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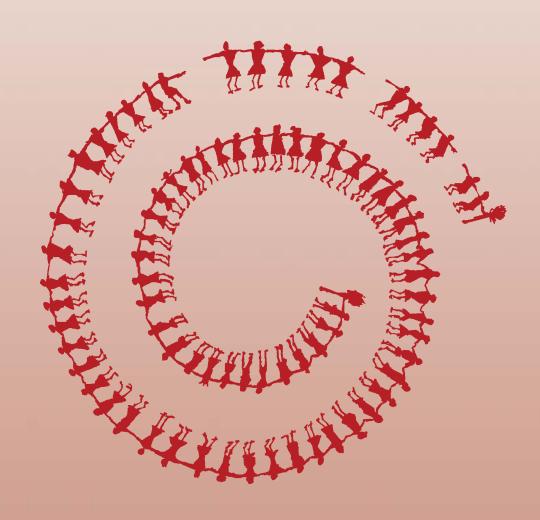
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The Promotion of Social Cohesion Through Education in Sri Lanka

September 2011

Discussion Paper Series

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List of Acronyms

2NL	Second national language
CLIL	Content and language integrated learning
ESCP	Education for social cohesion and peace
GCE OL	General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level
GCE AL	General Certificate of Education Advanced Level
GTZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft fur Internationale Zusammenarbeit
ISA	In-Service Advisor
MOE	Ministry of Education
NCOE	National College of Education
NEC	National Education Commission
NEREC	National Education Research and Evaluation Centre
NIE	National Institute of Education
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PTF	Presidential Task Force
RESC	Regional English Support Centre
SCPEU	Social Cohesion and Peace Education Unit
TC	Teacher Centre
TTC	Teacher Training College
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

Executive Summary

Introduction

The social dimensions and benefits of education are being increasingly appreciated in developed and middle-income countries. Among the many social benefits of education, promoting social cohesion in countries has become extremely important in the modern world, as global mobility of culturally diverse populations has posed challenges to the shared values, ethics and identities of societies. The instantaneous transfer of diverse and varied information through modern communications technologies has further increased the importance of social cohesion. Cohesive societies are more effective in achieving collective economic and social goals, since such societies are better at including and uniting diverse groups and forging synergy (OECD, 2001; Greaney, 2006). Five dimensions of social cohesion, belonging, inclusion, participation, recognition and legitimacy, are especially important for multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious societies such as Sri Lanka.

The education system is of central importance in promoting national unity and solidarity among the different social groups in a country. Education is a key instrument in the promotion of social cohesion through the transmission of knowledge and the shaping of attitudes of individuals towards diversity and change. Sri Lanka has initiated measures to promote social cohesion through the school curriculum, textbooks, teacher development, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, the organization of schools, and language policy. This paper discusses these measures, and future policy options for Sri Lanka as a middle-income society.

Education and Social Cohesion: The Conceptual Framework

What is Social Cohesion?

Social cohesion can be defined as 'the shared values and commitment to a society' by all its members (Jenson, 1998). In a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural country like Sri Lanka all ethnic groups need to feel they belong. When all members of a society can exercise the same rights and privileges there is greater unity and a feeling of solidarity and comradeship which in turn induces a greater commitment towards achieving common goals. Sri Lanka needs to focus on building a national identity that will help create national solidarity which is important for economic development.

In the past social cohesion was understood to be the result of the assimilation of diverse cultures and religions into a nation with a common language and values. Today social cohesion is understood to include not only assimilation but accommodation as well. This implies that all ethnic and religious groups are fully integrated and are allowed to freely practice their religion and use their language in daily activities and moreover are accepted by each other as belonging to one nation.

Education and Social Cohesion

Education is seen as a key instrument in the promotion of social cohesion in its role of transmitting knowledge and attitudes to individuals to help them cope with change and diversity. Education is responsible for the cultivation of a civilized society and helps to inculcate moral and ethical values in individuals which help in the creation of a healthy society that has a deep commitment to the principles of human rights. This naturally has implications for the overall school curriculum, textbooks, the attitudes of teachers and the manner in which students are taught.

Education can contribute towards social cohesion in four ways: (a) by teaching students the basic principles of what it means to be a good citizen and the consequences of not adhering to those principles; (b) by providing students with an experience consistent with these principles that brings them closer to those of different ethnicity and background; (c) by providing equal opportunities to all students; and (d) by providing students with a common understanding of citizenship, while incorporating the interests of diverse communities (Heyneman, 2010, p. 4).

Education is seen universally as a public good but every education system has the potential to either aggravate or reduce the conditions that could lead to disharmony and conflict (Buckland, 2006, p.7). While education can play a vital part in building social cohesion among diverse groups in a community, education can also play a negative role in countries where there is war or civil strife (Buckland, 2006; Cardozo, 2008, Davies, 2006). Education, if used positively, forges a national identity which unites diverse communities. But education might be used in a negative way, to promote a particular idea of national identity that does not incorporate all ethnic communities.

In Sri Lanka, with the end of the civil war and a renewed effort at a lasting peace, education can play a prominent role in building trust and understanding amongst the country's diverse ethnic and religious groups. It can be an important vehicle for conveying to the younger generation attitudes of peace and tolerance, and values that help build a sense of national solidarity.

Social Cohesion in Education in Sri Lanka: The Evolution of Policy

From the 1990s policymakers have been aware of the need to restructure the education system so that it would help inculcate values of peace and social integration in the future generations. The 1997 Education Reforms contained a special component on *Value education and national integration* with the idea that the teaching and learning environment "will inculcate justice and fair play in pupils regardless of caste, creed or social class" (Presidential Task Force, 1997, p. 26). Life Competencies was introduced as a subject at the junior secondary level but with limited success.

In 2008 education policy makers took the vital step in preparing a national policy on social cohesion and peace education. The need to strengthen the vital role of education in promoting social cohesion and in the building of future citizens was recognized, as was the need to co-ordinate efforts at peace education. The policy identifies seven strategic areas through which

social cohesion can be developed. These are: (a) curriculum; (b) teacher education; (c) second national language (2NL); (d) whole school culture; (e) integrated schools; (f) co-curricular activities; and (g) research (Ministry of Education (MOE), 2008, p. iv). The creation of a specific unit, the Social Cohesion and Peace Education Unit (SCPEU) in the Ministry of Education is an indication of the importance placed on social cohesion in education.

More recently policy makers have recognized both the need to inculcate the importance of tolerance and respect for different people and cultures in the citizens of the country, and the benefits of accepting the existence of ethnic diversity within the nation. Officials from the Ministry of Education, and Provincial and zonal directors, have been motivated to organize extra-curricular activities through schools all around the island with the purpose of boosting inter-ethnic tolerance and understanding. Principals and teachers have been involved in organizing cultural events and co-curricular activities which help students learn about diversity and tolerance. Funding agencies also have sponsored programs at school, zonal and provincial level to ensure the future generation is equipped with an understanding of the values of social cohesion.

Changes in curriculum have included the introduction of Civics Education, English as a compulsory second language, and the learning of Sinhala or Tamil as a second national language. The teaching of the second national language, and the teaching of English as a link language and as a language of international communication, technology, and science, are establishing a basis for equity of opportunity and removing the barriers and divisions of language.

Initiatives to Promote Social Cohesion

Social Cohesion through Extra-Curricular Activities

Extra-curricular activities that promote trust building and social cohesion between diverse ethnic and religious groups have been planned at school level, zonal and provincial levels, and through the Ministry of Education. The Unit of Social Cohesion and Peace Education in the Ministry of Education has been especially enthusiastic and has focused on different types of programs to build trust and comradeship between students of different cultural backgrounds.

Denuwara Mithuro (Pals of two cities) was started in 2007 and has had seven separate student-exchange programs to date. In these programs, students from Tamil speaking areas and students from Sinhala speaking areas are brought together in a 7 day friendship program. About 200 students participate in each exchange program and spend a week together in fun filled activities. Students are given an introductory course in the Sinhala or Tamil language on the first day so that they can bond and make friends. Programs have been carried out between schools in the Polonnaruwa, Akkraipattu, Colombo, Batticaloa, Kalutara, Trincomalee, and Gampaha Districts. A lack of certainty about funding could hinder further developments in what is an excellent opportunity for the promotion of social cohesion.

