

# Understanding of Peace and Peace Building Among Young Children, Parents and Teachers in Several Pre-Schools in Malaysia

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## ABSTRACT

Starting peace-building in early childhood is crucial as this is the best time to model a harmonious personality as well as exposure to value-based curriculum. Peace-building helps in preventing conflict and violence among peers, at home and in the community. In Malaysia, the elements of moral values such as tolerance, respect and unity are integrated across the National Preschool Curriculum in order to instill the awareness of maintaining peace and unity. This qualitative study aimed to explore the perspectives of the children, parents and teachers regarding peace and peace-building. Instruments in the form of questions were sent to various kindergarten teachers from public and private setting including those from urban and rural areas. Seven preschools responded. Interview of children, parents and teachers were conducted and transcribed through a focal point from each school and sent back to the researchers for analysis. Constant comparative method analysis was used where categories were created. Based on the analysis, children's perception of peace is predominantly linked to love and orderliness and is within the environment they live in; whereas parents and teachers have more comprehensive and complicated views of peace which is related to harmony and tolerance in a bigger perspective. Children perceived peace-building pragmatically, to them peace-building just happened in everyday living. They perceived cleaning up, helping each other, sharing happiness, listening and cooperating as actions for peace-building. Parents and teachers understood their roles in creating peace for the young children; and unanimously agreed that they must be the role model for the children in creating peace. Parents and teachers believed that the immediate environment children live in must be harmonious, caring, and loving so that they can build up the character of their children who will love and practice peace in their own life. Methodology of peace building adopted by parents and children were mainly dialogue, negotiation and situational learning.

**Keywords:** Peace building, Early childhood, Malaysian children, Malaysian parents and teachers

## BACKGROUND

Peace is generally understood as a state of tranquility, security or order within a society provided for by regulation and law. It also often refers to the freedom from oppressive emotions and action as well as harmony in human relations. In order for the society to achieve this state of tranquility and harmony, education both at home and in school is necessary to nurture each individual to live harmoniously with oneself and his/her family members, friends and society. A 'Declaration and Integrated Framework of Action on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Democracy' was adopted by the Ministers of Education from UNESCO member states at the 44<sup>th</sup> session of the International Conference on Education held on October, 1994 in Geneva.

This momentous occasion paved the way for member states and UNESCO to integrate, within a coherent policy, education for peace, human rights and democracy in the perspective of sustainable development. The ministers were convinced that education should promote human rights in terms of its knowledge, values, attitudes and skills for active commitment to the defence of such rights in order to build a culture of peace and democracy (UNESCO, 1995). This effort materialized with the enactment of Education for All (EFA) Dakar Framework of Action that promotes for an education that helps children and young people to acquire skills such as prevention and peaceful resolution of conflict as well as social and ethical values. Member states have incorporated peace education

according to the needs of their respective countries bearing in mind that learning begins from early childhood.

Early childhood is the optimal time when children learn the fastest as they are engaged in the interplay of language, cognition, social-emotional development and physical activities (Alfonso, 2014) which enable them to participate in real-life exchanges. As children develop holistically, they are able to express their wants, needs, emotions and able to solve conflicts within themselves and among their peers if guided and supported by their parents and teachers. As such, early childhood can become a crucial time for developing the skills and capacities necessary for peace making, peace keeping, and peace building.

Early childhood educators can be instrumental in building those capacities in teaching for peace (Alfonso, 2014; Reardon, 2009). It is generally agreed that values such as love, peace and tolerance need to be inculcated from early childhood. There are regional and official documents from UNESCO, UNICEF and Ministry of Education in various countries which supports this thoughts, however, there are not many studies investigating our young children's understanding of peace and practice of peace-making through the school system.

