

Promotion of a Culture of Peace and Non-violence in Formal Education

The session, 'Promoting a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence in Formal Education', was held at the conference with the objectives to develop effective strategies to address violence among children and adolescents; to discuss the perspectives of experts on incorporating non-violence into education; to explore various creative teaching methods to weave the concept of non-violence into education; and to recognise that peace and non-violence need to be treated as critical concepts in formal education.

Speakers

- Mr Ashoke Chatterjee, Former Director, NID and CEE Governing Council
- Dr Jim Taylor, WESSA, Maritzburg College, South Africa
- Ms Lopa Shah, Founder, Elicit Foundation
- Ms Meena Raghunathan, Director CSR, GMR Varalakshmi Foundation
- Mr Sanjay Deasi, Founder and CEO, ConsciousLeap



Presentations and Key Messages

Mr Atul Pandya (Director, Sabarmati Ashram Preservation and Memorial Trust) shared details of the ongoing programme, “Learning Non-Violence,” being implemented in 300 schools and reaching approximately 30,000 children in collaboration with CEE. This programme is being rolled out with the support of more than 14 local NGO partner organisations. It focuses on the interconnectedness of physical, social, and internal environments, and on understanding non-violence as encompassing all aspects of life, including interactions with nature. The conference provides a platform to share and discuss this approach.

Mr Ashoke Chatterjee (NID and CEE Governing Council) shared that the programme aims to reflect Gandhian principles, but achieving this in the current context presents challenges, citing the specific example of the vulnerability of artisans and the destruction of artisan tools and livelihoods during the 2002 Gujarat riots. He noted that the current state has social and political fractures, providing a

context where notions of common good and Gandhian principles may face challenges. Viewing nature as an expression of peace and non-violence and imbibing learning from nature's inherent balance and harmony, he asked speakers to share their experience and views on exploring how to harmonise all the realities of human life with the lessons of nature.

Mr Sanjay Desai (ConsciousLeap), addressing the impact of social media and the current education system, highlighted an overemphasis on competition and rote learning, a lack of space for critical thinking and emotional development, and high levels of stress among children.

Ms Lopa Shah (Elicit Foundation), sharing her work in schools in conflict-impacted regions of Pulwama, shared the need for promoting mindfulness and emotional intelligence, creating space for introspection and self-awareness, and developing skills for managing emotions and navigating social situations.

Ms Meena Raghunathan (GMR Varalakshmi Foundation), focusing on Education and Children, highlighted the importance of fostering a connection to nature by understanding the impact of human actions on the environment and developing a sense of responsibility and care for the natural world. Addressing Violence and Children, she spoke about tackling bullying and other forms of violence in schools through creating a safe and inclusive learning environment, and promoting conflict resolution skills and restorative justice practices. Furthermore, concerning Justice, Equity, and Inclusivity, and quoting from her book 'To Every Parent, To Every Teacher: Raising Resilient Children', she advocated for addressing inequalities by recognising and challenging systemic inequalities based on class, caste, gender, and religion, and promoting equitable access to resources and opportunities for all.

Dr Jim Taylor (Maritzburg College), focusing on Justice, Equity, and Inclusivity, discussed overcoming the "othering" of individuals and groups by fostering empathy, understanding, and respect for diversity, and building bridges of communication and collaboration across different communities. Addressing Violence and Children, he highlighted the impact of violence on children's development, noting increased anxiety, fear, and trauma, erosion of trust and empathy, and long-term psychological and social consequences. He further spoke about challenging harmful narratives to promote fearlessness among people, especially children and youth.

Session Highlights

- Wellbeing of our inner environment is a foundation for managing our external environment, in line with Mahatma Gandhiji's quote, "Be the change that you wish to see in the world".
- Challenge harmful narratives and promote a more compassionate and inclusive vision for the future.
- Emphasise the need for a multi-faceted approach that addresses the root causes of violence.

Key Remarks from the Participants

- Recognising the political dimensions of social and environmental issues.
- Engaging in collective action to address systemic challenges and create a more just and equitable society.
- Education needs to generate skills and competencies to fulfil individual aspirations and how to engage with the outcomes when aspirations are not fulfilled, as peace is also related to the fulfilment of aspiration for students as they are coming because of aspirations of parents,

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their self-aspiration, or aspirations of society. Education has a major role to play in developing this kind of mindset.

- Wider understanding of environmental education with a fearless, more compassionate and inclusive vision for the future.
- Teacher training: Building on teachers' knowledge is crucial. Teachers' wellbeing is crucial, as is student wellbeing.

Key Recommendations from the Session

- Reiterate the interconnectedness of peace, non-violence, and environmental equity.
- Emphasise the need for a multi-faceted approach that addresses the root causes of violence.
- Encourage further dialogue and collaboration to create a more just and sustainable future for all.

Who Acts?

- Department of School Education at all levels and teacher training institutes
- Department of Higher Education
- Development organisations
- Media