In the effort at Peace Education, the Unit has also encouraged schools in the island to have their own 'Student Parliament' in their school. Debates on topics of interest are carried out in democratic style, giving students the opportunity to learn about Parliamentary procedures and also the confidence to speak in public. Unit sources state that about one third of the schools in the island have begun conducting this activity.

An individual program – the Rebuilding of the Elephant Pass Railway Station, as a gift from the students of the south to the students of the north, is also underway. Students in the south were asked to contribute Rs.2 each towards this project and the response has been tremendous. An island-wide Art Competition has also been organized in connection with this project. Each entry shows a scene of ethnic bonding and carries an appropriate slogan.

Social Cohesion through Co-Curricular activities

Co-curricular activities relating to peace and social cohesion are carried out by schools, some departments in the Ministry of Education, the National Institute of Education (NIE) and the funding agencies. Peace events, cultural shows, activity camps, debates and dramas, English competitions, and art exhibitions, are some of the many activities undertaken. Schools organize oratorical competitions, spelling bees and essay competitions to enhance learning in English and the second national language.

Issues of Language and Social Cohesion

Language has always been an important issue in Sri Lanka because of the multi-racial mix of the population. Language has served to identify each ethnic group's cultural heritage. While language can often be an issue of contention between diverse ethnic and religious groups, linguistic issues can also contribute to the building of peaceful relations between different ethnic communities if handled in a sensitive manner. In 1978, Articles 18 and 19 – Chapter IV of the Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka designated Sinhala and Tamil as national languages and English as a link language, realizing the importance of English both as a communication link between the two major communities and as an international language. Learning English as a second language and using it as a medium of instruction in bilingual education, and learning the second national language are important policy reforms that would help the future generation communicate with all ethnic and religious groups as well as teach them tolerance and understanding of diversity.

English as a Second Language

The Presidential Task Force (PTF) document General Education Reforms (1997) revealed a sharp focus on acquiring competency in the English Language, which the document implied was necessary for the world of work. At the Primary stage English for communication was introduced in Grade One with formal teaching beginning in Grade Three. English is taught as a second language from Grade Six onwards and is regarded as a core subject for the GCE Ordinary Level (OL) Examination. At the GCE Advanced Level (AL) stage a new subject, General English was introduced, covering a range of topics pertaining to the world of work. However there is still a shortage of teachers competent to teach the language.

Bilingual Education

Bilingual education in Sri Lanka refers to education in both the mother tongue and English. One of the objectives of the Bilingual Education Department of the Ministry of Education is the use of English as a link language between ethnic and religious groups. From 2001, GCE Advanced Level Science students were allowed the option of studying some subjects in the English medium. By 2002 this option was granted to Grade 6 students. The policy of Bilingual education allows, *inter alia*, students to study some subjects in the English medium while still learning in the mother tongue. There is however a shortage of teachers capable of teaching in the English medium.

The Bilingual Education program is conducted jointly by the Bilingual Education Department in the MOE and the Unit of Language Co-ordination at the NIE. The Bilingual Education Department seeks to use Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) to teach students English, but the program needs to be developed further. In this method (CLIL) a new language is taught through a popular subject that is of interest to the student. However because this method lacks the more formal basic language training it necessarily makes more demands on the capabilities of the teacher.

The Second National Language

Research indicates that while the mother tongue is the best medium in which a child should learn in the early years, competence in the first language assists in the successful acquisition of a second language (Bush & Salterelli, 2000, p.18). Frequently schools teach a national language as part of a nation building program. Sri Lanka has followed suit with its policy to teach the second national language to all students, i.e. Tamil to Sinhala medium students and Sinhala to Tamil medium students.

Learning of the second national language was first introduced in 1999 as a compulsory subject in Grades 6 - 9. In 2001 it became an additional subject for the GCE OL (Grades 10 - 11). In 2007 it was introduced as an oral subject from Grade 1 and was put in one of the selection baskets for the OL examination. However, because of a shortage of teachers trained to teach Sinhala and Tamil as second languages, only approximately 45% of all schools offer learning in the second national language.

Children and Diversity: The Promotion of Integrated Schools

Children tend to accept diversity more easily than adults and if encouraged to mix and share ideas with children of other ethnic and religious groups at an early stage would learn respect and tolerance for diversity. The National Education Research and Evaluation Centre (NEREC) of the University of Colombo, based on their research, proposed that mutual understanding and respect for diversity would follow if children from the different ethnic and religious groups learned together in classrooms (NEREC, 2004, p.109).

The promotion of ethnically integrated schools has been a strategy of the national policy for social cohesion. However, in Sri Lanka, a large percentage of the schools tend to be

segregated by medium of instruction. The provisional school census of 2008 indicates that there is a total of 484 schools offering mixed medium education, a small increase in number since 2006. This is barely 5% of the total number of schools in the national education system. Yet increasing the number of these schools is an initiative that could be worked on and which could see clear benefits in building social cohesion.

Key components of education that impact social cohesion

Education reform and change often center around three vital components – curriculum development, revision of textbooks, and teacher training and development. These three components are also interconnected and must be undertaken simultaneously to be effective.

Curriculum development and social cohesion

In Sri Lanka the development and planning of the overall school curriculum is the province of the National Institute of Education (NIE). Two curriculum units, one for Languages, Humanities and Social Sciences and the other for Science and Technology, working through several subject departments are responsible for the drawing up of the curriculum. The curriculum is designed by a panel of subject specialists drawn from universities and other institutions under the supervision of the subject director.

With the establishment of a national policy for social cohesion and peace education, a new curriculum was introduced for Life Competencies and Civics Education (Grade 6 – 9) and Citizenship Education and Governance (Grade 10-11) that successfully integrated peace education concepts and values of cooperation and respect for others. The curriculum has been produced after much research and a study of civics education in 89 countries. Further the curriculum helps promote the need for sensitivity to difference and respect for diversity of cultures in a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural society.

In this sense the curriculum for the GCE OL examination (Grade 10-11) presents a compact whole and could be made a compulsory subject for these Grades. While Life Competencies and Civics Education is a compulsory subject in Grades 6 – 9, Citizenship Education and Governance is only an optional subject for Grades 10 -11 and barely 20% (approx.75, 000) of students offer the subject for the GCE OL examination.

History is an important subject to promote social cohesion by demonstrating the contributions of each ethnic and religious group to the long-term development of the country. There is sufficient evidence to suggest that the main ethnic groups lived amicably together from early times. Sri Lanka has been multi-ethnic and multi-cultural from prehistoric times, and studies suggest a close genetic affinity between the Sinhalese and the Sri Lankan Tamils (Kshatriya, 1995, p.861; Papiha, Mastana & Jayasekera, 1996, p.735). As history is a compulsory subject for the GCE OL examination the presentation of the stories of all ethnic and religious groups could contribute to the promotion of a multi-ethnic and multi-religious Sri Lankan identity.

Textbooks and Social Cohesion

A key issue in the promotion of social cohesion in education concerns the manner in which minority cultures are represented in textbooks (Heyneman & Todoric-Bebic, 2000). Textbooks are read every day by students all over the country and therefore have the potential to influence young minds. The transfer of knowledge from one generation to the next through textbooks is often controlled not only by scholarly and pedagogical criteria, but also by political interests. In this sense it is vitally important that textbooks are examined for sensitivity to different cultures and religions and for the imparting of inappropriate values.

Greaney (2006) mentions eight ways in which textbooks can undermine respect for diversity and tolerance: narrow nationalism, religious bias, omission, imbalance, historical inaccuracy, treatment of physical force and militarism, use of persuasive techniques, and artworks (pp.50-51). These categories are not the only possibilities, neither are they mutually exclusive, but they serve as a method of analyzing textbooks. The history textbooks in Sri Lanka could be made a prime tool for the promotion of a culture of peace and inclusion. It is important that policy makers and educationists make a concerted effort to present the history curriculum in a way that is representative of all ethnic and religious groups in the country.

Teacher Training

Teachers are the most valuable component in the promotion of concepts of peace building and social cohesion. Therefore their training in peace education and in the transferring of these ideas to the students is vital. Teachers must also believe in these values and be convinced of the importance of imparting them to students in order to ensure the production of well balanced and responsible citizens for the future.