In Malaysia, preschool education aims to develop the potential of children between the ages of four to six years in a comprehensive and integrated manner with respect to their physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual and social development in a safe and enriching environment through fun, creative and meaningful activities (Curriculum Development Division, 2016). The curriculum is developed based on six learning strands namely Communication, Spirituality, Attitudes & Values, Humanity, Personal Competence, Physical Development & Aesthetics and Science and Technology.

These six learning strands complement one another and are integrated in the learning experiences provided to each of the preschool child. The Spirituality, Attitudes & Values learning strand consists of two components namely Islamic Education and Moral Education. The Moral Education component emphasizes the importance of values in appreciating and practicing courteousness in one's daily life in order to foster closer ties with members of society to strengthen unity.

Values of cooperation, tolerance, love are instilled through play when children socialize with their peers in and outside the classroom in order to achieve a positive self-concept as well as awareness of peace building. When issues arise during their play and interaction, teachers guide and allow children to make decisions to resolve their conflicts. This will enable them to reflect consciously that peace is indeed a needed ingredient to live in a community. Approaches to promote peace education can be explicit or implicit, however, it must focus on cultivating citizens who are capable of working towards a humane and just society (Alfonso, 2014).

### **Aims of the Study and Its Methodology**

This study was initially conducted as part of a bigger study commissioned by the Asia Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC) in 2015, where six countries in the Asia Pacific region participated in the study. It was later expanded to include more Malaysian children. The rationale of the study arises out of a growing awareness of the added value of Early Childhood Development (ECD) on peace-building (ARNEC, 2015).

The aim is to find out what is in the minds of young children, parents and teachers regarding their understanding about peace and peace-building in the Asia Pacific region. The objective of this study is to explore the following from the perspectives of the children, parents and teachers:

- What is the meaning of peace and feelings associated to peace?
- How to create peace?
- What are the strategies used by children in non-violent conflict resolution?
- How parents and teachers teach children peace and non-violent conflict resolution?

The following questions were posed to the children during the interview session with the children:

- What do you see in your city/village or neighbourhood that is good?
- How does it (good thing) make you feel?
- What do you see in your city/village or neighbourhood that you think is bad?
- How does it (bad thing) make you feel?
- What does peace mean to you? OR What do you mean by peace? OR What is peace?
- How does peace make you feel? What is it like?
- How did this make you feel?

- What can we do to create peace?
- How can we help to make our communities and homes a better place to live in for all of us?

The children also made drawings of what they think is good and bad and data analysis included document analysis of these drawings.

The following questions were posed to the parents of these children as well as their teachers during interview sessions with them:

- In your opinion, what is the meaning of peace?
- What can we do to create peace in the lives of young children?
- What can a parent/an adult/teacher do to teach their young children about peace and non-violent conflict resolution strategies?
- Have you ever helped your child to learn about peace and peace-building? If yes, please explain: How did you help? What was the context?
- What do you think the child learned from it? Did you find it making a visible impact?
- Have you ever observed your child or children using non-violent approaches in solving problems? If yes, please explain:
- What was the problem? How they/he or she solved the problem?

There is currently no major study to investigate Malaysian children's perception of peace and status of peace-making efforts through teaching and learning in the preschools. Thus when the lead researcher was approached by ARNEC to conduct this study, the researchers' team pondered over it before agreeing that this would be a beneficial study to embark on with the intention to better inform the policy makers and the public on how to provide scaffolding to our children in understanding peace and actions related to peace-making.

In the case of Malaysia, this study was done on a voluntary basis, instruments in the form of questions (as indicated above) were sent to various preschools teachers. Seven preschools responded as stated in Table 1, focal point from each school was appointed. The researchers called up these focal points and explained to them the aims, procedures and ethics of conducting data collection. Among these focal points are school principals and school teachers.

Interview of children and their parents were conducted, tape-recorded and transcribed by these focal points and sent back to the researchers for validation and analysis. The researchers interviewed the teachers who taught these children, some of them who were not available for face-to-face interview answered the interview questions and send it to the researchers.

