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THE RELEVANCE OF PSYCHO-SOCIAL THEORIES IN PEACE EDUCATION AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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ABSTRACT

Though conflict can cause distress, it is not an inevitable, destructive, and imposing barrier. Managing conflict is an essential life skill that is too often neglected. There is need to look at theories which can enhance conflict resolution through the adaptation of peace education. This paper sees peace education from three viewpoints: the environment in which the conflict occurs, the parties involved in the conflict and the process of arriving at the solution/ management of such conflict. It is against this background that this paper discusses the relevance of psycho-social theories to conflict resolution and peace education. The paper reviewed some theories such as psychodynamics, field theory, gaming theory and human relations theory as applicable to peace education and conflict resolution. The paper concludes that the content of peace education will lead to development of skills, attitude and knowledge which will guarantee peace and harmony within and between people and organizations and in all contextual application of the principle.

Introduction

Conflict generally exists whenever one set of goals, needs or interest disagrees with another set. Hammed (2002) sees it as the intervention of interdependent people who perceive incompatible goals and interference from each other in achieving those goals. This definition shows that conflict is almost always caused by unlike points of views; and it is bound to happen since we have not learned exactly alike and more so that we see and value things differently (Ogunyemi 2004).

The occurrence of conflicts requires solutions. The solutions can come through statutory mechanisms or mutual settlement via proper handling tactics by the parties involved. However, of late, it is seen that peace education can guarantee resolution of conflicts in a most non-violent way (Ajala 2003a). Ajala (2003b) sees peace as not consisting solely of the absence of conflict but implies principally a process of progress, justice and mutual respect among the people

designed to secure the building of society in which everyone can find a true place and enjoy a great share of intellectual and material resources. Also Alger (1989) perceives peace as not just absence of war but the prevention of all structural and social inequalities. These concepts show that in all environments peace is certain with the removal of injustices and inequalities and getting satisfaction for all concerned.

Whatever concept of peace is adduced, the introduction of education along with peace means that, there will be changing of mindset of all those involved in interactions with the general purpose of promoting understanding, respect and tolerance for one another (Ravis, Oppenheimer and Bar-Tal 1999). Just as Ajala (2003a), sees peace education as inculcating the principle of equity in every conduct and shaping human behaviour towards non-violence in relation with other persons. Change in attitudes and values is an outcome of change in behavior hence the development of peaceful attitude and values are outcomes of peace education which inculcate skills of critical thinking, empathy, assertiveness, self-respect, respect for others and open mindedness (Ajala 2008).

Some theories are useful in understanding how peace education can be achieved and conflict resolved among people. Among these theories are psycho-social theories like psychodynamic theory, field theory, experimental gaming theory, and human relations theory. Therefore, this paper attempts to synthesize the applicability of these psycho-social theories to peace education and conflict resolution.

Psycho-social Theories Examined

Some psycho-social theories found useful for conflict resolution and peace education are:

(a)Psychodynamic Theory of Conflict Resolution

The psychodynamic theory in conflict research has some basic assumptions. Freud (1947), a psychodynamic theorist, portrays the human mind as a reservoir of psychic energy which is channelled into various activities. He maintained that this energy is the impulse behind all human activities and can be channelled into different behaviours ranging from positive pursuits such as work or raising a family to destructive impulses such as vandalism. But whichever way it is channelled, this energy must be released. If it is not released through one channel, it would be released through another. Psychodynamic

theorists attempt to describe the mechanisms in the human mind that constrain and channel psychic energy as:

(i)   the Id — the source of energy,
(ii) the Super-ego — the value system designed to constrain this energy, and
(iii) the Ego — the executive function that relates the Id and Super-ego to actual behaviour.

The id is "the primary source of psychic energy and the seat of the instincts" (Hall, 1979). It is governed by the pleasure principle which aims to reduce the amount of tension through the discharge of psychic energy.

People are not just wilful impulsive creatures; they often have a great deal of self-control and very high moral standards which route their energy into socially acceptable outlets. Freud called this moral and judicial branch of the personality the super-ego.

It consists of two parts: the ego ideal and the conscience. The ego ideal is the person's mode for behaviour and is usually patterned after his or her parent or some other admired person. The conscience corresponds to what the person believes is morally bad. It is, in essence, a "negative" ego ideal — something the person tries to avoid. The super-ego is like a parent. It regulates behaviour by punishing one for disapproved activities and rewarding approved activities.