Although policy documents since 1997 have stressed the importance of teacher education in concepts of peace and national solidarity these policies have not been effectively implemented. There are many principals and teachers in rural areas who have not received any guidance on how to implement such programs in their schools in spite of several attempts at policy level to provide pre-service and in-service training. NIE sources also assert that 150 in-service teachers have been trained in civics education in 10 Teacher Centers since 2009, and that the new Non-graduate training course for teachers in the system has trained 7,040 teachers in General Education which incorporates the subjects of civics, peace and value education and concepts of social cohesion. Although these numbers are provided it is not clear how many teachers have actually been trained in aspects of social cohesion to date.

A baseline survey conducted in August 2010 by the Ministry of Education and the NIE indicates that although 80% of teachers said they understood the concepts of peace and value education only 24% of these were able to give an appropriate example (MOE & NIE, 2010, p.24). The survey also indicated that a significant number of trained teachers were unable to use what they had learnt and to apply their skills in the classroom (p.31).

The teacher education network of Sri Lanka consists of the National Institute of Education (NIE), 4 University Faculties/Departments of Education, 17 National Colleges of Education

(NCOE), 5 Teacher Training Colleges, 100 Teacher Centers and 30 Regional English Support Centers (RESC). Besides the Degree courses offered by the universities and the NIE, there are two types of teacher training programs; a pre-service Diploma at the National Colleges of Education (NCOE) and in-service training at the Teacher Training Colleges (TTC) for those who have entered the service without a qualification. The National Institute of Education works with both the NCOEs and the TTCs, undertaking the training of instructors/lecturers in the National Colleges of Education (NCOEs), the Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs) and the Teacher Centers (TCs).

Avenues and Pathways for the Future

Sri Lanka can select from a menu of policies to build on the current set of measures to promote social cohesion and strengthen social tolerance and the acceptance of diversity. Some strategies for the education system to move towards a culture of peace are set out below.

(a) Promoting integrated schools can continue to be one of the key strategies to promote social cohesion in schools.

(b) Textbooks, particularly in subjects like History, could be reviewed by panels of scholars and researchers from all the different ethnic and religious groups in the country, ensuring the accuracy of contents of books, in relation to the source material and historical records, is verified.

(c) A policy option for the government to consider is to make the subject Citizenship Education and Governance compulsory for the GCE O/L cycle.

(d) The role of the Social Cohesion and Peace Education Unit in the Ministry of Education can be strengthened as co-curricular and extra-curricular activities among students from different ethnic and religious groups can continue to play a major role in promoting interaction between students of diverse communities.

(e) Teacher education and training programs need to strengthen the capacity of teachers to deliver concepts conducive to social cohesion; and

(f) The role of English as a link language can be further developed as improved English language skills in the population will facilitate the interactions between the different ethnic and linguistic groups in the country.

Building national solidarity and social cohesion and recognizing the cultural diversity in Sri Lanka's plural society has been set up as the first National Goal in education, and the education system should therefore strive to see that it achieves this aim. Recent policy decisions have moved in the right direction, but these decisions alone are not enough. They must be followed through with actions that make all ethnic and religious groups in the country feel they belong. This is vitally important for the country to move forward towards achieving national solidarity and a culture of peace.

Introduction

The social dimensions and benefits of education are being increasingly appreciated in developed and middle-income countries. Among the many social benefits of education, promoting social cohesion in countries has become extremely important in the modern world, as global mobility of culturally diverse populations has posed challenges to the shared values, ethics and identities of societies. The instantaneous transfer of diverse and varied information through modern communications technologies has further increased the importance of social cohesion. Cohesive societies are more effective in achieving collective economic and social goals, since such societies are better at including and uniting diverse groups and forging synergy (OECD, 2001; Greaney, 2006). Five dimensions of social cohesion, belonging, inclusion, participation, recognition and legitimacy, are especially important for multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious societies.

The education system is of central importance in promoting national unity and solidarity among the different social groups in a country. Education is a key instrument in the promotion of social cohesion through the transmission of knowledge and the shaping of attitudes of individuals towards diversity and change. Sri Lanka has initiated measures to promote social cohesion through the school curriculum, textbooks, teacher development, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, the organization of schools, and language policy.

This paper begins with an introduction to the concept of social cohesion and various viewpoints on it, and then proceeds to discuss social cohesion and its relationship to education in general, leading into a specific discussion of education and social cohesion in Sri Lanka. The paper then discusses the measures to promote social cohesion in Sri Lanka and future policy options for the country as a middle-income society.

Education and Social Cohesion: A Conceptual Framework

What is Social Cohesion?

Social cohesion is greatest when all members of a society 'play by the rules' and show respect and tolerance for diversity. Jenson (1998) defines social cohesion as 'the shared values and commitment to a society' by all its members, and identifies five important dimensions (p. v-vi). They are: belonging, inclusion, participation, recognition and legitimacy. These five dimensions are crucial in a multi-ethnic society like Sri Lanka in which members from all ethnic groups need to feel they belong and are recognized and can participate freely in all aspects of life. Feelings of inclusion and belonging are more likely to prevent divisions of race and culture and go far in promoting concepts of peace.

Cohesive societies are more effective in achieving collective goals because they are better at protecting and including diverse groups (OECD, 2001, p.13). When all members of a society can exercise the same rights and privileges there is greater unity and a feeling of solidarity and comradeship. This in turn induces a greater commitment towards achieving common goals. The increase in global mobility has ensured the presence of culturally diverse populations in many societies. Ritzen (2001) believes that the objective of social cohesion then is a reconciliation of a system of organization based on equal opportunity and enterprise, with a commitment towards solidarity and mutual support ensuring open access to all members of a society (p.26).

In this sense a national identity that all groups can feel a part of is an important aspect. In Sri Lanka there are several ethnic identities but the country needs to focus on building a national identity that will help create national solidarity. National solidarity is important for economic development. According to the OECD, social cohesion can be the driving force that motivates a population into action, whereas an increasing divide between the skilled and unskilled can undermine social cohesion, and social polarization can impair a nation's ability to withstand economic shocks (OECD, 2001, p.14).

In the past social cohesion was understood to be the result of the assimilation of diverse cultures and religions into a nation with a common language and values. Today social cohesion is understood to include not only assimilation but accommodation as well. This implies that all ethnic and religious groups are fully integrated and are allowed to freely practice their religion and use their language in daily activities and moreover are accepted by each other as belonging to one nation. Heyneman states that this "often requires compromise and redefinition of the 'typical citizen' from many sides, including by the majority as well as minority population" (Heyneman, 2010, p.8).

Education and Social Cohesion

Education is seen as a key instrument in the promotion of social cohesion in its role of transmitting knowledge and attitudes to individuals to help them cope with change and diversity. Education is responsible for the cultivation of a civilized society and helps to

inculcate moral and ethical values in individuals which help in the creation of a healthy society that has a deep commitment to the principles of human rights. In this sense the expectation of society of the outcomes of the education system is high. Baig states: "The education system of a society produces the citizens and leaders needed for the smooth operation of that society, now and into the future. Its state of health or sickness translates directly into the health or sickness of the society that it is meant to serve" (Baig, 2010, p.2).

Thus education is fundamental in transferring not only basic numeric and literary skills but also in instilling social and cultural values in children. Formal schooling is thus expected to help develop in young citizens a sense of national solidarity as well as a respect and tolerance for diversity.

At the heart of each nation's education system is education's role in building social cohesion (Heyneman, S.P. &Todoric-Bebic, S., 2000, p.146). This naturally has implications for the overall school curriculum, textbooks, the attitudes of teachers and the manner in which students are taught. Education plays an enormous part in inculcating in young minds, positive attitudes towards others and society in general. "The way children and young people are educated and trained affects not only their self-perception and their views of their nation, but also their image of others" (Roberts-Schweitzer, 2006, p.1).

According to Heyneman (2010) education ought to contribute towards social cohesion in four ways (p. 3). Firstly, schools ought to teach students the basic principles of what it means to be a good citizen and the consequences of not adhering to those principles. Secondly, schools should provide students with an experience consistent with these principles that brings them closer to those of different ethnicity and background. Thirdly, there is an expectation that schools will provide equal opportunity to all students. If a system is perceived to be biased then the trust placed in that institution is eroded. Lastly, schools are expected to provide a common understanding of citizenship, while incorporating the interests of diverse communities (Heyneman, 2010, p. 4).

