

CULTURE OF PEACE AND HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLS

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Abstract

One of the greatest challenges of education today in Nigeria is how to deal with violence through the establishment of a culture of peace in schools so that students could learn ways to live in peace with each other. The paper is hereby identifying other strategies for sustainable culture of peace in schools in Nigeria, such as peacemaking, preventive diplomacy and peace keeping ' which generally is referred to as 'a paradigm of peace education', it implies a standard pattern of peace education based on rational principles.

Introduction: The Concept of Culture

The word 'culture' could take various meanings depending on interests and emphasis. It could refer to the intellectual cum aesthetic achievements of a people; which achievements are indicative of¹ their level of civilization or sophistication, e.g. American culture, Nigerian culture, Chinese or Japanese culture. It could also take the meaning of developing micro organisms (bacteria) as in the context of medicine or biology; and it could mean cultivating the soil and raising plants or animals with intent to improving their quality as in agriculture. However, we are concerned with 'culture' in the context, of Social Anthropology in which it refers to "the total of human behaviour and technology communicated from generation to generation" (*New Grolier International Dictionary*).

The culture of a people therefore, implies all behavioural characteristics that symbolize a people and distinguish them from other people. These include their language and other means of communicating, their mode of dressing, working, feeding, choosing life partners, celebrating events (both joyous and sorrowful ones), their attitudes to visitors, to money, to family and to community belongings, and their thinking and feelings, and the predictable ways of expressing emotions of happiness and anger.

Culture and Education

Peters (1967) posits that education implies "the transmission of what is worthwhile" and this position is further espoused by Schofield (1972) as he insist that the important single characteristic of culture is "worthwhileness", and when we think of education, it could be about some people handing on the values of their culture to other people. In the words of Schofield (1972:36) "education is a process which initiates each individual into the general culture of society". In informal education, particularly at basic education levels, the curriculum should consist essentially of the values, ' knowledges and ideas that are worthwhile to enable the learners fit in and participate effectively in life, within the society. To expatiate on worthwhile curriculum, we note that it should consist of:-

- Desirable Values which include the principles of democracy, respect for humanity and human rights;
- Cherished Ideas including traditional ethos regarding the treatment of different sexes and strangers, beliefs, morality, customs, leadership and follow-ship, taboos etc; and
- The Knowledge Component of Culture which ranges from the people's craftsmanship to their highest level of attainments in science and technology.

Education has been described as an instrument par excellence for national development probably because, it is a potent medium of social change, or what could otherwise be called *cultural enrichment*. Thus, a well-planned curriculum of education, particularly for the childhood and adolescent stages in the lives of learners, could provide veritable avenues for their cultural

augmentation, amplification and embellishment. In other words, education can be used to fill the "gullies" that may exist in the culture from which the learners are borrowing (cultural augmentation). Education widens the intellectual horizon of learners through cognitive attainments as well as the .acquisition of skills in the psychomotor domain (cultural amplification). Education equally improves the learners' attitudes, values, appreciations and other attainments in the affective domain (cultural embellishment). Indeed, education exerts inestimable influences on native culture, and these can be

appreciated in the illustrative examples that follow.

Impact of Education on Our Native Culture

Anileweze (2000) identifies the following trends as indicative of advances in science and technology, some of which have positive effects; some seem to serve as catalysts for breaching the culture of peace.

(1) Knowledge Explosion

- i. Science and technology occasioned limitless advance in knowledge.
- ii. New frontiers in science initiated a culture that challenges nature, e.g. cloning. '
- iii. Enhanced sophistication in technological devices:
 - for exploiting resources leading to culture of dependency;
 - for combating diseases ushering in a culture of long span of life;
 - . for prosecuting wars encouraging a culture of violence; and
 - for enhanced scientific research leading to a culture of dynamism.

(2) Automation and Mass Production

Substitution of animate power with machine power has encouraged a culture of specialization. Use of ploughs in agriculture has led to a culture of fewer hands in farms.