Children were allowed to draw pictures to express their feelings and opinions. When there is a need for clarification, researchers contacted the respective focal point and further information was collected. A total of 34 children, 24 parents and 12 teachers were interviewed, details of the participants is as given in Table 1. Constant comparative method analysis was used where themes and categories were created based on the data collected. To ensure validity and trustworthiness of the study, audit trail of the study was recorded, and peer review was conducted after the data analysis was done.

For ethical considerations, permissions to interview the children were obtained from the parents as they are below 18 years old. Consent from parents and teachers were also elicited prior to their interviews. The objectives and nature of the study were revealed to these participants before data collection.

**Table 1: Samples of the study**

<b>Preschool*</b>	<b>Children**</b>	<b>Parents</b>	<b>Teachers</b>	<b>Brief background of the Preschool</b>
Preschool S	Six children aged 5+ (Ethen, Eunice, Gan, Koo, Tee, Long)  Four child aged 4+ (Ong, Lee, Leong, Tan)	9 mothers  1 father	5 teachers	A private preschool in the central zone of Peninsular Malaysia, where philosophy of the kindergarten is based strongly on values and peace. Many of the parents who sent their children to the kindergarten are professionals.
Preschool G1	One child (Muhd), 5+	1 mother	1 teacher	Government preschool caters for the general public especially the lower income family. This school is a typical Malaysian school situated in the central zone of Peninsular Malaysia.
Preschool E	Four children aged 5+ (LG, DP, VR, LR)	2 mothers  2 fathers	1 teacher	This government preschool E is situated in a plantation at the northern region of Peninsular Malaysia, most of the children are from the lower social economic status family. The parents interviewed were a fishmonger, lorry driver, florist and a housewife. They have all completed secondary school education
Preschool T	Two children aged 5+ (JX and TZ)	2 mothers	2 teachers	A privately run Buddhist Association preschool in a city at the northern zone of Peninsular of Malaysia, philosophy of the kindergarten is based strongly on values.
Summer Academy	One child (MO, 4+ ys)	1 father	1 teacher	A private preschool in a city situated at the central zone of Peninsular Malaysia, which strongly believed in developing child personalities.
Preschool G2	Six children (Ir, Aka, Nurul, Ahmad, Faridah, Ayu)	3 fathers, 3 mothers	1 teacher	A government preschool in the southern zone of Peninsular Malaysia.
Preschool SBa	10 children		1 teacher	A government preschool in the southern zone of Peninsular Malaysia
Total	34	24	12	

Note:

\*In Malaysia, the name of Early childhood center ranges from preschool, kindergarten to playschool. For this paper, these centers are all named as preschools as the name given through the Education Act 1996.

\*\* Names of the children are not their real names

## FINDINGS

Consolidation of the findings are presented based on questions asked to the respondents consisting of children, parents and teachers.

### Perspectives of Children

Children's perspective which emerged from the data is about 'good', 'bad', 'peace and peace-building'. Analysis is done based on the conversation(interview) with them as well as their drawings.

#### *'Good' in the eye of the children*

The question of "What is good?" was asked as warming up leading to the question on 'peace'. This is necessary as 'good' and 'bad' are terms used more often in the children's everyday living. In the children's eye, 'good' is manifested through physical things in their natural surroundings and the people in it including their families as well as friends. Criteria of 'good' is described as beautiful, clean, tidy, orderly, friendly and calm. Children talked about cleanliness a lot, they disliked rubbish. Samples of children's response are given in Table 2.

**Table 2: Samples of response from the children on what is good**

Children	Verbatim Response
Koo	- lining up - no fighting, complaining, offending - lend a helping hand - people doing recycling campaign around the neighbourhood
TZ	A clean and beautiful garden
MO	When someone falls in the playground, the other people/ hero comes to help
Ir	There are many friends that I can play with near my house

Almost all the children said that good things made them feel happy. Koo was more expressive, he said "good things made him feel wanted and protected".

