

*Education after the Arab Spring: Alternative  
Philosophy to Develop Awareness towards the "Other"*

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**Abstract**

Young children of Arab countries after the Arab Spring and especially the Lebanese are, unfortunately, experiencing great political pressure, conflicting ideologies, humanistic annihilation, and are becoming a laboratory for violence and warfare, lacking positive relationships, community participation, and responsibility. What can be done to respond effectively to the seriousness of this problem? What is needed is a foundational system of values that the communities have to be aware of. Based on these values we have to put mechanisms and guidelines for ourselves so as to have a mutual acceptance and cooperation between the entire world's ideologies, spiritual movements, and ethical dimensions. In my point of view an evolutionary jump in the consciousness of the Arab families is needed for conflict resolution, anti-racial ideologies, multiculturalism, and techniques of negotiation. This jump as I see it is an education for a culture of peace that will help in developing humanity and communities. To introduce this culture of peace educating holistically, reorganizing the content of the curriculum and its delivery, and empowering caregivers are the ways that awaken the Arab families to the realities of oppression, violence, and suffering. These steps serve as a guide for revitalization of society and coexistence. This will be the focus of this paper. Specific ideas and strategies as well as suggestions will be discussed to bring each step into reality. In the end, a summative idea about the importance of revitalization and the link of these steps will be explored with few recommendations.

Key Terms: Peace education, equity, conflict resolution, social justice,  
multiculturalism

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## 1. Introduction

Young children in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are facing many challenges that are affecting their lives, to name a few: social inequity, political instability, conflicting ideologies, fragile economy, health issues, and migration (The World Bank, 2013). Consequently these children, among other groups, are expected to excel under the pressure of these conflicts in this challenging and fast changing world. Hence, to face the challenges, children need to be equipped with the necessary skills enabling them to be successful citizens contributing to their own good and to the good of their societies and humankind globally.

It is true that young people worldwide share common challenges and basic developmental needs but different aspects of development may be more important in different contexts (Palmer & Zajon, 2010). For instance, Lebanese people have been suffering from unstable political, economic and social conditions for forty years. This unstable period has started with the civil war (1975) that lasted fifteen years, and continues until our present time. In addition, they witnessed and still witnessing major dramatic events such as the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik El Hariri in 2005, the 2006 Israeli war, explosions, terrorist attacks, rise in sectarian divisions, periodic street clashes and the “Arab spring” that created a big turmoil in the Arab world affecting Lebanon among other countries.

Children achieve better outcomes when their diverse strengths, abilities, interests, and cultural practices are understood and supported. Valuing and respecting diversity is vital for children to develop a strong sense of identity. Principles of equity and diversity are linked to children developing a sense of belonging, identity, and wellbeing so that they become effective communicators and confident, involved learners (DEEWR, 2009; DEECD, 2009).

Among all of these events, parents, communities, as well as schools generally do not teach children what peace looks like or that we can live it. Peace education receives little to no coverage in traditional school curricula and materials. Further, when war is covered it is done with a sense of passion and excitement, while peace, when it is included, is portrayed as passive and boring. Even when we look at our curricular materials and try to analyze its content we find that it offers political culture. It often makes it sound as though there is no opposition to war and no human ability to live in peace because humans are by nature, aggressive.

As a result the Lebanese children are, unfortunately, experiencing great political pressure, conflicting ideologies, humanistic annihilation, and are becoming a laboratory for violence and warfare, lacking positive relationships, common identity due to the nation's sectarian segregation and social injustice among the different socio-economic groups (Nahas, 2009; Frayha, 2012). These national challenges coupled with the global ones require from education in Lebanon to plan programs that are culture fair and context specific. In fact, the UNESCO report (2009) concludes that factors critical to the future of education in the world of today and tomorrow should take into account the profile of cultures, values, and circumstances of each region and nation.

Having acknowledged the seriousness of our problems, what can we possibly do to respond effectively? Where do we start? The crisis we face is complex and multidimensional. How might we bring about a meaningful education that could truly lead to a culture of peace?

