Education for Peace: Empowering children to uphold liberty, equality, and dignity

By
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We will continue our journey to our destination of peace.
No one can stop us!
We will speak up for our rights and we will bring change with our voice.
Our words can change the whole world because we are all together.
Let us shield ourselves with unity and togetherness.
Let us wage a global struggle against illiteracy, poverty, and terrorism.
Let us pick up our books and our pens; they are our most powerful weapons.
One child, one teacher, one book, and one pen can change the world.
Education is the only solution.
Education first!
Malala Yousafzai (2013)

Vision of Utopia

At the end of the Second World War the people of the United Nations committed to take collective measures to effectively remove all threats to peace and, in doing so, save succeeding generations from the menace of war (Charter, 1945). To accomplish this, United Nations officials and committees set out to “establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained” (ibid), and in doing so, “promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom” (ibid).

However, global violence still prevails where the fundamental rights and human dignity of all persons are continuously compromised in the “pursuit of power or material wealth” (Dalai Lama, as quoted in Cavoukian & Olfman, 2006). As such, the objective of securing world peace has been, and continues to be elusive. In the continued pursuit of creating long-lasting peace, social reformers have turned to the work of education. Visionaries such as Maria Montessori claimed that, “establishing peace is the work of education” (Montessori, 1949). In a speech before the European Congress for Peace in Brussels (1936) she further declared the role of “education as the armament of peace” (Standing, 1957), and claimed that the dilemma of world peace can never be satisfactorily resolved until we acknowledge the contribution of children to the formation of society (ibid). Arun Gandhi, the grandson of the legendary spiritual leader, Mahatma Gandhi, supported this objective of education by stating that education should “help create not only a balanced and harmonious individual but also a balanced and harmonious society where true justice prevails, where everybody is assured the right to live and the right to freedom” (Global Villages Resources, n.d.). Recently, the Dalai Lama also proposed directing our attention to our children, the world’s future. Through the provision of a sound education that instils positive values, children can ensure a more “harmonious, peaceful and productive future for us all” (Cavoukian & Olfman, 2006). This vision of a harmonious world that embodies a people’s image of a peaceful future (Charter, 1945; Miller, as quoted in Cavoukian & Olfman, 2006).
requires that we partner up with young people to establish a “foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world” (Convention, 1989).

A Glimpse to the Past

In recent history, education in the industrialized world was steeped in pre-World War I ideology that was designed to ‘manufacture’ conforming individuals to become useful contributors to the economic welfare of an increasingly capitalistic society. Government leaders, business people, and other powerful social establishments forged controlling education systems designed to fashion a global consensus to support an autocratic economic and political agenda (Miller, as quoted in Cavoukian & Olfman, 2006). The increase in budgetary restraint, downsizing, privatization and deregulation in the post World War II neoclassical economic and neoliberal political thinking era further shaped approaches to education management (Goldspink, 2007). The imposition of this rigid industrialized managerial model onto education resulted in a bureaucratic top-down hierarchical system that was governed by business management principles with little regard for the individuals within the system. This led to a focus on accountability that resulted in education being assessed according to achievements and targets (OECD, n.d.). In conjunction, people had become so far removed from the atrocities towards humanity that occurred during the first part of the twentieth century, that the attention given to the role of education in fulfilling the “people’s vision of peace” (Charter, 1945) during the post World War II era had been sadly forgotten. As a result, the over-arching social purpose of education in cultivating a peaceful society was superseded by a restricted debate about accountability (Davis, 2012) that was steeped in an economic and political agenda with very little regard for fundamental human rights and the dignity of the person.

The Moral Compass is Lost!

Recent debate regarding what the purpose of education should be for the twenty-first century is challenging the industrialized factory model of schooling where the input of knowledge is expected to produce workers to advance the economic and political agenda of a capitalistic society. Davis and Sumara (2008) state that it is problematic to conceive of education purely in terms of top-down, ends-driven structures within an increasingly complex and ever evolving world. Questions are challenging us to contemplate what the aims and outcomes of schooling should be for the twenty-first century (Deng, 2011). As national barriers become blurred in the post-modern globalization era, there is some consensus amongst those contemplating this question that education should enable students to become global citizens with critical thinking skills, lifelong learning capacities, enhanced social awareness, positive values and attitudes and grounding in deep social justice and responsibility. (Davis, 2012; Terwell, 2005; Deng, 2011) These views regarding the purpose of education indicate that there is a shift away from the current linear, mechanical concept that the current education system is deeply entrenched in. Instead, post-modern thought is towards viewing education as a developing global complex system involving the cumulative actions of individual agents (Phelps & Hase, 2002) acting collaboratively to advance a greater societal
agenda. Education, in this sense, is understood to serve the whole community and benefits accrue to the general public rather than to some individuals (Davis, 2012). However, there is ambiguity regarding what the greater societal agenda should be.