Both the id and super-ego are forceful influences. The id simply wants to discharge energy and the super-ego wants to channel behaviour to acceptable paths regardless of the consequences.

The ego mediates between the two and relates them to real-world concerns. According to Freud, the ego is governed by the reality principles. Its aim is "to postpone the discharge of energy until the actual object that will satisfy the need has been discovered or produced" (Hall, 1979). This "actual object" is defined by the limitations of the social situation and by the super-ego.

However, Folger, *et al.* (1997) observed that since conflict occurs in situations where people perceive incompatible goals and interference from others, that is, situations in which people fear they will not be able to act successfully, the ego is faced with the problem of managing the id and super-ego when acceptable and effective behaviour channels are unavailable. The frustrations and uncertainties involved in conflict generate two powerful impulses that the ego must manage — the aggressive impulse and anxiety. The various ways in which these

energies are channelled play a critical role in conflict interaction because they determine how members react to conflict.

The psychodynamic theory has generated important insights into conflict resolution. The most important strong point of the theory is its explanation of the role of impulses, particularly aggression and anxiety, in conflicts.

The idea that these impulses, aggression and anxiety, build up and can be redirected into other activities, including attack on a third person, is crucial to most conflict theories and resolution.

Furthermore, the idea of unconscious or subconscious motivation in psychodynamic theory is very important. People do not always understand what is driving their conflict behaviour, but the unconscious motivation in psychodynamic theory underscores the importance of helping members gain insight into their behaviour. Once members understand what is driving conflicts they can begin to control them.

Field Theory of Conflict Resolution

Kurt Lewin's field theory, developed in the 1950s, gave the concept of climate an important place in the study of conflict (Lewin, 1951). The best analysis of the role of climate in conflict was provided by one of Lewin's students called Deutsch. Deutsch (1973) noted that the processes of conflict resolution that are likely to be displayed will be strongly influenced by the context within which the conflict occurs. He argued that the critical contextual feature of conflict situations is the type of independence established between the persons involved. For him, climates are defined by interdependence. Deutsch defined two basic types of interdependency:

(i) promotive — where the persons involved in the conflict perceive that gains by either one will promote gains by the other, while losses will promote losses,

(ii) contrient — where everyone perceives that one's gain will be the other's loss.

Deutsch argued that perceptions of promotive interdependence tend to promote cooperative interaction, whereas perceptions of contrient interdependence tend to produce competition. He further maintained that under promotive interdependence e.g. cooperative climate, people will stress mutual interests and coordinate division of labour, exhibit trusting and friendly attributes, perceive similarity in

their beliefs and goals, and communicate more openly and honestly.

Under contrient interdependence e.g. competitive climate, people will focus on antagonistic interests and on constraining each other, exhibit suspicious and hostile attitudes, over-emphasize differences, and communicate in a misleading and restrained manner. He, therefore confirmed the hypothesis which states that "cooperation breeds cooperation while competition breeds competition."

The field theory shows that the pervasive climate of a situation (promotive and contrient), will influence the parties' conflict behavior at resolution. The perception of interdependence assumed parties' concept of common interest, level of trust, friendly or hostile attitudes towards each other, perception of similarity or difference in positions and their communication. Hence, the perception of interdependence is the primary "cause" of conflict behaviour towards resolution and the direction the conflict interaction will take.

Experimental Gaming Theory of Conflict Resolution

The experimental gaming theory likens conflict to games of strategy. In its most form, the experimental gaming theory, according to Kelly and Thibaut, (1978), makes the following assumptions:

- The structure of a game is composed of choices (options) available to players and the rewards or costs (payoffs) they receive from selecting a given choice.
- The choices available to players are limited in number and players know what these choices are.
- The payoffs associated with a given move depend not only on the players' choice but also on the choice made by the other.
- Players know the payoffs associated with each combination of choices and these payoffs are interesting and meaningful to them.
- A player's choice is determined by calculation of payoffs (reward and costs). Rational game behaviour consists of the selection of choices that yield favourable outcomes, either the maximization of gain or the attainment of a beneficial norm, such as distributive justice.

Based on these assumptions and submitting to the liking of conflict to game structure, conflict can be represented as a payoff matrix. In most experimental games, as in most conflicts, the parties are permitted to make more than one move. Hence they can use the other's previous

moves as information for predicting their next move. They can also use their own response to the other (competitive or cooperative) to tell the other what his or her choice should be. The numerous resolution strategies available to parties make it evident that many of the processes involved in conflicts-prediction, persuasion, interchanges of moves, bargaining-can be simulated with experimental games.