What is needed is a foundational system of values that the communities have to be aware of. Based on these values we have to put mechanisms and guidelines for ourselves so as to have a mutual acceptance and cooperation between the entire world's ideologies, spiritual movements, and ethical dimensions, in addition to developing an ecological sense of worth, and convictions. In my point of view an evolutionary jump in the consciousness of the Arab families in general and Lebanese family in particular is needed for conflict resolution, anti-racial ideologies, multiculturalism, and techniques of negotiation. This jump as I see it is an education for a culture of peace that will help in developing humanity and communities. To introduce this culture of peace educating holistically, reorganizing the content of the curriculum and its delivery, and empowering caregivers and stakeholders are the ways that awaken the Arab families to the realities of oppression, violence, and suffering. A holistic approach comprising different methods: dialogue, training, awareness raising, advocacy, capacity building, and formation of alliances and network building. These steps serve as a guide for revitalization of society and coexistence.

By revitalization and coexistence, I do not mean refining and improving the old system of education. I mean re-conceptualizing what schools are and how they should function when a culture of peace is introduced to the educational system. Families would interact and react when they acquire skills of dealing, understanding and communicating with the other. It is my intention to prove that when individuals change their level and way of thinking to the way they think, and break the barriers that bind them to the old ineffective structures revitalization and coexistence are attained.

In setting the foundation for revitalization, I suggest some basic steps, which will lead to a better transformation in educational and social system. The first step is introducing a vision of peace education that offers the idea of replacing the archaic relationship that exists between educators, children, and their parents by a more dynamic performance-oriented progress. When this vision is correctly planned and supported by key players and educators then growth is endless. The second step has to do with quality improvement, introducing peace education skills to teachers, and familiarizing them with these skills, the teaching profession will be enhanced, and working conditions will allow the teachers to think, reflect, and interact in professional development activities. In addition, students will develop a positive self-esteem and a positive reaction toward the other and toward learning. To reach this high level of performance, educators must keep on working and offering constant quality improvement thus making it a norm in their organization. The last step has to do with partnership where the stress will be on parental and community involvement. The link that has to be established between the parents, the community and the school will create a difference in the lives of the children.

In this case certain questions have to be answered in order to create a peaceful society with no discrimination and understanding of the other. The first is “what is needed to help children to be physically, socially and mentally accepting and understanding the

other?’ The second, “how to interact with the needs of children and how would be our attitude and behavior when implementing the core values derived from the first question?” Thirdly, “what would be the behavior and attitude of the ‘Other’ when all the community lives by these values?” Lastly, “how do we enumerate and evaluate the achieved standards and performance in order to add or delete goals?” The answer to these questions will be reflected through a vision, quality improvement, partnership and sustainability.

## **2. The Vision**

One of the first obstacles that will come up is people's fear of change. Creating or adjusting a vision statement is an unmistakable indicator of imminent change. As important as the vision is, keeping it alive throughout the year is not an easy task. To get the most out of the vision, we must first remove the barriers from making it an integral, vibrant facet of the school and the community.

Peace education could be taken for granted, or it could be reflected through a foundational system of values that ensures a shared existence with different groups. These shared values are not very far from our understanding but we forgot to implement them. Bamburg (1994: 14) notes, "The schools that have been most successful in addressing and increasing the academic achievement of their students have benefited from a clarity of purpose that is grounded in a shared set of core values". If applied they should help in developing humanity and communities:

- All individuals are equal and have same rights and duties.
- Individual's happiness is built on the basis of love that leads to ultimate good and happiness.
- Collaboration and mutual respect are the basis of understanding.
- The true freedom of the individual is built on the knowledge of doing to others what you want others to do to you.
- Promotion of a universal language for communication worldwide, with no melting pot of the language of the other.
- Belief that interfaith and intercultural dialogues lead to unity and after that will lead to universal homogeneity in the world.