Education is seen universally as a public good but every education system has the potential to either aggravate or reduce the conditions that could lead to disharmony and conflict (Buckland, 2006, p.7). While education can play a vital part in building social cohesion among diverse groups in a community, education can also play a negative role in countries where there is war or civil strife (Buckland, 2006; Cardozo, 2008, Davies, 2006). In fact education can be part of the problem as well as part of the solution. Education might be used to promote a particular idea of national identity that does not incorporate all ethnic communities. It might be used to suppress minorities through denying them access or language rights. In this way education can be seen to cause conflict and disharmony.

There are several ways in which an education system could contribute towards a culture of hate and conflict, especially in the context of an armed conflict. Through the maintenance of inequality, the polarization or exclusion of social, ethnic or religious groups and their identities, and through fear or militarism, formal schooling and thus education could become a base for conflict (Davies, 2006, p.13). Exclusion of minority or disadvantaged groups' interests, whether in the curriculum or in the allocation of resources or in the access to

education through language policy, can cause dissatisfaction, disharmony and conflict. If policies are not reversed or changed and the inequitable and unfair status quo is maintained then the potential for continuing conflict is increased.

In Sri Lanka, with the end of the civil war and a renewed effort at a lasting peace, education can play a prominent role in building trust and understanding amongst the country's diverse ethnic and religious groups. It can be an important vehicle for conveying to the younger generation attitudes of peace and tolerance, and values that help build a sense of national solidarity. If we accept that the quality of education is to be gauged by the inculcation of personal and moral values as well as academic excellence and employable skills in the future generation, then quality education in all education systems is about education that is sensitive to diversity (Smith, 2006, p.33). Education has a vital role to play in Sri Lanka but only as a wider social, economic and political effort. Peace education cannot succeed in isolation and must be incorporated into a multilevel process of peace building.

Social Cohesion in Education in Sri Lanka: The Evolution of Policy

From the 1990s policymakers have been aware of the need to restructure the education system so that it would help inculcate values of peace and social integration in the future generations. The 1997 Reforms contained a special component on *Value education and national integration* with the idea that the teaching and learning environment "will inculcate justice and fair play in pupils regardless of caste, creed or social class" (Presidential Task Force, 1997, p. 26). Life Competencies was introduced as a subject at the junior secondary level but with limited success.

In 2008 education policy makers took the vital step in preparing a national policy on social cohesion and peace education. A national policy on social cohesion and peace education was deemed necessary because of the many issues of conflict and the lack of social harmony in the country. Although there were many peace education initiatives being carried out in the country they lacked coherence and coordination. The need to strengthen the vital role of education in promoting social cohesion and in the building of future citizens was recognized, as was the need to co-ordinate efforts at peace education. The policy identifies seven strategic areas through which social cohesion can be developed: 1) curriculum 2) teacher education 3) second national language (2NL) 4) whole school culture 5) integrated schools 6) co-curricular activities 7) and research (Ministry of Education (MOE), 2008, p. iv). The creation of a specific unit, the Social Cohesion and Peace Education Unit (SCPEU) in the Ministry of Education is an indication of the importance placed on social cohesion in education.

More recently policy makers have recognized both the need to inculcate the importance of tolerance and respect for different people and cultures in the citizens of the country, and the benefits of accepting the existence of ethnic diversity within the nation. In the last few years, and particularly since the end of the civil war, the importance of social cohesion and national integrity has strengthened the resolve of policy makers and personnel in education organizations and institutions, and a stronger commitment towards these national goals is apparent. Officials from the Ministry of Education, and Provincial and zonal directors, have been motivated to organize extra-curricular activities through schools all around the island with the purpose of boosting inter-ethnic tolerance and understanding. Principals and teachers have been involved in organizing cultural events and co-curricular activities which help students learn about diversity and tolerance. Funding agencies also have sponsored programs at school, zonal and provincial level to ensure the future generation is equipped with an understanding of the values of social cohesion.

Changes in curriculum have included the introduction of Civics Education, English as a compulsory second language, and the learning of Sinhala or Tamil as a second national language. The teaching of the second national language, and the teaching of English as a link language and as a language of international communication, technology, and science, are establishing a basis for equity of opportunity and removing the barriers and divisions of language. More difficult to eradicate is the visible bias in history textbooks, a result of long years of conditioning and therefore quite often subtle and almost subliminal. While it is accepted that this is one of the most difficult areas in which to effect change, a re-scrutiny of

the textbooks and a removal of all traces of bias is vital to ensure the country can move towards a culture of peace. Recent effort to make minor changes in textbooks indicates the awareness of the authorities of the importance of removing this bias and is a step in the right direction.

The first National Goal identified by the National Education Commission (NEC) to be achieved through education deals with "nation building and the establishment of a Sri Lankan identity through the promotion of national cohesion, national integrity, national unity, harmony and peace, and recognizing cultural diversity in Sri Lanka's plural society within a concept of respect for human dignity" (NEC, 2003, p. 71).

The following section discusses the extent to which the Sri Lankan education system has been able to gear itself towards a culture of peace and social cohesion through its various components and activities.

Initiatives to Promote Social Cohesion

Social Cohesion through Extra-Curricular Activities

One area that appears to have been more successful in creating an atmosphere of trust and acceptance is the component of extra-curricular activities. Extra-curricular activities that promote trust building and social cohesion between diverse ethnic and religious groups have been planned at school level, zonal and provincial levels, and through the Ministry of Education. The Unit of Social Cohesion and Peace Education in the Ministry of Education has been especially enthusiastic and has focused on different types of programs to build trust and comradeship between students of different cultural backgrounds.

Denuwara Mithuro (Pals of two cities) was started in 2007 and has had seven separate student-exchange programs to date. In these programs students from Tamil speaking areas and students from Sinhala speaking areas are brought together in a 7 day friendship program. Students are accompanied by male and female teachers from their schools as well as interpreters. About 200 students participate in each exchange program and spend a week together in fun filled activities. Students are given an introductory course in the Sinhala or Tamil language on the first day so that they can bond and make friends.

> **Box 1: The Flowers of Two Cities**
>
> If petals were to fall to the ground and die
> Would there be a flower?
> If each finger was a separate entity
> Would there be a hand?
> If flowers were to scatter far and wide
> Would there be gardens throughout the world?
> If fingers were separate and there were no hands
> How would little children clap for joy?
> In this kind of world, let us flock together and unite,
> To build a fortress in the name of this world.
> Let us join hands and make flower gardens,
> That will release a sweet aroma in the name of the country.
>
> Translation of a poem by: **Dilini Hapukotuwa**,
> **Gr.10, Girls High School, Kandy**

Programs have been carried out between schools in the Polonnaruwa, Akkraipattu, Colombo, Batticaloa, Kalutara, Trincomalee, and Gampaha Districts. A lack of certainty about funding could hinder further developments in what is an excellent opportunity for the promotion of social cohesion. Visiting students who have enjoyed their time spent in these exchange programs have expressed a wish to invite their new found friends to their own schools and host a similar program. Ideally the programs are expected to be a start in the building of a relationship between schools and students and it is hoped that students and schools will maintain the links they have formed and carry out their own activities.

Field investigations were carried out by the author among participants in these programs and these revealed a great enthusiasm and appreciation for the program and its objectives. Participating students continued to be in touch with friends through letters, greeting cards, the telephone and through Facebook. Most students had not been in close contact with students of

other ethnicities before and marvelled at the degree of acceptance and trust they had witnessed.

An example of the friendship generated by these programs is seen in the incident where students collected Rs.10, 000 in a spontaneous effort to support a friend whose father had passed away on the last day of the program. Another example is seen in the poem sent in by one of the student participants, a translation of which appears in Box 1.

In the effort at Peace Education, the Unit has also encouraged schools in the island to have their own 'Student Parliament'. In this program students take the initiative for planning a mini Parliament in their school, participating in the election of officials and appointing a speaker. Debates on topics of interest are carried out in democratic style, giving students the opportunity to learn about Parliamentary procedures and also the confidence to speak in public. Unit sources state that about one third of the schools in the island have begun conducting this activity.