Included in current discourse regarding the purpose of education is that it should be focused on "educating for a democratic and humane society" (Miller, as quoted in Cavoukian & Olfman, 2006) aimed to develop qualities such as "freedom, creativity, social responsibility, and commitment to moral and ethical ideals that transcend self-interest and corporate profit" (ibid). In aligning with this democratic vision pertaining to the purpose of education, individuals are expected to develop an "adaptive competence" to enable the management of diversity and uncertainty. (Haste, 2009) where individuals become "both thinkers and doers" (Null, 2007). An education that has as its core the development of citizens with these capacities might benefit the advancement of a democratic society, but there is no central set of principles or values for education to latch onto that is true to the democratic behaviours required to realize the greater vision of establishing lasting global peace as outlined in the 1945 Charter of the United Nations.

**Finding a Moral and Legal Reference**

Many attempts to reform education to bring it in line with emerging views regarding the purpose of education for the twenty-first century have failed because most attempts at reform are still steeped in anti-democratic ideals designed to serve the political and economic agendas of those seeking power and financial gain. In order for education to be reformed so that it can fulfil its greater societal objective of securing world peace, it is crucial that a fundamental set of principles or values be established to provide the reference points upon which to build the rules of engagement (Goldspink, 2007). To achieve sustainable educational reform to support this vision, it is proposed here that the United Nations 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (herein the Convention) be adopted to provide the legal and moral framework for determining the purpose of education. The alignment of education to the Convention, which is an internationally mandated human rights instrument, enables society to empower future generations to participate democratically to pursue social justice and uphold the "inherent dignity" and "equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family" (Convention) within a greater freedom. This is the only way the goal of peace for all members of the human family can be reached. Against the backdrop of the debate between the hierarchic top-down and horizontal complexity theory perspectives applied to education, this paper first examines the Convention’s unique moral and legal dual nature. It then analyses the Convention’s guiding principles regarding the purpose of education, and discusses their benefits to accomplishing sustainable education reform that fulfils the objective of establishing global peace and security. The discussion in this paper is limited to education systems in Western democratic countries where it is assumed that the provision of the basic survival, developmental, and protection rights outlined in the Convention are mostly realized for every child. This includes the child’s right to education as outlined in Articles 23 and 28 of the Convention, including the right to a free primary education; the right to access secondary and
higher education; and the rights of disabled children to receive appropriate education and support.

The Dualistic Nature of the Convention

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
The Convention is a nearly universally agreed upon set of non-negotiable standards and obligations that were built on varied legal systems and cultural traditions (UNICEF, n.d.). It is the most widely and most quickly ratified convention in world history, and it provides a “systematic and comprehensive statement on the status of the child and on the rights of children that did not exist before” (Howe & Covell, 2013). Unanimously approved by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989, it has since been ratified by virtually all countries of the world, and only the United States, South Sudan and Somalia have yet to join suit. Comprised of fifty-four articles, the Convention outlines the basic human rights that children everywhere are entitled to. The substantive rights in the Convention fall into three major categories: provision, protection, and participation rights. These include the right to survival; the right to develop to one’s fullest potential; the right to protection from harmful influences, abuses, and exploitation; and the right to participate in matters that affect the child (UNICEF, n.d.). Each right in the Convention is inherent to human dignity and the harmonious development of every child, and is based on three overarching principles of human rights. These include the principle of universality, which means that the rights contained in the Convention are universal to all children and that every child is entitled to them. The principle of indivisibility proclaims that the rights in the Convention are inherent to the dignity of every child and each right has equal status. Respect for all rights is required for their full enjoyment. Finally, the principle of interdependence states that each right contributes to the realization of the child’s dignity, and the fulfilment of one right depends wholly, or in part, on the fulfilment of other rights. The ratification of the Convention by a country, referenced in the Convention as States Party, obligates it to assume full responsibility for the welfare of each child within its national, regional, local, and familial jurisdictions. The moral and legal obligations herein relating to all actions concerning every child requires public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies to always have as their primary consideration the “best interests of the child” (Article 3) as is explicitly stipulated in the Convention.