#### *'Bad' in the eye of the children*

Consistent with what they think is good, many of what the children described as 'bad' are actually the opposite of what they think is 'good'. To them, 'bad' is being dirty, untidy, fighting and flouting rules such as cutting queues as stated in Table 3. One of the children, Muhd talked about kidnapping being 'bad', he said that his sister had witnessed a kidnapping taking place, he went on to say that the thug kidnapped people because they are influenced by drugs and gum.

**Table 3: Samples of response from the children on what is bad**

Children	Verbatim
Ethen	He dislikes seeing black dirty mole patches on the wall around the neighbourhood. He dislikes people who litter around the neighbourhood
Gan Jin	See fighting scene in TV
Koo	Car cutting queues, people throwing rubbish out from the car or everywhere else, animals getting hurt, car accidents, shouting/ screaming people, thefts and robbery
Tee	Rubbish everywhere and a lot of mosquitoes
Wong	When my best friend Ding Rui fight with me, we do not love each other
TZ	When I see people throw rubbish in the river, and a lot of mosquitoes, I feel sad. I don't like to see people dirty the river.
MO	When I see some friends laugh at the girl who is crying (referring to his drawing)

Among the four drawings submitted by the children from Preschool E on what they think is bad in their neighborhood, one of it (VR) has drawing of indication of violence in the house (Figure 1). The researcher requested the teacher to talk to the child about the picture he drew. The teacher conveyed what VR has said:

‘The people in his drawing are his parents, his parents have different opinion and always fight with each other. They also argue everyday. The crying person in the picture is his mother. When they argue, the father will beat his mother. He told me that their argument will happen when his father drank alcohol. This made him hate and get frustrated with his parents.’



**Figure 1: Drawing on what is ‘bad’ by VR**

Another drawing by TZ (Figure 2) showed how he dislikes people dirtying the river, he said “When I see people throw rubbish in the river, and a lot of mosquitoes, I feel sad. I don’t like to see people dirty the river”



**Figure 2: Drawing on what is ‘bad’ by TZ**

Children feel sad and angry when they are confronted with ‘bad’ things. Koo described the feeling as uncomfortable, emotional and downcast. Gan elaborated her sadness by saying that when people fight and police catch them, their family will lose them and feel sad. Two children, Eunice and VR wanted to be left alone when they feel angry and sad. VR’s confession of ‘hate parents’ is related to violence at home.

#### ***Peace and peace-building in the eye of the children***

Majority of the children equated peace with loving others, loving others can be manifested through helping others, taking care of others and abstain from fighting and no war. Examples of responses are quoted below:

“Peace means even I am not a group leader, I still help the group leader to keep the things because I know I have to be kind” (Ethen)

“No fighting, take care of your sister. Don’t fight with your sister” (Leong)

However, there were a few children who also related peace with cleanliness and beauty (Figure 3 & 4), cleanliness meant do not litter. LG and Rohin said peace is quietness and no noise. MO elaborated his understanding of peace by saying that “When I help my friend to put on a plaster when he was bleeding. I asked him not to cry and I told him to be brave”.



**Figure 3: Drawing on what is ‘peace’ by TZ**  
“Peace is a clean and beautiful garden”

DP told her teacher as she described her own drawing (Figure 4):

“In my house we plant a lot of plants and trees, my family took a lot time to clean up our surroundings but my neighbour always throws rubbish near our house. Pets in surroundings also make our house dirty. The purple colour room is my room with a lot of paintings in the wall...The people in the house are my parents. My family is very small, and we are really happy living together.”



**Figure 4: Drawing on what is peace by DP**

Almost unanimously children reiterated that peace made them feel happy. Eunice is more creative and said that peace “made her feel happy like an angel watching over her” whereas Gan said “peace can make a heart shape bigger and its red colour”. Two children said peace made them feel safe, and LG said that “peace is relax and having breathing space”.