The Unit has also encouraged schools in the island to celebrate the main cultural and religious festivals of all ethnic and religious groups to help students learn understanding and acceptance of different cultures. These programs have taken place since 1997.

An individual program – the Rebuilding of the Elephant Pass Railway Station, as a gift from the students of the south to the students of the north, is also underway. Students in the south were asked to contribute Rs.2 each towards this project and the response has been tremendous. An island-wide Art Competition has also been organized in connection with this project. Each entry shows a scene of ethnic bonding and carries an appropriate slogan.

The Ministry of Education has also organized several student exchange programs between Tamil and Sinhala schools in the north and east of the country. Here visiting students were hosted by the families of the students of schools in the area. These Friendship programs created opportunities for students to live with other students of different ethnic background and get to know more about their culture.

Field investigations by the author with all level of participants reveal that the number of activities in this area, although not yet involving a critical mass of people, has had a positive impact on students, parents, teachers and the community. The momentum that has spearheaded the activities, if allowed to continue, will have a significant impact on building social cohesion in the country. An assurance of support for the activities in the Unit of Peace Education and Social Cohesion in the Ministry would help ensure this momentum is carried on.

Social Cohesion through Co-Curricular Activities

Co-curricular activities relating to peace and social cohesion are carried out by schools, some departments in the Ministry of Education, the National Institute of Education (NIE) and the funding agencies. Peace events, cultural shows, activity camps, debates and dramas, English competitions, and art exhibitions, are some of the many activities undertaken. Schools

organize oratorical competitions, spelling bees and essay competitions to enhance learning in English and the second national language.

The Department of Bilingual Education of the Ministry of Education has organized several subject based student activity camps. The purpose of these camps was to increase students' communication skills in the English language. There were only two rules to be observed in these camps. The first was that all students must participate in all activities, and the second was that they were only allowed to speak in English. These camps were open to both students who were studying in their mother tongue only and those who had opted for bilingual education. This was possible since all students were learning English as a second language.

The Second National Language Department of the Ministry of Education has also organized a competition for students from Grade 6 to 9 to boost second national language learning. Here the students compete in three separate categories – reading, writing and speaking and the best are selected and awarded certificates. The competition begins at school level and then moves to the zonal level, the provincial level and finally the national level. Prizes are awarded to the winners and all participants achieving a score of 75% or above at zonal level are awarded certificates. The Department also has a program where Sinhala students are encouraged to perform a cultural show at Tamil schools, and Tamil students are encouraged to perform at Sinhala schools. Two such programs are organized for each zone per year.

Issues of Language and Social Cohesion

Language has always been an important issue in Sri Lanka because of the multi-racial mix of the population. Language has served to identify each ethnic group's cultural heritage. It is what language represents that is important, not language itself (Dharmadasa, 1996, p.4). "Language policy" relates to the use of language in administration, law and education, and is of crucial importance in setting the recognition of ethnic and religious groups. "Language, like religion and culture, has a sentimental dimension as well, which infuses it with a special power potential in social life, particularly in multi-ethnic settings" (Dharmadasa, 1996, p.4). As early as 1956, strong feelings of nationalism emerging after years of colonisation brought a change in the language of administration and governance from English to Sinhala. English was perceived as the language of the colonial masters and the elitist segments of society. Although the aim was to make both Sinhala and Tamil national languages, in practice only Sinhala was made the official language (Gunasekera, 1996, p.18; Vamadevan, 1996, p.114). This policy subsequently caused two major problems – the alienation of the Tamil people (De Silva, C.R., (1984) p.119; De Silva, K.M. (1993) p.8; De Votta, (2004) p.72) and the downgrading of the importance of English (Jayaweera, 1998, p.324). Thus an understanding of these sentiments is important for the building of social cohesion.

While language can often be an issue of contention between diverse ethnic and religious groups, linguistic issues can also contribute to the building of peaceful relations between different ethnic communities if handled in a sensitive manner. In India English has become a link language in the real sense of the term becoming the language of communication between the classes and the many diverse sects of the population. In 1978, Articles 18 and 19 – Chapter IV of the Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka designated

Sinhala and Tamil as national languages and English as a link language, realizing the importance of English both as a communication link between the two major communities and as an international language. Learning English as a second language and using it as a medium of instruction in bilingual education, and learning the second national language are important policy reforms that would help the future generation communicate with all ethnic and religious groups as well as teach them tolerance and understanding of diversity. Other countries with multi ethnic communities have made similar language policies. An example is provided in Box 2.

Box 2: Singapore's Language Policy

Widely hailed as an educational success story, Singapore, a multilingual island nation in Southeast Asia, embraces an officially bilingual education policy. English is the medium of all content-area education from the start of schooling, with students' official "mother tongue" required as a single subject. Although called the student's "mother tongue," these languages may not be the student's home language, resulting in many students studying two non-native languages in school. ……………………… Singapore is comprised of three major ethnic groups in the following proportions: Chinese 77%, Malays 14% and Indians 8%. …………………….. …………………………. In 1959 when Singapore gained self-rule from Britain, Singapore chose to become an officially multilingual state, selecting four official languages: English, Mandarin Chinese, Malay and Tamil. English is promoted as the "working language" of Singapore for inter-ethnic communication, while the other official languages are considered "mother tongues" of the major ethnic groups

Source: Dixon, 2005.

English as a Second Language

The Presidential Task Force (PTF) document General Education Reforms (1997) revealed a sharp focus on acquiring competency in the English Language, which the document implied was necessary for the world of work. At the Primary stage English for communication was introduced in Grade One with formal teaching beginning in Grade Three. English is taught as a second language from Grade Six onwards and is regarded as a core subject for the GCE Ordinary Level (OL) Examination. At the GCE Advanced Level (AL) stage a new subject, General English was introduced, covering a range of topics pertaining to the world of work. Special training programs for teachers to ensure proficiency in the language were also to be introduced.

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30 Regional English Support Centers (RESC) have been established to provide support by way of in-service continuing education for teachers of English. The Department of English at

the NIE provides a full time Diploma in teaching English as a second language, and the Prinsett certificate program for untrained teachers of English. One suggestion for finding an immediate solution to the shortage of teachers is to engage retired senior teachers and officials who are proficient in English to teach in schools in their locality.

Bilingual Education

Bilingual education in Sri Lanka refers to education in both the mother tongue and English. One of the objectives of the Bilingual Education Department of the Ministry of Education is the use of English as a link language between ethnic and religious groups. From 2001, GCE Advanced Level Science students were allowed the option of studying some subjects in the English medium. By 2002 this option was granted to Grade 6 students. The policy of Bilingual education allows students to study a few subjects in the English medium while still learning in the mother tongue. There is a shortage of teachers capable of teaching in the English medium and only a limited number of schools offer the option of bilingual education. However, the demand from students is strong and Bilingual education is expanding in the country.

The Department has organized a program to train monolingual teachers to become bilingual teachers. In 2009 a total of 707 teachers were trained at 62 teacher centers around the island. They participated in 12 two-day workshops that consisted of four components: bilingual education, language methodology, subject methodology and peace education. It is further claimed that these teachers came from 152 schools which had not started bilingual education but 80% of them have been able to go back and initiate the program in their schools. Ideally if teachers are going to teach in the English medium they need to have total immersion courses – even if these can only be short term. At best a two-day workshop would give a subject teacher some terminology in English and nothing more. A teacher is a communicator, a facilitator – therefore fluency in the medium of communication is of paramount importance.

The Bilingual Education program is conducted jointly by the Bilingual Education Department in the MOE and the Unit of Language Co-ordination at the NIE. There is a deliberate avoidance of the term "English medium" owing to the previously discussed negative connotations associated with it and the term "bilingual education" is used instead. Ideally this method of bilingual education should be carried out with a subject specialist competent in English. Because of the lack of competent English speakers it is better to have the combined efforts of both a subject specialist and an English teacher. The final aim is to produce students who are fluent in both spoken and written English, increasing their employable skills and opening doors to internationally available information and knowledge. In a country where there is a shortage of teachers who are fluent in the English language it is a pity not to use all the available resources towards achieving this goal.