Based on these values we have to put mechanisms and guidelines for ourselves so as to have a mutual acceptance and cooperation between all the world's ideologies, spiritual and political movements and convictions. In this situation, I will present six important points that can be considered the essential requirements that every school can follow to achieve peace and justice on its grounds and spread it to all the people on earth. Accepting these points might be the first step to a unified world without problems and without annihilating the other:

1. Mutual understanding through respecting others' individuality.
2. Belief that all people belong to the same Origin and Destination.
3. Faith in the potentials of all the individuals in the community will help in creating a better world ruled by peace and justice.
4. No exclusion and zero reject. All ideologies, religions, sects, spiritual movements and convictions had their origin in their culture and developed on the basis of their cultural beliefs, concepts and values.
5. Testifying and not converting. The believers should present their ideas in an understandable language, that the dialogue between cultures, religions, and

traditions will lead to a better understanding, and to an exchange of values so as to enrich one's faith and the others' faith.

6. Our world is suffering from ecological, economical, social and financial problems. The best way to solve these problems is through global collaboration between religious and faith communities and the world of politics/economics.

These practical reasons will raise the expectations; create energy to change since the focus is on the future with no blame for the past, and generate foundation for decision making.

### **3. Quality Improvement**

As for the second question of our vision, “how to interact with the needs of children and how would be our attitude and behaviour when implementing the core values derived from the first question, the answer will be through quality improvement. Talking about quality improvement, the challenge that we will face is how to make the transition from a traditional system of teaching to a system of various roles and wide variety of tasks to offer a cooperative and comprehensive program in peace education as an equal partner with educational programs. The response will be through empowering the whole constituents of the school starting by administrators, staff, teachers, stakeholders, students and peers and whoever present in school environment.

There is evidence that human beings perform better, will cope more effectively, when they perceive themselves as possessed of inviolable dignity and worthy of unconditional respect (Norcross & Grencavage, 1989). With the continued emphasis on child development, the integration of Maslow pyramid, Cognitive Behaviour Coping Skills Therapy, and Social Ecology model can demonstrate success in helping these people change.

#### **2.1 Teachers' Empowerment**

Lebanese schools are diverse in social class, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, age, ability, religious background, national and geographical origin, and language and culture. Like schools around the world, the Lebanese schools have become, in the last four years, diverse institutions with some identified trends: younger children are joining schools, in addition to Palestinian children; schools have to enrol Syrian, Iraqi children and children with learning or physical disabilities due to their exposure to traumatic situations (Frayha, 2012).

The thing is how to offer an educational environment that provides equitable treatment and supports identity development, learning and success of all students. Diversifying the curriculum is central in achieving this goal. Further, research shows that a diverse environment enhances the quality of the learning process for all children (Quaye and Harper 2007). As such teachers are in need of assistance to develop skills pertinent to deal with diverse children and diverse topics. To prepare teachers who will be both multicultural persons, practitioners and change agents, I view teaching for social change as teaching for educational equity, social justice, and activism.

To the researcher the first step that has to be done is to improve the well-being of teachers by improving their attitudes towards themselves and towards others: Developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity.

Cuban (2001: 26) articulates, "people who develop skills in redefining familiar situations have in their heads more than one way of seeing the world. They have developed their capacity to juggle diverse ways of viewing daily occurrences, to the degree that one can hold in his or her mind multiple ways to see a situation, to that degree opportunity to reframe a problem and dilemma multiply".

Here a question that comes to mind is how to support teachers to reframe their views of diverse learners and challenges that they are experiencing? A response would be quoting Bolman and Deal (1994: 7), who argue that when teachers are able to reframe, they are able to see new possibilities and become more versatile and effective in their responses". Reframing enables the teacher to see a situation from multiple perspectives: managerial level, human relations and political level.

### **3.1.1 Managerial Level**

When it comes to classroom behaviour, and although group stereotyping is a common occurrence, the teacher has to strive to ensure to make accurate statements about people opposed to group stereotyping. Whenever appropriate, discussions of diversity should be encouraged in department meetings, especially with respect to topics such as curriculum, classroom climate, course content, course requirements...