Pruitt and Kimmel (1997) noted that there are three main types of experimental games:

(i) Matrix games, like those just discussed;
(ii) Negotiation games which stimulate formal negotiations over some issues like an award in a legal case or the price of a used car (points are awarded on the basis of the final agreement);
(iii) Coalition games where more than two subjects play a game or bargain and subjects can form coalitions to defeat others. The coalition is awarded points and members then bargain to splits their rewards).

Gaming theory has provided several important insights into conflict resolution. Firstly, experimental gaming theory recognizes that people usually play an active controlling part in conflict resolution as opposed to the passive and reactive role assigned to them by psychodynamic theory.

Secondly, it emphasizes the importance of interdependence in conflicts. It underscores the fact that conflicts almost never occur in wholly competitive wholly cooperative situations. There is always a mixture of incentives to compete and incentives to cooperate. If parties focus on competition, they may be drawn into an ever-escalating spiral of conflicts, but if they recognize cooperation, they have grounds for a productive resolution.

Thirdly, the theory gives a good picture of conflict as an exchange of moves and counter-moves. These pictures show how later moves are shaped and constrained by earlier ones and how each party's power— in the form of control over the other's reward and costs— determines the moves he or she can make.

Fourthly, gaming theory recognizes that the rewards and costs associated with moves depend not only on the direct instrumental gains they yield, but also on the effects the moves have on the relationship between the two parties.

People's calculations are based not just on gain, but on consequence for their relationships as well.

Human Relations Theory of Conflict Resolution

Human relations theory focuses, in particular, on the work group, the site where most relationships develop and play out, and on the superior-subordinate relationship. Perrow (1986) contended that the theory assumes that the nature and quality of interpersonal relations in the work place play a large role in determining employee motivation as well as satisfaction derived from work, level of absenteeism and resignation, management-employee relations, and ultimately the productivity and success of an organization.

With this perception, it was therefore not a surprise that conflict was a major concern of the human relations researchers. Rubble and Thomas (1976) used assertiveness (defined as behaviour intended to satisfy one's own concern) and cooperativeness (defined as behaviour intended to satisfy the other individuals concern) to classify conflict behaviour under five styles; namely:

1. *Competitive:* A competing style is high in assertiveness and low in cooperativeness. The party places great emphasis on his or her own concerns and ignores those of others. This orientation represents desire to defeat the others. It has also been called the dominant style.
2. *Accommodative*: An accommodating style is unassertive and cooperative. The person gives in to the other at the cost of his or her own concerns. This orientation has also been called appeasement or smoothing and those who follow it attempt to avoid conflict for the sake of maintaining the relationship. It is a self –sacrificing approach but may also be viewed as weak and retracting.
3. *Avoidance:* An avoiding style is unassertive and uncooperative. The person simply withdraws and refuses to deal with the conflict. In this orientation, the person is indifferent to the outcome of the conflict and can be described as apathetic, isolated or evasive. This style has also been called flight.
4. *Collaborative*: A collaborating style is high in both assertiveness and cooperation. The person works to attain a solution that will meet the needs of both people. This orientation seeks full satisfaction for all and has also been called problem solving and the integrative style.
5. *Compromising*: A compromising style is intermediate in both assertiveness and cooperativeness, both parties give up some and

"split the difference" to reach an agreement. In this orientation, both are expected to give up something and keep something. It has also been called sharing or horse-trading.

The five styles have been an enormously useful tool for understanding conflict. They provide a common vocabulary in conflict resolution and almost every major writer on interpersonal or organizational conflict has used the style extensively.

Before looking at the relevance of these theories to peace education, there is need to understand what "Peace Education" is all about and its objectives. The main objectives of peace education are to produce an individual who has acquired the relevant skills, knowledge and attitudes that are pertinent to resolution of conflicts. Therefore, in line with UNESCO (1974) and Ajala (2003a) peace education will inspire the individual to acquire a critical understanding of problems; to understand and explain facts, opinions and ideas; to work in a group; to accept and participate in free discussions and to base value-judgments and decisions on a rational analysis of relevant facts and factors.