The Bilingual Education Department is seeking to develop Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). In this method (CLIL) a new language is taught through a popular subject that is of interest to the student. This does not necessarily refer to a subject in the school curriculum but is often a topic of interest like cricket, bird-watching etc. According to Marsh (2003) Content and language integrated learning (CLIL) refers to any dual-focused

educational context in which an additional language, [thus not usually the first language of the learners involved], is used as a medium in the teaching and learning of non-language content (p.1).

This process of learning a language naturally is much slower but the student is stimulated to learn by his/her interest in the topic. However because this method lacks the more formal basic language training it necessarily makes more demands on the capabilities of the teacher. The teacher is required to be much more fluent and competent in the language (Marsh, 2003, p.3), being most probably the teacher's first language or mother tongue. Novotna & Hofmannova (2002) state that "CLIL teachers should [therefore] have a good command of the target language" (p.2). The teacher would also have to be a specialist in the subject. Novotna and Hofmannova (2002) go on to state that often student-teachers specialize in two subjects for their pre-service diploma combining teaching of a foreign language with another subject like Mathematics or Science, believing that they meet the need to teach these subjects at secondary level. But the authors state these qualifications are far from sufficient.

The Second National Language

Research indicates that while the mother tongue is the best medium in which a child should learn in the early years, competence in the first language assists in the successful acquisition of a second language (Bush & Salterelli, 2000, p.18). Frequently schools teach a national language as part of a nation building program. Sri Lanka has followed suit with its policy to teach the second national language to all students, i.e. Tamil to Sinhala medium students and Sinhala to Tamil medium students.

The medium of instruction in Sri Lanka is the mother tongue. English is taught as a separate subject from Grade 3. Learning of the second national language was first introduced in 1999 as a compulsory subject in Grades 6 - 9. In 2001 it became an additional subject for the GCE OL (Grades 10 - 11). In 2007 it was introduced as an oral subject from Grade 1 and was put in one of the selection baskets for the OL examination. Therefore the two languages ought to be taught to all children in all government schools as part of the curriculum. But this is not the case because of the shortage of teachers trained to teach the subjects.

At present only approximately 45% of all schools offer learning in the second national language. Approximately 16,000 students offer Sinhala as a second national language at the OL examination, but only 3,000 offer Tamil. Yet these numbers are increasing and the pass rate is also rising (51% in Tamil and 45-49% in Sinhala in 2009). Although numbers opting to take the subject are increasing there is a shortage of teachers to teach both Sinhala and Tamil as second languages. There are Advanced Level qualified persons available but these cannot be recruited as cadre positions are not available. As a result, other subject teachers are often made to teach the second national language and they resent this.

Table 1 provides approximate figures for the number of schools that offer teaching in the second national language (both Sinhala and Tamil), the number of students studying the subject, and the number of teachers teaching the second national language (both Sinhala and Tamil). However, it must be noted that those teachers who were recruited to teach another

subject but were also teaching a second national language would not be included in these figures. The figures show the severe shortage of second national language teachers.

Table 1: Number of schools, teachers and students by district for the second national language, 2009 .

District	No. of schools	Tamil 2NL Students	Sinhala 2NL Students	No. of 2NL Teachers
Colombo	94	25406	5173	64
Gampaha	75	9534	7082	27
Kalutara	79	8780	5811	32
Kandy	186	17015	11212	99
Matale	74	4729	3192	30
NuwaraEliya	105	5707	6556	37
Galle	66	10842	2783	34
Matara	74	7887	2918	34
Hambantota	60	6439	1969	31
Jaffna	17	0	1718	0
Mannar	13	506	1205	0
Vavuniya	32	770	4815	8
Batticaloa	62	791	9870	12
Ampara	91	4776	7395	41
Trincomalee	48	1302	5259	13
Kurunegala	253	21943	11530	122
Puttalam	89	10867	3361	21
Anuradhapura	110	9041	3365	49
Polonnaruwa	37	2618	2855	7
Badulla	205	14942	10091	96
Monaragala	56	4008	1353	11
Ratnapura	115	10092	4019	39
Kegalle	105	5667	9590	39
All Island	**2046**	**183662**	**123122**	**846**

Source: Ministry of Education.

Teaching of the second national language is vitally important for healing rifts and building social cohesion in a country like Sri Lanka. Policy makers, having realized this, stipulated in 2007 that all government officials had to gain proficiency in the second national language within a period of five years. All National Colleges of Education (NCOE) also teach the second national language as a compulsory component to all student-teachers, but only a very small number of teachers are trained to teach it as a second language. Training in second national language teaching in the NCOEs began in 2006 and of the batch that completed in 2009 and were ready to commence teaching in 2010, only 19 teachers were trained to teach Tamil as a second language, and 24 teachers were trained to teach Sinhala as a second language.

While the NCOEs offered courses in the second national language, the perceptions of the lecturers, students and professors differed as to the objective of these courses (NEREC, 2007). In the absence of a clear policy on second national language teaching and learning, the purpose of the teaching is misunderstood (NEREC, 2007, p. xviii). Lecturers believed that all students who had studied a second language as a subject would be able to conduct these classes in schools. A better plan would be to select the best from the 3,000 student-teachers entering the NCOEs as possibilities for training in the methodology of second language teaching in their own mother tongue. This way the students with the highest attainment in the mother tongue at the OL examination could be picked out and trained in the methodology of teaching a second language. In order to teach a second national language, teachers must have proficiency in that language as well as an understanding of the methodology for teaching a second language. Further incentives could be offered to student-teachers who opted for this. Unlike the teaching of English, there should not be a dearth of Sinhala and Tamil teachers. The bigger problem would be in deployment as the ethnic communities are geographically segregated.

In moving towards a culture of peace, learning of the second national language and learning English are vitally important. While in the past there was a reluctance to learn the second national language this does not seem to be the case anymore, particularly with policy makers deciding that all public servants need to prove competency in both national languages. Bush & Salterelli (2000) maintain that there is no evidence to state that teaching of minority languages necessarily diminishes a sense of political unity (p.18). It also becomes more difficult to marginalize or isolate children speaking different languages and from different cultural backgrounds if their languages and histories are part of the formal education process. Bilingual education too can help diverse ethnic and religious groups to gain knowledge and participate fully as citizens in the community in which they live.

Children and Diversity: The Promotion of Integrated Schools

Children tend to accept diversity more easily than adults and if encouraged to mix and share ideas with children of other ethnic and religious groups at an early stage would learn respect and tolerance for diversity. Children of diverse ethnic communities learning and playing together grow up accepting difference. Ideally then integrated schools that have students from multiple ethnic and religious groups studying in different mediums would encourage this acceptance in children. The National Education Research & Evaluation Centre (NEREC) study on Civics Education (2004) also states: "Mutual understanding and mutual exchanges facilitative of social cohesion would ensue if children from the different ethnic and religious groups learned together in classrooms" (NEREC, 2004, p.109).

However in Sri Lanka, a large percentage of the schools tend to be segregated by medium of instruction. While the promotion of integrated schools has been a specific strategy of the National policy for social cohesion, physical and resource constraints make this quite difficult. The provisional school census of 2008 indicates that there is a total of 484 schools offering mixed medium education, a small increase in number since 2006. This is barely 5% of the total number of schools in the national education system. Yet increasing the number of

these schools is an initiative that could be worked on and which could see clear benefits in building social cohesion.

Physical size and location of schools do not always make expansion easy and where there is this restraint the policy encourages the idea of linkages with other schools, particularly with schools with students of another ethnicity. These linkages would help to build understanding and tolerance through joint sports and cultural activities and programs. In this regard the Social Cohesion and Peace Education Unit of the Ministry of Education has outlined a program to get school principals in each zone together to liaise with each other and find a school that they would like to have continued linkages with, the only condition being that the other school must have students of a different ethnicity to those in their own school. In this way the principals of the schools would take the initiative in organizing joint activities, perhaps even sharing teachers, (particularly where second national language teachers are lacking), resources, and facilities. These programs, given the necessary support and backing, could do much in the way of creating bonds between individuals, both students and teachers, of diverse cultures.