To teach in such environment is very challenging. As a result teachers have to be trained in how to teach diverse learners and to deal with them as individuals with unique abilities and unique challenges (Kuh 2005). In this sense teachers will be as "cultural workers" (Freire, 1998), "border crossers" (Giroux, 1991) or bridge builders across language, social class, racial, cultural differences and academic abilities. As such, all teachers should be trained in the basic skills of psychosocial support, teaching diversity, communication skills, critical thinking... When teachers are trained on these basic skills, they will be able to help students cope with particular challenge in some cases. By applying this, the teacher will be using the first key to peace education: a helping and healing relationship.

### **3.1.2 Human Relations Level**

The human relations level identifies the classroom as a community defined by relationships between individuals with feelings and needs. Like the human resource frame from Bolman and Deal (1994, 1997), it spotlights the social system of the classroom, the caring interactions necessary between teacher and students, and among students. In an effort to foster an environment of equity, teachers have to be aware about their knowledge of different groups other than their own, and learn as much as possible about these groups. Teachers have to understand that marginalized people have the right to define themselves and their own issues, and have to recognize and strive to meet their distinctive needs.

### **3.1.3 Political Level**

The political frame acknowledges the power differentials in the classroom and society, and can work to change them. In this case the teacher will be a helper and a facilitator in teaching, learning, and personality developer of the student. In addition, when I stress the importance of acquiring these skills, I am not devaluing teaching and academic skills, nor disregarding the value of knowledge that the teacher has, but I am trying to show that deficiency in interpersonal and intra-personal skills has a negative effect on teaching and learning. Today it is no longer enough for teachers merely to learn how to be sensitive to diverse students and their cultures; they must possess the habits of transformative practice and change agency (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Freire, 1973; Nieto, 2000; Oakes and Lipton, 2007).

### **3.2 Administrators' Leadership**

Another important figure that plays a role in creating and developing peace education is the principal and stake holders. If they are supportive, involved, and engaged in what is happening, all the positive powers of students, teachers, teachers' assistants, and counsellors will be unleashed to their fullest. In this situation, they will be facilitators and managers at the same time.

One of the key findings of research carried out on successful leadership in multiethnic schools in England (Walker et al. 2005: 3) was that it is “based on the articulation and implementation of explicit values that promote an agenda of equality, fairness and respect” and that these leaders define their leadership ‘in terms of their commitment to principles of social justice’.

Leaders in education may benefit from ‘auditing’ their own views and encouraging and leading their staff to do the same (Begley 2003). Discussing the leadership of multiethnic schools, Shah (2006: 530) draws on the Muslim concept of *Adab* as a tool for leaders, arguing that this (roughly translated as respect) ‘underpins diverse aspects of relationships, celebrates diversity, supports vulnerability, rejects discrimination (racism!) and promotes innate human dignity’.

#### **3.2.1 Professional development**

Professional development in the form of training should be inclusive to all who often act as education developers, caregivers, stakeholders, and the gatekeepers who recruit and interview prospective senior staff (Coleman 2005; Coleman and Campbell Stephens 2009). Mentoring is a particularly useful form of professional development. It can be used for supporting individuals who face the additional difficulties of overcoming stereotypes and prejudice.

The more that a school or other educational institution has integrated its values into the thinking of staff, students, governors and parents, the easier it will be to ensure that a united front is presented to those who are outside the immediate boundaries. It is particularly important that leadership training includes training for social justice and awareness of diversity issues, stereotyping and discrimination.

### **3.3 Students' empowerment**

Empowerment can be attained by creating awareness at the levels of mental, emotional and social. The common problems experienced by Lebanese children have to do with the unsafe setting of the country itself, physical, mental and social. As for the physical setting, children are interacting with displaced Syrian and Iraqi's poor general conditions of which hygiene, nutrition, isolation, overcrowding, varied socio-cultural conditions...etc (Frayha, 2012). They are developing a fear of losing some of safety that leads in its turn to anxiety, depression, low mood, low-self esteem and emotional behaviour disorder. As a result they turn out to see the displaced as a threat to their existence and so refusing to accept them as normal children like them.