The substantive subject matter of peace education can be grouped under three major objectives which are: the acquisition of skills, the acquisition knowledge and the acquisition of attitudes. This can be represented schematically as shown below:

SKILLS

1. Critical thinking
2. Co-operation
3. Empathy
4. Assertiveness
5. Conflict resolution

KNOWLEDGE

Issues to do with:

1. Conflict   6. Race
2. Power   7. Justice
3. Peace   8. Ecology
4. Gender   9. Future
5. War   10. Nuclear Issues

ATTITUDES

1. Self respect
2. Respect for others
3. Ecological concern
4. Open mindedness
5. Vision
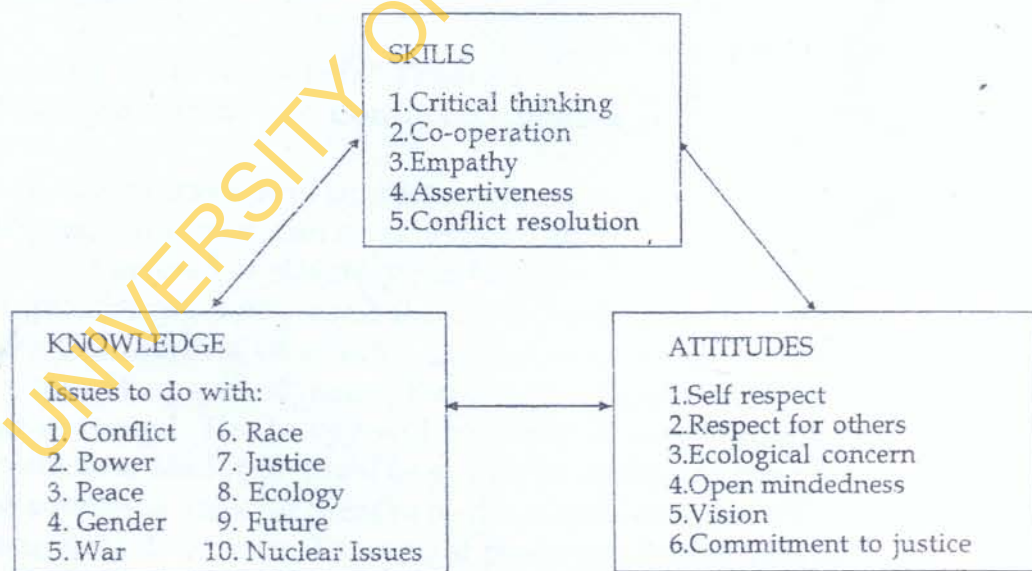6. Commitment to justice

*Fig.*1 A Visual Summary of Objectives of Peace Education

Source: Hicks, D. (1988). Education for Peace: Issues, Principles and Practice in the Classroom

As can be seen from Fig. 1, when these skills are acquired, participants are able to use them to approach issues with an open and critical mind and change others' opinions in the face of new evidence and rational argument. They will recognize and challenge bias, indoctrination, and propaganda.

Learners will also appreciate the value of co-operation i.e. recognize the feelings of others, and be able to communicate in a peaceful manner. They will analyze different conflicts in an objective way, suggest solutions and develop the ability to influence decision-making both within and outside their environment.

The learners when well exposed to skills in peace education will develop a sense of pride e.g. social, cultural, and family background and appreciate the worth of others different from theirs. At this stage, their self-respect, open-mindedness, and the willingness to approach different sources of information will give them a vision of what tomorrow will look like. Their approaches to a variety of conflict situations will provide them with knowledge of how to resolve such conflict in non-violent manner using different types of strategies. This is development of positive attitude in peace education.

The learners can at this stage easily grasp situations illustrating injustice that is development of knowledge about issues. For instances, they are able to examine the work of other people and groups involved in the struggle for justice and proffer solutions to injustice in a non-violent manner.

Relevance of Psycho-social Theories to Peace Education and Conflict Resolution

The review of theories of conflict resolution earlier discussed will show how peace education can come in as an alternative process for conflict resolution instead of statutory mechanisms of conflict resolutions. For example, the psychodynamic theory, by itself, is insufficient to explain the re-channelling of psychic energy towards different people or activities. The psychodynamic theory argues that psychic impulses are often re-routed. The theory will be useful to peace builders as it will help them to lead individual or groups in conflict to have insight into their problems, making them to re-direct their energies into useful and meaningful directions. The use of peace education, through critical analysis of content and environment, will lead to the development of attitudes such as open-mindedness, empathy, cooperativeness whereby re-channelling are established and how substitutes can be chosen.