Children gave very concrete everyday examples on how to keep peace, this includes cleaning up, helping each other, sharing happiness, listening, cooperate, negotiate, take turns. They clarified further by saying that ‘peace’ means don’t fight, don’t bully. The attitudes that they mentioned include good manners, respect, tolerate. They suggested activities such as open house, gathering with neighbours, planting trees.

**Table 4: Samples of response from the children on how to keep peace**

<b>Children</b>	<b>Verbatim</b>
Ethen	Help to clean up. don't be lazy and forgetful, don't kick things around and don't idle, don't day dream, we must help to do things to keep ourselves busy and not waste time.
Eunice	No fighting, help each other, talk nicely with each other, good manners, willing to share and care for other. not selfish.
Gan	Share our happiness with friend, help mother to do housework, play with sibling.
Koo	Respect people around us, share and understand
Tee	We want peace, say stop fighting, be patient
Muhd	Need to clean up the house, feel peaceful, need to be good, like it
LG, VR, DP, LR	Cooperate with community, talk happily to every one, tolerate with friends, listen to the parents advice, plant trees, gathering with neighbours; open house celebration
Leong	Listen to her mummy, don't fight with others.
Won	Always play together with friends and do not fight, share with friends
TZ	No fighting, help each other,
MO	We negotiate, we take turns, we do not fight
Preschool G2	Follow regulation, do good, don't disturb friend, watch our behavior, help people in need

### **Perspectives of Parents**

Parents' perspectives on peace and peace-building which emerged from the data collected are 'meaning of peace', 'creating peace in the life of young children' and 'using non-violent approaches in solving problems'.

#### ***Meaning of peace***

Parents have a more comprehensive understanding of 'peace'; to them, 'peace' means balanced life, calm, harmony, unity, tolerance. 'Peace' also meant no suffering, no war, no hunger, no crime no violence, not life threatening, assets not threatened. It is obvious from the tone of the adults, the opposite of peace gives a lot of negativity to life and threatens their otherwise calm and quiet life. One of the parent went a bit more philosophical by reiterating that peace is from within us, according to him: "To me, peace is from within. When you are at peace all your actions will be of peace and I bring it to the community I meet."(Ong).

#### ***Creating peace in the lives of young children***

Parents understood the important role they play in creating peace in the lives of young children, firstly, they agreed that they must be the role model for the children, showing them the way to create peace. Secondly, parents believed that the immediate environment children live in must be harmonious, caring and loving. It is only by living in such an environment that they can build up the character of their children who will love and practice peace in their own life.

In order to teach the young children about peace and non-violent conflict resolution strategies, parents need to lead by example and at the same time guide and have dialogue with them, explaining the reasons for why certain action is taken. TZ's response encapsulate these thoughts shared by most of the parents:

"Education starts at home, to educate them not to use violence act towards their siblings. How to solve the conflicts by in a polite manner. Leading by example parents shouldn't fight/quarrel with the witness of children". Story-telling and nature walk provide opportunity for such dialogue on the need to have genuine concern, accepting differences, taking responsibility as well as gratefulness."(TZ)



Most of the parents have helped their children in learning about peace-building. They did it through two ways, firstly, guiding them to resolve their conflicts when they had a fight; secondly by consciously telling the children about peace through pictures and activities that the parents are involved in. Parents also deliberately arranged for opportunities for their children to mix around and communicate with children and adults of other races and background. Parents of the estate children emphasized on teaching the children to let go of their ego and find inner peace.

#### ***Using non-violent approaches in solving problems***

The children have used non-violent approaches in solving problems, they resolved conflicts through talking, expressing their needs, negotiating and sharing. There appear to be two different approaches when the conflict is between an elder sibling and a younger one, where one is to ask the elder to give in to the younger one, the other is to discuss and resolve the conflict. One parent taught the child to be brave and confront the bullies.