Each of these factors may influence the children in one way or another. The negative effects of the prevalent conditions can be reduced through the holistic integrated program that offers developmental and preventive measures. Thus the provision of adequate prevention and intervention services is both beneficial to the Lebanese children as well as to their peers. To start with, the first thing to do in the provision of intervention program is to apply Maslow's Pyramid of hierarchy of needs. The most important basic needs for the children are:

- Safety, environmental stability and predictability;
- Reliable assistance from persons and settings;
- A sense of being appreciated and cared for, and a desire for relationships that provide emotional sustenance and empathy;
- Services that facilitate self-advancement, self-improvement and autonomy.
- Privacy and autonomy;
- Personal development and respect from others.

When these basic needs are satisfied then the next step is moving to the complex needs those that are related to psychological problems. Factors that may account for psychological problems can be due to lack of coping skills and discrimination, or day-to-day stresses. Moreover, continuous exposure to conflict and threatening events may represent a loss of freedom, and loss of social support, fear of the unknown, uncertainty and fear about the future (Fosket & Hemsley-Brown, 2001). A suggested comprehensive prevention program that is characterized by a number of cognitive, behavioral and social activities will create basis for understanding.

#### **3.3.1 Cognitive activities:**

- Assessing the nature and type of skill deficits in every child.
- Increasing the child's ability to cope with high-risk situations including both interpersonal difficulties and intrapersonal discomfort (such as anger or depression)
- Training children to use active behavioral or cognitive coping methods to deal with problems.
- Through simulation, children will develop the skill of self-efficacy and be persuaded by the possibility of change.
- Teach coping behavior through instruction, modeling, directed practice and feedback.
- Teach specific problem-solving strategies.



- Elicit from the significant other some important positive aspects and explore how they can work together to overcome the discomfort.

### **3.3.2 Behavioral and Social Activities:**

Physical activity constitutes an important factor in creating a culture of acceptance and equity. In fact, physically active people tend to have better mental health than their inactive counterparts. The physically active usually score better in regards to positive self-concept, and self-esteem. Physical activity has also been used to treat mental health problems such as depression (Active Living Research, 2009).

Practical ways of enhancing resilience include but not limited to:

- Access to sports and fitness facilities
- Opportunities to participate in the arts
- Opportunities to practice enjoyable and fulfilling use of time, for example involvement in the theatre, arts, music, drama or exercise
- Opportunities for socially useful activity, for example through peer support or community involvement etc...

## **4. Collaboration**

Thirdly, “what would be the behaviour and attitude of the ‘Other’ when all the community lives by these values?” Collaboration between teachers, staff, administrators, families and stakeholders can be grouped into shared core values and respect, proper training, and continued cooperation. Each level depends on and potentiates the other.

In establishing the program of collaboration we need to be cognizant of what really bothers each group if we are going to develop ways of genuine empathy and caring. We have to be aware about the issues and problems that make individuals anxious, such as lack of justice, equality, security, rights, equal opportunities, survival... Emphasizes in this section is on the social ecological model as a form for collaboration where interaction in relationships have to be between the parents and the surrounding community. The researcher suggests horizontal multilateral rather than vertical approaches to service delivery through creative use of volunteers, paraprofessionals, peer support, and social networks, in addition to professional services.

### **4.1 Partnership with Parents/Organizations**

In establishing the program for peace education, we need to be cognizant of what really bothers each group if we are going to develop ways of genuine empathy and caring. We have to be aware about the issues and problems that make individuals anxious, such as lack of justice, equality, security, rights, equal opportunities, survival etc.

Families need help in developing parenting skills that will encourage the kind of conditions that promote cooperation and the development of a positive self-concept and acceptance in their children. Parent involvement in developing a culture of peace is an important assistance to school revitalization and individual coexistence, especially when parents are exposed to different psychosocial support programs and learn the necessary skills relevant to today’s conflicting situation. Harris and Goodall (2008: 286) point out that: ‘parental engagement increases with social status, income

and parents' level of education' and that 'differential strategies are needed to secure the engagement of a diverse range of parents'