Moral and Legal Dualism
The Convention outlines the moral and legal obligations of States Parties. The historical origins of the Convention form the foundation for the moral commitments implicit within it, whereas the adoption of the Convention by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989 along with its subsequent ratification by States Parties defines its legal obligations. In order to better understand the moral aspects of the Convention, it is necessary to examine the Convention’s history predating its 1989 adoption by the United Nations General Assembly. An analysis of the process of
ratification and subsequent implementation and monitoring defines the legal obligations of signatories to the Convention.

**Moral Obligations**

The concept of the child as an individual and independent rights bearing person emerged very recently in human history. For centuries children were viewed as properties of their parents with little or no status in society. Their situation improved slightly in the latter part of the nineteenth century as they became considered a distinctive and defenceless class requiring the protective care of society and the state (Howe & Covell, 2005). Increased social problems arising from industrialization, urbanization, and immigration precipitated a rising tide of humanitarianism and sentimentality towards children, and the protection and advancement of the interests of children slowly transitioned to the state (ibid.). This move started to form the foundation for the Convention’s protective and provision rights. Later, in the period following the Second World War, the concept of the child as an independent bearer of rights emerged (ibid.). The origins of this thinking started with John Locke (1632 – 1704) who insisted, “that the child has needs and interests which should be recognized for what they are, and that the child should be reasoned with, not simply beaten or coerced into conformity with the rules of required behaviour” (Archard, 2004). This belief of the child possessing independent rights was further advanced through the work of Eglantyne Jebb, a British social activist in the early twentieth century. She advocated that children are deserving of better protection, and Save the Children Fund Union adopted her work in 1922, which was subsequently assumed by the League of Nations in 1924. At the same time, Dr. Janusz Korczak, a Polish educator, paediatrician, and writer, began advocating for the rights of children to express opinions in matters affecting them. He established orphanages in Warsaw, Poland, where the orphans governed themselves under his caring tutelage. Korczak became a legend in Europe for his work with children, and his teachings came to inspire the Convention’s participation rights (UNICEF, n.d.).

The complex moral obligations outlined in the Convention pertaining to the welfare of children stemmed from the work of many committed individuals who aimed to seek social justice for children. This led to the formation of the Convention’s ‘best interests principle’. This term is referenced in six articles, and they each deal with specific matters pertaining to the welfare of the child including child custody, adoption of children, and juvenile judicial proceedings. All assume the underlying principle outlined in the Convention’s Article 3, which is that, the “best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration” in all actions concerning children. The understanding is that ‘all actions’ includes the decision to act as well as refrain from acting in the best interests of the child (Howe & Covell, 2013). The Convention’s moral obligations are based on this principle, and any decision-making authority, in either the public or private sector, is morally required to always act in the best interests of the child in all matters concerning the child.
Legal Obligations

The Convention represents a “major milestone in the historic effort to achieve a world fit for children” (UNICEF, n.d.). Without exception, the Convention codifies the principles that members of the United Nations deemed to be universal for all children, without exception, merely through the fact that they were born into the human family (ibid.). Along with fulfilling the moral duties of society to its children, the Convention is also a binding treaty of international law (ibid.). Upon ratification, States Parties become unequivocally legally bound to realize its principles and provisions for all children within their jurisdiction, and agree to align their domestic laws, policies, and practices to be consistent with the Convention and the principle of ‘best interests of the child’ (Howe & Covell, 2013). Furthermore, the Convention provides the legal framework required for its successful implementation and monitoring by different actors at different levels of society. A Committee on the Rights of the Child that consists of ten experts of high moral standing monitors the progress made by States Parties in achieving the realization of the obligations undertaken in the Convention (Article 43). Basically, States Parties are required to submit progress reports to the Committee every five years (Article 44).