#### **Perspective of the Teacher**

Teachers' perspective on peace and peace-building emerged from the study are 'meaning of peace', 'general principles in creating peace in the life of young children', 'strategies in teaching children about peace-building' and 'non-violent approaches in solving problems'.

#### ***Meaning of peace***

To the teachers, peace is caring, sharing, harmony, working together, orderly, tranquility, accepting, free from war, mutual respect. The teacher from the estate kindergarten held a slightly different perspective, to her, peace is related to self and spirituality.

#### ***General principles in creating peace in the lives of young children***

Creating peace in the lives of young children need to start from their heart and instilling in them the big heart and moral values. On top of this, Quah said that to foster peace among children we also need them to believe that they "themselves are persons who can make differences to the society and the world" and they need to have courage to take initiatives to "bring a peaceful and better life to the society". At the same time, creating peace in the lives of young children does not mean only showing them the peace and beautiful life, but rather two of the teachers think that there is a need to expose the children to the real and rather ugly world to bring awareness of the importance of peace.

In all these, teachers need to be a role model, practicing compassion and wisdom every day. Mina is one of these teachers who believe that a teacher needs to be role model "I believe a teacher can be a strong role model who can influence a child's life, besides the parents. Just showing wisdom and compassion in our daily interactions in class, we can sow the seed of peace in the lives of the children". Silatoo put in another perspective: "Creating peaceful environment for the children, a happy environment".

#### ***Strategies in teaching children about peace-building***

Teachers were enthusiastic in giving responses regarding strategies in teaching children about peace-building. An overwhelming response is the teacher needs to act as a role model practicing the spirit of peace, solving problems in non-violent ways and engaging children in dialogue. Story telling is identified as the important method in dialogue on peace. In the quote below, Mina has reflected most of what the rest thinks:

"Firstly, a teacher can engage the children to discover the power of sincere dialogue as a conflict resolution strategy. In order to demonstrate this, the teacher needs to have excellent listening skills and have lots and lots of patience. The teacher does need initiative to research on the concept of peace for young children through books and other reading materials. This serves as a theoretical backup for the teacher in guiding the children to learn about peace" (Mina)

All the teachers said they provide guidance to the children in learning about peace and peace-building in their preschools as if there are components of peace and peace-building in the school curriculum and school programme. Suggested activities in the curriculum include story-telling, singing, card playing, visitation, assembly etc. However, teachers do have the freedom to design their own activities. The approach used by the respondents of this study is a pragmatic one focusing on situational learning. In Preschool S, children are gathered in daily assembly or during classroom activities where cases of conflict are shared or role played from incidences in the school or from news clips followed by discussion on solving the conflict. The purpose is to enhance

awareness and develop empathy about the world they are living in. In all these preschools, the teachers arrange for celebration of festivals from different culture in the schools. Teachers themselves practice moral values related to peace-building such as accepting children's mistake. Recognition is also given to children who apply peace values in their daily activities.

### ***Non-violent approaches in solving problems***

Teachers were able to recall incidences when the children were fighting over turns, toys, story books and they subsequently resolved the conflict amicably through negotiations. The children were able to control their emotions and some of them acted as negotiators for the conflict between their friends. A number of teachers gave detailed examples of how children use non-violence approach in solving problems. The challenges that teachers felt that children need are the realization that children still need the support and encouragement followed by regular reminders.

## **ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Meaning of Peace**

From the depiction of peace uttered by the samples of this study, there appear to be three categories of meaning of peace. First, peace as love and orderliness. Second, peace is harmony and balanced living and third, peace can only come from within. This difference is probably due to different experiences in life as well as cultural differences. Raviv, Oppenheimer, Bar-Tal (1999) reiterated that 'peace and war can be defined as social phenomena and viewed as an integral part of a child's social world and experience' (pg 5) Children's idea of peace is predominantly linked to love and orderliness and is within the environment they live in, parents and teachers have more comprehensive and complicated view of peace which is related to harmony and tolerance in a bigger perspective, this is unsurprising as conception of peace and war are consequence of direct and indirect experiences as stated by Raviv, Oppenheimer, Bar-Tal (1999).