Folger, *et al.* (1997) submitted that there is a limitation to field theory in that Deutsch isolated one feature of conflict situations, interdependence, and derives his entire analysis of cooperative and competitive process from this feature. Other features of group situations such as dominance or emotional relationships are underemphasized in Deutshch's discussion. These shortcomings can lead to improper diagnoses of conflicts.

Furthermore, Wilmot and Wilmot (1978) observed that one shortcoming of the gaming theory is that it does not take into account the extremely wide variety of choices people face in real life. Games usually assume that there is a relatively small set of options which remain stable over time. Real world conflicts often are not fought out of small well-defined games matrices. The "option" problem becomes even thornier because parties often create entirely new options as they interact. The structure of options changes constantly as the conflict interaction unfolds.

Therefore, there is the need for a constant re-assessment and the application of peace education attributes that emphasizes critical thinking, empathy, open-mindedness, balancing of emotion and rational reasoning, all with the intent of creating mutual integration and commitment to justice at all levels of human endeavour.

In appraising Schmidt's resolution methods as reflected in the work of Rubble and Thomas (1970) which are: competing, avoiding, accommodating, comprising, and problem solving, Phillips and Cheston (1979) said that competing resolution style is useful when outcomes of conflicts are very important and where there is pressure to quickly come to resolution because competitors can push their own agenda through.

However, competition breeds resentment that can later on lead to resistance. Wall and Nolan (1987) opined that an avoiding resolution style leads to low satisfaction among the parties involved in conflicts.

Millar and Rogers (1987) also confirmed the complementary relationship of dominance and submissiveness in accommodating style of conflict resolution.

Compromising resolution style finds an intermediate position through which parties in conflict can achieve important goals in exchange for foregoing others. However, Filley (1975) maintained it shows a low level of commitment from parties because they force themselves to give up something they value.

The problem-solving resolution style is almost similar to peace education. The style tries to make parties redefine their goals by

emphasizing those that are achievable during the integrative process.

Furthermore, problem-solving style stresses that controversial issues should be discussed to guarantee peace; it affords learning about issues and new possibilities for the peace. Learning about issues and new possibilities as emphasized by problem-solving style is similar to topics of open-mindedness etc. in peace education.

All the reviewed theories on conflict prevention, mediation and resolution styles have not shown a precise curriculum study. The concept of peace education is a step further on all theories reviewed. It postulates a curriculum text for the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes that will aid the resolution of conflict in a non-violent way.

Peace education will educate people to recognize both structural and behavioural violence. The course content of peace education takes cognizance of environmental education, political education and economic education. All these will lead to the development of skills such as critical thinking, empathy, and cooperation as well as attitudinal skills such as self respect, respect for others, balancing of emotion and rational thinking and open mindedness. The content should cover knowledge about issues such as: conflict, power, justice, non-violent culture, and a host of others which guarantee peace and harmony within and between people either in the formal or non-formal setting.

Conclusion

Being peaceful is often associated with passiveness of actors, and a state of peace is often thought to be one in which there is no conflict. But a moment's thought makes it clear that a world without conflict would be a dull and sterile place. Therefore what peace education recognizes is that conflict is often a springboard for growth. It does not advocate the elimination of conflict, but rather seeks creative and less violent ways of resolving it.

After the review of these theories, it is imperative to note, as Ajala (2008) noted that, the usefulness of peace education are seen in the development of knowledge, attitudes and skills towards explanation of concepts of peace as a state of being and an active process; enquiries into the causes of conflicts and the resolution of conflict in a non-violent way. Peace builders are therefore encouraged to develop an individual who is grounded in the concept, aim and content of peace education so as to work together and jointly with others in promoting peace and peaceableness.

Parties involved in conflict, after the acquisitions of skill of peace education, will be more cooperative, less aggressive and less violent in their interpersonal relationship with others (Ajala 2008). Furthermore, peace builders should make parties involved in conflict to develop personal peace in form of empathy, cooperation, active listening, tolerance and diversity which are in themselves peace-building processes.

Therefore, the main purpose of peace education is to unite all areas of knowledge and actions into an integral whole thereby promoting and mobilizing for peace and societal harmony.

In essence, the task of peace education is to help people internalize critically, the information they receive and develop the willingness to act in the spirit of the objectives of peace education, that is, acquisition of skills, knowledge and attitudes that guarantee an egalitarian society and non-violent resolution of conflicts.

In the end, peace education is cheaper and more likely to produce lasting resolution of conflicts than waiting until passions have been inflammed, positions hardened, situations rendered intractable and parties polarized.

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