Moral and Legal Balancing Act

There is a delicate interplay between the moral and legal obligations required to uphold the Convention’s provisions and principles for every child. The United Nations is continuously working with States Parties and non-government organizations to overcome the many obstacles to the implementation of the Convention’s legal obligations. One major problem is that the Convention does not have any monitoring in the “strict sense” (Himes, 1993) and the United Nations monitoring procedures are “quite weak” (ibid). Also, there is a great deal of vagueness regarding the nature of the legal obligations of the States Parties (ibid). Essentially, the successful fulfilment of the Convention’s legal obligations requires the partnership of a moral commitment to always act in the ‘best interests’ of each child. Whether intentional or not, the architects of the Convention built in a moral appeal to always act in the ‘best interests’ of each child, and in doing so the Convention’s legal obligations are reinforced through a foundation of trust. And when States Parties fail to champion children’s rights, the public and media can nudge them towards fulfilling these legal obligations (UNICEF, n.d.). However, the hierarchic top-down framework implicit in fulfilling the Convention’s legal obligations has the potential to undermine the greater moral purpose of the Convention by sending messages of mistrust. Instead of imposing a set of legal consequences to those failing to fulfil the Convention’s obligations, a foundation of trust is created that encourages governments to practice “diversity and pluralism” (Goldspink, 2007) as they uphold the Convention’s principles and provisions because it is the right thing to do. Monitoring States Parties in the ‘strict sense’ would require policing countries by enforcing consequences to breaches of legal obligations that essentially undermines the potential benefits of the Convention in fostering a foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world (Convention).
The Purpose of Education as Outlined in the Convention

“Enabling children to express themselves and have their views heard and respected in their homes, schools and communities from an early age will enhance their sense of belonging and their readiness to take on responsibility. The Convention on the Rights of the Child was created to protect [children], and our world, by recognizing that today’s children are tomorrow’s leaders. All of us must strive, in our personal, professional and public lives, to include children in shaping the future they are inheriting.”

(Thomas Hammarberg, Council of Europe’s Commissioner for Human Rights)

Reaching for the Stars

The purpose of education is outlined in great detail in the Convention. In Article 29 of the Convention, it states: “The education of the child shall be directed to the development of the child’s personality, talents, and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential.” This broadly defines the purpose of education, as it is limited to the development of the individual. Dewey pointed out that the development of the child should serve as the guiding principle of education (Schecter, 2011). During the twentieth century, core concepts of cognitive and psychoanalytical theories of development were consolidated with Dewey and Piaget’s views of development as the aim of education. These formed the principles of progressive education, which had at its core the values of individuality and autonomy (ibid). In the latter part of the twentieth century, “developmentally appropriate practice,” (ibid) formulated by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, built on this notion. Critics of DAP argue that the emphasis on individual autonomy separates children from their social world. As a result, the emphasis on the development of individual capacities has been at the expense of education’s “mission for social change” (ibid). Furthermore, the emphasis on Dewey’s views regarding development as the purpose of education failed to acknowledge that, in his view, “the trajectory of individual growth is defined in terms of participation in the forward movement of social change” (ibid). Dewey’s notion here is that there are “more distant ends to development, and these are the cultural values which represent social ideals” (ibid). The work for social change requires instilling these cultural ideals so that society can progress to uphold the principles enshrined in the 1945 Charter of the United Nations “to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security.” The emphasis here is that the unity of the people is required do this work and, while the focus in the first part of the Convention’s Article 29 is necessary in promoting the development of the individual to his or her full potential, more is required to ensure lasting global peace.

“I have rights that I share with all children!”

The discourse, then, regarding the purpose of education has to be expanded beyond the development of the individual and towards an education that enables individuals to collaborate together towards realizing the vision of global peace. Article 29 of the Convention states that education shall develop the child’s respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Children can only develop this respect if they, themselves, are recognized and treated as owners of rights. When the Convention is adopted as the overarching framework to advise for the purpose of
education, its democratic values of liberty, equality, and dignity (Ober, 2012) automatically qualify the status of the child as a rights bearing citizen. Because States Parties are legally bound to actively disseminate the principles and provisions of the Convention to adults and children (Article 42) without discrimination of any kind, (Article 2) children enjoy the principle of universality of rights as they discover that they are entitled to fundamental rights and freedoms. The active fulfilment of these legal obligations expands the purpose of education beyond the development of the child to encompass education about human rights, inclusive of the “provision of comprehensive information about the rights afforded to the individual as well as about the values that underpin rights, and the mechanisms for their protection” (Covell, 2013).

The concept of respect is further expanded to include the role of education in developing the child’s respect for his or her parents, cultural identity, language and values, along with developing respect for civilizations other than one’s own (Article 29). Children, according to Dewey, “have the potential for many different ends – some more desirable than others, and the course is determined by the quality of experiences to which they are exposed” (Schecter, 2011). A rights respecting educational experience, in which children are educated according to the principles of universality, indivisibility, interdependence enshrined in the Convention, perpetuates respect for human dignity and fundamental rights and freedoms, fulfils some of the moral obligations signatory governments have as signatories to the Convention, and further advances the necessary work of education to “establish lasting peace” (Montessori, 1949).