- Bull dozers and earth movers in constructional engineering has initiated unemployment of crude labour.
- Belt system in manufacturing industries encourages a culture of mass production and cheaper goods.
- Electronics in music and entertainment industry facilitates the culture of leisure and relaxation.

Level of sophistication in science and technology makes the difference between the culture of developed countries and that of the third world. (Cf. Asian Tigers!).

(3) Precision, Instantaneousness & Computerization

Precision, accuracy and instant result account for the culture of insatiable inquisitiveness, hence from "Age of Science"¹ to "Jet Age" and thence, to "Age of Computer"¹.

Computerized storage and retrieval of information in law, architecture, medicine, education, and robotics leads to the culture of remote-controlled devices that perform jobs automatically, **Globalization and Information Technology**

Widespread use of computers and electronic communication leads to the world becoming a global village. Information technology results to use of computers and internet and inevitable acculturation through the information super highway.

The Rich Gets Richer and the Poor Gets Poorer

Knowledge of geography opens the mind to wealth that exists in other lands. Knowledge of economics and business administration including banking and entrepreneur leads to some people becoming very wealthy and others impoverished. Disparities in wealth and greater materialism lead to covetousness, robbery, and other vices through which people seek to get rich quick. Native culture of peace and human rights become breached due to reckless display of naira power.'

Does Nigeria Need Peace Education?

A critical analysis of contemporary history of Nigeria will provide resounding evidences why peace education is badly needed if Nigeria must exist as a single political entity shared by peoples of various 'nations' that must inevitably operate under Nigerian nationality. Education has always been touted as a potent instrument for achieving change in any society. Unfortunately, we realize that even the culture of peace is lost to the school system just as it is lost to the Nigerian socio-polity. Intra-societal violence

which is sometimes religious-based is prevalent in the society and the schools are not exempted from the repercussions. Drug abuse and cultism prevail, and young persons kill themselves as they quarrel over illegally acquired money. Strikes and examination malpractice are common phenomena in our educational system, and these are not indices of harmony. Gender hostility is practiced as a norm; it is manifested as wife battering in some homes, male chauvinism in offices and sexual harassment in educational institutions. Child abuse assumes unimaginable dimensions as some criminal-minded adults progress from child labour to child trafficking. Cries for the rights of the child are often trivialized by those who ought to know, otherwise, what has been done at the community level to curb the vicious treatment perpetrated against women and children?

Education has not been utilized as a factor to unite Nigerians rather, as Randle (1997) posits", Nigeria is "a nation divided by education." This is because many Nigerians who belong to the educated class know what is right and just, but insist on doing what is entirely wrong, particularly, in political leadership. In education sector, the policy makers may be held responsible in some aspects, for using education to further divide Nigeria, as they pursue agendas that depart from national standards. Decentralization in management policies is inevitable in a democratic dispensation, especially in socio-culturally diverse a country as we have in Nigeria, .but this must not be misconstrued for license to discriminate against the educational opportunities of Nigerian children on the basis of state of origin, Peace education is needed to disabuse the minds of Nigerians that education could be a unifying factor, by orienting all Nigerians to their rights and helping them to determine the limits of their freedom to allow for the freedom of fellow Nigerians.

An Agenda for Peace in Nigerian Secondary Schools

One of the greatest challenges of education today in Nigeria is how to deal with violence through the establishment of a Culture of Peace in schools so that students could learn ways to live in peace with each other. It requires development of a *paradigm of peace education* (UNESCO, 1998). Two out of three strategies advocated by Whaley and Piazza-Georgi (1997) commend themselves to our quest for peace building in Nigerian schools, particularly in secondary schools. These are what

they termed *Peacemaking* and *Preventive Diplomacy*. The third strategy which is *Peacekeeping* is occasionally necessary where the other two have failed.