Bush and Saltarelli (2000) make the point that children do not come into the classroom as blank canvasses but carry with them learned attitudes, values and behaviour patterns from their homes and social environment that have influenced them (p.3). Using Sri Lanka as an example they state that the ethnic chauvinism and stereotyping that is rampant in society finds its way into the classroom through textbooks particularly in social studies. Parents and the home environment have a significant effect on a child's development. Parental attitudes and behaviour strongly influence children's physical, intellectual, social and emotional development. Children interact with peers who come from different cultural backgrounds or share different religious beliefs. If these differences are seen positively, children learn to respect and enjoy diversity.

Many researchers state that children who demonstrate less tolerance for other ethnic and religious groups are more cynical and less secure than children who are more accepting of diversity. In Sri Lanka, segregation of schools often causes students to grow up with a lack of awareness of other cultures and ethnicities. They begin to think in exclusive terms about their own race and religion. Segregated schools can thus cause children to endorse the stereotyping of characteristics of other ethnic and religious groups.

This is most apparent when studying the change in students who switch from local schools to international schools. The students who come from local schools with students of diverse cultures make the change very easily but students who were in schools that had only one ethnic group find the transition more difficult. There is no room for ethnic issues in international schools and while these students are old enough to understand what the accepted behaviour is, they still find it difficult to see multiple points of view. This, perhaps, is the more important drawback of segregated schools. As early in their life as possible, children should be made to understand that there are many ways of addressing a problem and many points of view to consider. They should be aware of different communities observing different religions, and learn respect and tolerance for diversity.

Key Components of Education that Impact Social Cohesion

Education reform and change often center around three vital components – curriculum development, revision of textbooks, and teacher training and development. These three components are also interconnected and must be undertaken simultaneously to be effective. Research indicates that it is the combined effect that is significant (Smith, 2006, p.34; Socknat, 2006, p.139). Changes in curricula alone are insufficient unless they are implemented successfully. The most tangible evidence of implementation is seen in textbooks, and the teacher plays an important role in conveying the content.

Curriculum Development and Social Cohesion

A curriculum specifies not only content but learning outcomes as well and emphasis should be placed on its effective implementation rather than the changes themselves. The search for relevance is an important factor in driving curriculum change. In the context of an increasingly globalised world, curricula need to focus on global as well as local challenges in order to equip future generations with the abilities and skills needed to succeed.

In Sri Lanka the development and planning of the overall school curriculum is the province of the National Institute of Education (NIE). Two curriculum units, one for Languages, Humanities and Social Sciences and the other for Science and Technology, working through several subject departments are responsible for the drawing up of the curriculum. The curriculum is designed by a panel of subject specialists drawn from universities and other institutions under the supervision of the subject director.

From as early as 1997 education policy documents indicated the need to build values of national solidarity and social cohesion through the curriculum but although subjects like civics education were added as a component in social studies and Life Competencies was introduced as a subject these reforms were not very successful (NEC, 2003).

Teachers also play a pivotal role in delivering the content of a curriculum. Ultimately it is the manner in which values are taught and the behaviour modelled by the teacher that has the impact on the child as teachers "mediate the curriculum and the values it conveys" (Smith, 2006, p.37).

Realising the importance of the role of education in building social cohesion the national policy for education for social cohesion and peace was established in 2008 creating also a special unit in the Ministry of Education for the purpose of coordinating all activities. While it was expected that social cohesion and peace education concepts would permeate the whole curriculum it was not considered necessary to design an entirely new curriculum for Education for Social Cohesion and Peace (ESCP) for schools (MOE, 2008, p.9).

A new curriculum however was introduced for Life Competencies and Civics Education (Grade 6 – 9) and Citizenship Education and Governance (Grade 10 – 11) that successfully integrated peace education concepts and values of cooperation and respect for others. The curriculum has been produced after much research and a study of civics education in 89 countries. The curriculum includes the role of citizens, their rights and responsibilities, good governance and participation in a democracy. It also deals with international norms and human rights and the role of international organizations. Further the curriculum helps promote the need for sensitivity to difference and respect for diversity of cultures in a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural society.

In this sense the curriculum for the OL examination (Grade 10-11) presents a compact whole and could be made a compulsory subject for these Grades. While Life Competencies and Civics Education is a compulsory subject in Grades 6 – 9, Citizenship Education and Governance is only an optional subject for Grades 10 -11 and barely 20% (approx.75, 000) of students offer the subject for the OL examination.

It is apparent that the content of some subjects is not related to the issue of social cohesion and it would therefore be more difficult to incorporate ideas of social cohesion and peace into these curricula. A scrutiny of the textbooks for Mathematics and Science from Grades 6 to 11 did not reveal evidence of topics promoting peace and social cohesion, nor did the textbooks touch on any sensitive area.

Values of social cohesion and peace were most successfully integrated into the Health Science textbooks of all grades. Social and ethical values, emotional balance and well-being, empathy, interpersonal relationships and the building of self-esteem were all addressed through the subject of sports. The importance of family life and the building up of a healthy society of law abiding citizens is stressed. Leadership qualities, team spirit and fairness in dealing with others are focused on as important attributes of good sportsmanship. English Language textbooks addressed a wide variety of subjects and endeavoured in a small way to incorporate social and moral values into lessons in each grade. An effort has been made to include topics from all local cultural and religious groups, as well as from different countries.

In Geography, topics were largely subject-centered and didn't offer much scope for incorporating ideas of social cohesion. Yet there were the occasional references to diverse ethnic cultures and the need to maintain good relations with people of other cultures, which were not expanded. The issue of social cohesion is obliquely addressed in the Grade 9 textbook in the section on the human challenges faced by South Asia. Topics like 'human settlements in Sri Lanka' and 'the population of Sri Lanka' also offered several opportunities to expand on the values of social cohesion for the future.

History is an important subject to promote social cohesion by demonstrating the contributions of each ethnic and religious group to the long-term development of the country. There is sufficient evidence to suggest that the main ethnic groups lived amicably together from early times. Sri Lanka has been multi-ethnic and multi-cultural from prehistoric times, and studies suggest a close genetic affinity between the Sinhalese and the Sri Lankan Tamils (Kshatriya, 1995, p.861; Papiha, Mastana & Jayasekera, 1996, p.735). As history is a compulsory subject

for the GCE OL examination the presentation of the stories of all ethnic and religious groups could contribute to the promotion of a multi-ethnic and multi-religious Sri Lankan identity. Box 3 provides examples of initiatives taken by other countries to promote social cohesion through curriculum change.

Textbooks and Social Cohesion

Textbooks are read every day by students all over the country and therefore have the potential to influence young minds. Pingel (2008) states quite plainly that textbooks matter (p.181). The transfer of knowledge from one generation to the next through textbooks is often controlled not only by scholarly and pedagogical criteria, but also by political interests. In this sense it is vitally important that textbooks are examined for sensitivity to different cultures and religions and for the imparting of inappropriate values. Often controversy over recent conflict tends to shape the interpretation of the distant past, either consciously or unconsciously.

Greaney (2006) mentions eight ways in which textbooks can undermine respect for diversity and tolerance: narrow nationalism, religious bias, omission, imbalance, historical inaccuracy, treatment of physical force and militarism, use of persuasive techniques, and artworks (pp.50-51). These categories are not the only possibilities, neither are they mutually exclusive, but they serve as a method of analyzing textbooks.

Box 3: Curriculum Changes in Other Countries

South African curriculum transformation

After an evaluation of their current curriculum that presented their "learners as divided and different; inferior and superior", the South African Ministry of Education decided to develop and implement a new curriculum. Since 1994, this transformation has taken place through the national Qualifications Framework, and has integrated education and training, academic and vocational in order to create an outcomes based education aimed at providing learners with the skills needed to ensure economic prosperity and to contribute to the development of a common citizenship. A specific subcommittee was established with the goal of integrating human rights education into each of the eight learning areas defined by curricula developers. The social sciences learning area statement, for example, "aims at contributing to the development of informed, critical and responsible citizens who are able to participate constructively in a culturally diverse and changing society".

Source: IIEP, 2006, ch. 20 p. 7 citing Surty, 2004.

Inclusive curriculum revision processes in post-war Guatemala

Following the settlement of Guatemala's civil war, a Consultative Commission for Education reform (CCRE) was established in 1997 to help design educational reforms for the country. The CCRE is a decision-making body with broad representation ... including Mayan organizations, women's organizations, teachers' unions and associations, students, journalists, churches, universities, private education centres and private enterprise.