### ***Peace is love and orderliness***

Majority of the children equated peace with loving others, loving others can be manifested through helping others, take care of others and abstaining from fighting. They feel good and happy when there is peace. However, there were a substantial number of children who also related peace to cleanliness and beauty, cleanliness to them meant do not litter. 'Good' in this aspect is manifested through physical things in their natural surroundings and actions of their families as well as friends. Criteria of 'good' is described as beautiful, clean, tidy, orderly, friendly and calm. Children talked about cleanliness a lot, they disliked rubbish. In this aspect, children's idea of peace is different from adults, their parents and teachers do not relate peace with cleanliness and orderliness. This is something that needs to be taken into cognizant by parents and teachers. Parents and teachers need to understand this difference and respect children's need of beauty, clean, tidy and orderly.

### ***Peace means harmony and balanced***

Parents and teachers have a more comprehensive understanding of peace, to them, peace means balanced life, calm, tranquility, mutual respect, sharing, caring, working together, harmony, unity and tolerance. Peace also meant no suffering, no war, no hunger, no crime, no violence, not life threatening, assets not threatened. It is obvious from the tone of the adults that the opposite of peace gives a lot of negativity to life and threatens their otherwise calm and quiet life which they dislike.

### ***Peace is something from within***

Some parents went a bit more philosophical by reiterating that peace is "from within us". The teacher from the estate kindergarten also reiterated that peace is related to self and spirituality. This can be related to religious belief and community culture where the parents and teachers live in.

### **Feelings related to Peace**

Children feel happy and good when they encounter beauty, cleanliness, tidiness, orderliness, friendliness and calm. Two children said peace made them feel safe. One of the children, LG said that peace is relax and having breathing space align to Tephly's (1985) study where peace was understand primary as a state of quietness or privacy Contrary to good, they feel bad and angry when they encountered dirty, untidiness, fighting and flouting of rules such as cutting queues. Koo described the feeling in more detail, he said he felt 'uncomfortable, emotional and downcast'. Eunice and VR wanted to be left alone when they feel angry and sad. VR confession of 'hate parents' is related to violence at home. The effect of peace and bad onto children is deeper than we can comprehend.

Muhd's thoughts of kidnapping as bad appeared to be a consequence of his sister telling about her experience of seeing a kidnap. VR's expression of hating the parents is due to the constant fight between his parents. Thus, it can be deduced that the feeling of peace or conflict could be related to experience in the life of the children.

### **Peace-building**

One of the objectives of this study was to find out how children maintain peace in their life and how parents and teachers develop peace-building skills of children. Six categories of peace-building emerged from the interviews with children, parents and teachers. Children in this study were very pragmatic and to them peace-building just happened in everyday living. Parents and teachers in this study understood the importance of themselves as role models and they acted that role in dealing with conflict among children. Methodology of peace-building adopted by parents and children were mainly dialogue and negotiation, as well as situational learning. Creating a peaceful environment was deemed as important by some of the parents and teachers. A very important element mentioned by one parent is teaching the children to believe that their action is important and make a difference to humanity and their community. The differences in establishing peace between individuals by age differences is found to be greater than the different strategies used by children, parents and teachers for resolving conflict and establishing peace between individuals (Covell, Rose-Krasnor, Fletcher (1994).

The categories of peace-building are as follow:

#### ***Peace-building in everyday life***

Children gave very concrete everyday examples on how to keep peace, this include cleaning up, helping each other, sharing happiness, listening and cooperating which are essence of friendship. Friendships and absence of quarrels dominated images of peace in a longitudinal study on children's concept of peace and war (Ilse, 1996). They clarified further by saying that means "don't fight, don't bully". The attitudes that they mentioned include good manners, respect, tolerate. They suggested activities such as open house, gathering with neighbors, planting trees.