Jeynes (2003) asserts that parental involvement positively affects the academic achievement of minority students, higher test scores, regular school attendance, better social skills and improved behaviour, as well as more positive attitude about school, completed homework assignments, graduation and continued education. If you want your school to be a good and safe place, you must enhance family *collaboration*. For example Foskett and Hemsley- Brown (1999: 222) identify the fives Cs: 'consistency, clarity, concern, cooperation and confidence as key components of the interface between the institution and the community'

Parents have to be offered instruction in effective child management techniques to help them with parent-child conflicts. They need assistance in dealing with aggression, developing their children's self- confidence, improving family communication, and getting their children to assume responsibility. So by increasing parents' involvement, building collaborative relationships and providing extended services we move towards making revitalization a reality. Possible programs include films, speakers or discussions for parents and guardians on topics such as bullying prevention, identity development, racial experiences, gender expression, sexuality, learning differences and family diversity.

A core component of anti-bias education is learning to take action against exclusion, prejudice and discrimination; it can be especially powerful for students to do this in their own schools and local communities. Research shows that when parents are involved students have higher grades, better attendance, increased levels of self-esteem & motivation, decreased use of drugs & alcohol, and fewer instances of violence (Jeynes, W., 2010). When parents come to school regularly, it reinforces the view in the child's mind that school and home are connected (Horvat, E., Weininger, E., & Lareau, A., 2003).

Certain steps can be done to establish partnership with parents and the community, if implemented it will lead to involvement that is more parental.

These suggestions include:

- Finding out about the needs of parents and communities
- The second, if you cannot bring parents to you, try to go to them. This will allow the educators to get to know the families, their values expectations, and customs.
- A third point is to use positive communication strategies with parents to erase the negative attitude established through experience.
- Fourth, the environment of the school has to become a receptive of diverse individuals, comfortable, and encouraging one. Administrators as well as teachers and key players have to create ways for parents to know how to help in order to create an excellent atmosphere for the children.
- Implementing these, strategies will take time and might be frustrating when response from parents in the beginning of the implementation of the program might not be up to the intended goals. In this situation, creative ways and insistence on cooperation in a positive and gradual way will lead to change.

In general this horizontal cross-training can plant the seeds for the development of awareness, knowledge and appreciation especially if all the working members are receptive to these messages. The triangular relationship established between the parents, staff, NGOs and teachers is the ultimate goal to a just and safe society.

## **5. Sustainability**

Fourth question asked in developing the framework for social justice and equity was: “how do we enumerate and evaluate the achieved standards and performance in order to add or delete goals?” The researcher considers four steps to be followed in order to answer this question; implementation of governance, accountability and order, abiding by legislations around the world that stipulate information about dealing with displaced and diverse children and their rights, enhancing partnership with educational organizations and the children’s community and exchanging practices (Brown, 2011; Clark, 2011). The success in delivering all the services needed demands dedicated and well-trained educators, but they in their turn need support and recognition from the administrators. The more this positive environment is maintained the clearer the emotional resilience among children is observed.

Cooperation with community agencies is vital to secure continuity of psychosocial support and to facilitate acceptance of diverse children into the school community (Epstein, 2001). Another factor that leads to sustainability of intervention program is to do continuous evaluation of the program in terms of:

- Respect of children’s rights
- Application of the processes suggested
- Quality of care and equity
- Continued meetings between parents, professionals and teachers
- Quality of the physical and social climate of the child

## **6. Summary**

Lebanese children are the most valuable asset. We have to provide support for their personal, educational and emotional needs, taking into consideration the stress and vicissitudes of life. Offering education for a culture of peace extends beyond techniques of negotiation and conflict resolution, beyond multicultural and anti-racist curricula, even beyond spiritual practice: it is an education for a new, expanded worldview, an evolutionary leap in consciousness. Skills, knowledge, strategies and cooperative community are the key elements for sustaining integrity, multiplicity and social justice in educational organizations. Whether the individual is a teacher, administrator, parent or student there is a need for empowerment, guidance and counselling, support and practice. This paper was intended to offer a framework to help facilitate the important work of promoting equity and social justice for the benefit of the Arab community in general and the Lebanese children in special.

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