Source: IIEP, 2006, ch.20 p. 10 citing Salazar Tetzaguic&Grisby, 2004.

A key issue in the promotion of social cohesion in education concerns the manner in which minority cultures are represented in textbooks (Heyneman & Todoric-Bebic, 2000). The history textbooks need to be made a prime tool for the promotion of a culture of peace and inclusion. It is important that policy makers and educationists make a concerted effort to present the History curriculum in a way that is representative of all ethnic and religious groups in the country.

How countries choose to deal with the issue of building national solidarity and social cohesion depends largely on each individual nation. In South Africa, changes in Afrikaans language textbooks have been most successful in removing racial stereotypes (Engelbrecht, 2006, p.77). However changes in history textbooks proved to be more difficult with an initial belief that perhaps it was better to do without history. Yet Engelbrecht states "history is vital in the rebuilding of formerly authoritarian societies" (2006, p.78), and historical difference is important if history is to be relevant.

Teacher Training

Teachers are the most valuable component in the promotion of concepts of peace building and social cohesion. Therefore their training in peace education and in the transferring of these ideas to the students is vital. Teachers must also believe in these values and be convinced of the importance of imparting them to students in order to ensure the production of well balanced and responsible citizens for the future. Merely regurgitating the ideas in a textbook without modeling the appropriate behaviour is insufficient, because students can judge the behaviour of the teacher. The teacher is also in the position to ingrain inappropriate or stereotyped views about ethnic and religious groups.

Although policy documents since 1997 have stressed the importance of teacher education in concepts of peace and national solidarity these policies have not been effectively implemented. Teacher training programs do not always have a peace education component "and in-service teachers are not sufficiently supported to use new initiatives" (Cardozo, 2008, p.24). There are many principals and teachers in rural areas who have not received any guidance on how to implement such programs in their schools in spite of several attempts at policy level to provide pre-service and in-service training.

The teacher education network of Sri Lanka consists of the National Institute of Education (NIE), 4 University Faculties/Departments of Education, 17 National Colleges of Education (NCOE), 5 Teacher Training Colleges, 100 Teacher Centers and 30 Regional English Support Centers (RESC). Besides the Degree courses offered by the universities and the NIE, there are two types of teacher training programs; a pre-service Diploma at the National Colleges of Education (NCOE) and in-service training at the Teacher Training Colleges (TTC) for those who have entered the service without a qualification. The National Institute of Education works with both the NCOEs and the TTCs, undertaking the training of instructors/lecturers in the National Colleges of Education (NCOEs), the Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs) and the Teacher Centers (TCs).

The NCOEs offer a three-year Diploma, with a two-year residential course plus one-year internship. There are 17 NCOEs located all over the island offering training in several subjects. NCOE educators are trained through the NIE on how to integrate peace concepts into the different subjects they teach. The NIE also trains In-Service Instructors (ISAs) who are then responsible for training at the zonal level. There are 100 Teacher Centers offering continuing teacher education according to the specific needs of the teachers in the area. According to Ministry sources, 60% of these educators have received training in social cohesion and peace concepts, two instructors being selected from each center.

Under the component of Education for Social Cohesion, NIE sources indicate that up to September, 2010, 395 teacher educators have been trained to date in programs on Environmental Education, Climate Change and Disaster Management. The social cohesion aspect is not implicit in these programs but is rather achieved through the diverse ethnic and religious groups coming together on common issues. NIE sources also assert that 150 in-service teachers have been trained in civics education in 10 Teacher Centers since 2009, and that the new Non-graduate training course for teachers in the system has trained 7,040 teachers in General Education which incorporates the subjects of civics, peace and value education and concepts of social cohesion. Although these numbers are provided it is not clear how many teachers have actually been trained in aspects of social cohesion to date.

A baseline survey conducted in August 2010 by the Ministry of Education and the NIE indicates that although 80% of teachers said they understood the concepts of peace and value education only 24% of these were able to give an appropriate example (MOE & NIE, 2010, p.24). The survey also indicated that a significant number of trained teachers were unable to use what they had learnt and to apply their skills in the classroom (p.31).

An annual peace event for 150 students from the NCOEs and 30 instructors is organized by the Ministry of Education and the NIE. The intention is that the participating teachers will go back and practice these concepts in their schools and home areas.

Avenues and Pathways for the Future

The preceding discussion reveals that there are wide benefits to be gained from the creation of a peaceful and tolerant citizenry, and that education can play a vital role in achieving this. Sri Lanka can select from a menu of policies to build on the current set of measures to promote social cohesion and strengthen social tolerance and the acceptance of diversity. Some strategies for the education system to move towards a culture of peace are highlighted below.

The number of ethnically integrated schools can be increased over time, as in these schools children learn to mix with and relate naturally to children of different cultures and backgrounds. Promoting integrated schools can continue to be one of the key strategies to promote social cohesion in schools. As the economy grows an increasing proportion of the population will move into urban centers. This will help bring together more students from different ethnic and religious backgrounds, making it feasible to expand the number of ethnically integrated schools. The presence of children from a diversity of cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds will provide a richer education experience than a culturally and ethnically homogenous classroom. Mutual understanding and mutual exchanges facilitative of social cohesion will be strengthened when children from different ethnic and religious backgrounds play and learn together.

Textbooks, particularly in subjects like History, could be reviewed by panels of scholars and researchers from all the different ethnic and religious groups in the country. The accuracy of the contents of books, in relation to the source material and historical records, needs to be verified. In addition, the presentation of history needs to promote a favorable picture of a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural country. This will be especially important in the future, as globalization proceeds and population flows into and out of Sri Lanka increases, expanding the ethnic and cultural heterogeneity of the population.

A policy option for the government to consider is to make the subject Citizenship Education and Governance compulsory for the GCE O/L cycle. The contents of the Citizenship Education and Governance syllabus are very appropriate, especially from the perspective of inculcating values and ethics conducive to a modern, liberal, multi-ethnic and multi-religious democracy. If this were to become a compulsory subject, the values and concepts of citizenship as embedded in the curriculum of this subject will be communicated to all students. This will help promote the values and concepts of good citizenship, democracy, social tolerance and the appreciation of cultural, ethnic and religious diversity in the younger generation.

The role of the Social Cohesion and Peace Education Unit in the Ministry of Education can be strengthened as co-curricular and extra-curricular activities among students from different ethnic and religious groups can continue to play a major role in promoting interaction between students of diverse communities. This is a vital unit in the quest to create social cohesion in education. Although this unit was established in 2008 when the National Policy

on Education for Social Cohesion and Peace was formulated it doesn't appear to have autonomy for its own activities or the coordination of activities outside its unit. The enthusiasm shown by the cadre in this unit in the drawing up of effective programs has been somewhat dampened by the fact that there is always uncertainty about which programs will get off the ground due to funding issues. The feedback from these programs should be evidence enough to sustain funding.

Teacher education and training programs need to strengthen the capacity of teachers to deliver concepts conducive to social cohesion. More research is needed into teacher training programs and the manner in which they deliver concepts of peace education and social cohesion. There is a general lack of coordination between the diverse bodies that handle teacher training, both at pre-service and in-service levels. Since teachers play a central role in delivering concepts of peace and social cohesion to students in the classroom, their training in this regard is of paramount importance. It is vital that teachers accept the need for tolerance and understanding of diversity, and the need to build social cohesion through inculcating these values in the future generation. Therefore attention must be paid to the quality of teacher training programs. The problem of the shortage of teachers for English and second national languages should be addressed immediately and if possible retired officials or AL qualified persons should be used to meet the demand.

The role of English as a link language can be further developed. Both students and parents recognize the need for good English language skills. The demand is driven by the economic and educational opportunities that open when a student is fluent in English. Improved English language skills in the population will facilitate the interactions between the different ethnic and linguistic groups in the country.

Building national solidarity and social cohesion and recognizing the cultural diversity in Sri Lanka's plural society has been set up as the first National Goal in education. Recent policy decisions have moved in the right direction with the Policy on Peace Education and Social Cohesion, the unit set up in the Ministry of Education, and decisions to include English and the second national language as compulsory components in the curriculum. The country can build on these initiatives to move forward towards achieving national solidarity and the creation of a favorable environment for a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society.

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