Peacemaking involves all necessary actions taken to bring hostile groups to agreement. These actions include enquiry and mediation by officials of the Ministry of Education, the officials or representatives of the Parent Teachers Association (PTA), religious leaders and the authority of the school involved in the crisis. The outcome of such interventions often involve general restitution by ail for damaged public property, rustication of culpable students, attestation by all parents/guardians that their wards would be of good behaviour and sometimes, corporal punishment. It is however, doubtful if corporal punishment ever fully achieved the objective of employing it. Martin Rosenbaum (1987) argues that "schools which attempt to promote peaceful solutions to contemporary problems undermine that attempt if they themselves resort to violence as a means of discipline."

Preventive Diplomacy refers to the actions taken to prevent disputes from arising between groups known to be mutually opposed to each other. It also includes efforts and strategies put in place to prevent existing misunderstandings from escalating. For a culture of peace to prevail in Nigerian schools, the establishment of School Management Team (SMT) which includes student-leaders, as practiced in South Africa, is considered ideal for enhancing preventive diplomacy. The SMT will ensure resolution of controversial issues through regular dialogue. It will also monitor the observance of Human Rights among the school community. All issues likely to lead to disputes should be discussed and agreed upon while difficult to resolve matters will be referred to the School Governing Board.

Education for Living Together

Reference has earlier been made to 'a paradigm of peace education' implying a standard pattern of peace education based on rational principles. It needs to be stressed that the principles that anchor peace education must be acceptable and operational in the wider society before they could succeed in the schools. This is because the school is part and parcel of the wider society. This does not however repudiate the possibility of the school serving as an instrument of change for the society. Other strategies for sustainable

culture of peace in schools are:

1. Orientation on Human Rights

Learners and teachers alike should be given orientation on their rights and the need to respect the rights of others as justification for demanding their own rights. One of the principles to be highlighted during such orientation is the golden rule: "Do unto others as you would like to be done by." Copies of "The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child" should be provided for all school libraries and learners encouraged to read them.

2. Limits of Freedom

Another issue to be widely advocated is the limits of freedom. All members of the school community should be made to understand that one's freedom to do whatever delights one's heart ends where another person's freedom begins. Issues of human rights abuse are often traced to the neglect or flagrant disregard of this essential code of conduct.

3. Banish Idleness from Schools

It is said that idle minds are the devil's workshop. Therefore, learners should be kept constantly busy with well-designed curricular and extra-curricular activities so that no room is given to the devil to scheme, dispute and conflict. This strategy underscores the need for adequate provisions for games and sports facilities and equipment in schools. The organization of clubs and societies along lines that unite rather than along ethnic or religious divides should be encouraged.

4. Monthly Honours List

All schools should be encouraged to maintain an honours list of learners per class per term for outstanding achievement or exemplary behaviour. Criteria for determination of hall of honours should be as expansive as possible to ensure that the list is not restricted to few very talented learners. The criteria should therefore, include attainments in Arts and Culture, literary production, debates, sports, club activities, leadership, acts of charity, excellence in academics and excellence in any other area of school life that promotes a culture of peace and human rights.

5. Elimination of Discrimination in School Administration

All acts of favouritism, bias and discrimination should not find a place in school administration whether in staff-staff, staff-student or student-student relations. Discrimination fosters discontentment, nurtures animosity and prepares the mind of the unfavoured for resistance. The members of the SMT should be encouraged to obtain information on any area of discontentment and displeasure with the pattern of administration so that improvements could be made in a smooth and peaceful manner.

6. Timely and Mutual Communication

One factor that quickly destroys peace in schools is rumour. There is the need for free flow of information rather than allowing rumour-mongers to enjoy field day. The best mode of communication to ensure a culture of peace in secondary schools is from *top-down* and from *down-up* as well as *cross-wise* flow of information. This strategy suggests that schools should not be run like military camps. It also suggests transparency of leadership in all dealings with staff and students.

Conclusion

Education should be an instrument that unites Nigeria and not one that divides Nigeria as opined by Randley (1997) following the prevalent impression that "our real problem is with our educated class who know what is right but insist on doing what is entirely wrong." The educated class knows the human rights provisions because they can read and understand. However, their inability to interpret the provisions correctly, or failure to practice them seem to give the wrong signal to their brethren who are illiterate and know nothing about human rights charter; but they are sensitive to justice and injustice.

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