#### ***Role Model***

Parents and teachers understood the important role they played in creating peace in the lives of young children, they unanimously agreed that they must be the role model for the children, showing them the way to create peace. In order to teach the young children about peace and non-violent conflict resolution strategies, parents need to lead by example and at the same time guide and have dialogue with them, explaining the reasons why certain actions were taken. Story-telling and nature walks provided opportunities for such dialogue on the need to have genuine concern of nature and human society, accepting differences among each other, taking responsibility as well as gratefulness. Teachers themselves practiced the moral values related to peace-building such as accepting children's mistake and respecting their rights and views. Recognition was also given to children who apply peace values in their daily activities.

#### ***Situational Learning***

The teachers in this study provided guidance to the children in learning about peace and peace-building in their ECD centres. The approach used was a pragmatic one focusing on situational learning. Children were gathered during daily assembly or during classroom activities where cases of conflict were shared or role-play from incidences in the school or from news clips followed by discussion on solving the conflict. The purpose was to enhance awareness and develop empathy about the world they are living in. The teachers also arranged for celebration of festivals from different culture in the schools. At the same time, creating peace in the lives of young children does not mean only showing them the peace and beautiful life, but rather two of the teachers thought that there is a need to expose children to the real and rather ugly world in order to bring awareness of the importance of peace. In all these, teachers need to be a role model, practicing compassion and wisdom every day.

Most of the parents have helped their children in learning about peace-building. They did it through two ways, firstly, guiding them to resolve their conflicts when they had a fight; secondly by consciously telling the children about peace through pictures and activities that the parents were involved in. One parent deliberately arranged for opportunities for her children to mix around with children of other races and background. Parents of the estate children emphasized on teaching the children to let go of their ego and find inner peace.

***Creating a peaceful environment***

Parents believed that the immediate environment children live in must be harmonious, caring, loving. It is only by living in such an environment that they can build up the character of their children who will love and practice peace in their own life.

***Negotiation***

Teachers were able to recall incidences when the children were fighting over turns, toys, story books and the children subsequently resolved the conflict amicably through talking, sharing and negotiations. Teachers expressed their thoughts that in negotiation, children still need the support and encouragement and regular reminder from the adults. There appears to be two different approaches when the conflict is between an elder sibling with a younger one, one is to ask the elder to give in to the younger one, the other is to discuss and resolve the conflict. One parent taught the child to be brave and confront those who bully him.

***Believing in one's ability to change society***

Creating peace in the lives of young children need to start from their heart and instilling in them the big heart and moral values. On top of this, Quah, a parent, said that to foster peace among children we also need them to believe that they 'themselves are persons who can make differences to the society and the world' and they need to have courage to take initiatives to bring a peaceful and better life to the society'.

**CONCLUSION**

Children formed their own idea of peace and peace-building from their daily interactions with their families, friends and environment. Basically, children said peace is love and orderliness, this is by itself a simple yet very powerful statement. Parents and teachers understand the need to develop peace building skills among children and they acted as role model, they create the peaceful environment where children live in, they capitalize on situation in everyday living to teach children how to use non-violent methodology to negotiate and finally to create peace.

This study has uncovered Malaysian children's understanding and their inner feeling towards peace and peace-making, the findings indicate that Malaysian children have an innate positivity towards peace and if cultivated from young would definitely create a more peaceful world of tomorrow. The study also uncovered that Malaysian teachers and parents are generally supportive of peace-building efforts and believe in taking self-initiated actions to generate a peaceful environment. This augurs well with efforts of the Ministry of Education Malaysia to nurture preschool children to adopt a holistic approach to everyday living and practice peace and peace-building to bring forth a harmonious and just society. The data of this study does not cover all the demographics of the country, hence a similar study can be expanded to other parts of the country to obtain more insights of the meaning of peace to Malaysian children, parents and teachers.

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