectively developed these attitudes we will no longer find it necessary to wage war on our people.

Non-formal education can play a major role in promoting the ideas of non-violence. Non-violence or inner peace is a very necessary force in the creation of world peace and is powerful enough to stop all nuclear and conventional weapons in the world. If we personally and collectively practice inner peace, we would ensure the future of the society.

Non-formal education and especially education in non-violence will become vital in the prevention of widespread urban crime and civil unrest. Increasing the powers of the police and military forces will never be enough to deal with these problems. We need to think now about the effects that education of the present generation will have in the future. We need to educate both the educators and our children in the values of non-violence, social cooperation, love, compassion, patience, tolerance, inner space, inner peace, intelligent wisdom and so on. If we can create a basic attitude of non-violence in the minds of the next generation, then all the activities that they need to support their lives, families, cities and so on will go much more smoothly. This includes work relationships, business, family lives, personal relationships and so on. As such, *Non-formal Education* is a long-term investment for the future of our cities.¹⁶

References

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