“Dignity empowers me to share these rights with all children!”

Once children learn that the rights in the Convention are universal to all children, they need to appreciate the principle of indivisibility of rights. This involves understanding that the rights in the Convention are inherent to the dignity of every child, and each right has equal status. When the Convention becomes the framework for determining the purpose of education, children learn that respect for all of the rights contained within the Convention is required for their full enjoyment. In expanding the concept of human dignity beyond the intuitive and elusive sense of self-respect and esteem for others, human dignity positions people at the centre of a government of the people, because it is the determining factor that empowers them to participate in the democratic decision-making process. When human rights are respected, individuals are empowered to be self-determining; this is what binds dignity to democracy (Dupre, 2013). Therefore, respect for human rights dignifies a person, which then enables the fullest manifestation of liberty and equality (Ober, 2012). The Convention charges education to prepare the child for a “responsible life in a free society” (Article 29). It does not suffice to just teach children about their rights so that they can respect the rights of others; instead, the Convention requires that education “educate for human rights” (Covell, 2013), which requires education to increase social awareness to inspire action for social fairness (ibid). Children can only become communally conscious if they are treated as dignified, rights bearing citizens. In other words, if the purpose of education is to authorize the child to act responsibly to promote freedom and equality as they seek to guarantee peace and
security in the world, then the overarching institutional design of education must ensure that the Convention’s rights are protected for every child so that they can enjoy participating as dignified persons placed at the centre of control (Dupre, 2013).

The Rights, Respect and Responsibility Initiative (RRR) conducted in Hampshire County, England (2004 – 2013) demonstrated that the implementation of an effective human rights education that is referenced to the Convention promotes and sustains respectful attitudes and responsible behaviours to uphold human rights and fundamental freedoms (Covell, 2013). Westheimer and Kahne expand the notion of what constitutes socially responsible behaviours, and identified three types of citizens who all embody this virtue. The “personally responsible” and “participatory citizen,” have good character, attitudes and behaviours that contribute to an ability to solve social problems and actively participate to improve society by taking leadership positions within established systems and community structures (Westheimer, Kahne, 2004). However, they “embrace a vision of citizenship devoid of politics” (ibid). A free society that adheres to democratic ideals of liberty, equality, and dignity requires that its “justice-oriented citizens” assume the responsibility to inquire and amend pre-existing systems and structures that replicate patterns of injustice over time (ibid). If we require of children to act responsibly to uphold the democratic values of liberty and equality as they act to realize the Convention’s rights of all children, then, along with providing children with knowledge of their rights, education has to also provide children with authentic opportunities to participate democratically in the community so that they can achieve the larger societal objective of securing world peace.

“This is how we stand together”

A commitment to advance a free democratic society depends, first, on education securing non-discrimination principles where all children have the right to be included “irrespective of the child’s, or his or her parent’s or legal guardian’s race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status” (Article 2). Furthermore, the Convention’s principles and provisions have to be realized for every child so that the social injustices that threaten liberty, equality, and human dignity can be identified. According to Dewey, it is the human responsibility to advance society, and this requires defining the purpose of education to foster participation in a democratic society (Schecter, 2011). An education system that is democratic includes all children without discrimination. It also respects their rights to participate as rights bearing citizens in their community to uphold social justice. The Convention defines the rights of children to express an opinion in all matters concerning them (Article 12). They have the right to freedom of information (Article 13), and the right to “freedom of thought, conscience, and religion” (Article 14). Finally, children also have the right to associate freely and peacefully with others (Article 15). The fulfilment of these democratic participation rights for each child is the legal obligation of signatories to the Convention, and ensures the child the freedom to act responsibly as a free citizen to uphold all the rights outlined in the Convention. The
principle of interdependence, where each right within the Convention contributes to the realization of a child’s dignity, requires that all these rights be respected for every child according to the proclamation in the 1945 Charter of the United Nations.

But, the ability to identify injustice is not purely connected to an inclination to take action (Ober, 2012). Education needs to equip children with the “critical literacy skills necessary for participatory democratic citizenship” (Hyslop-Margison & Pinto, 2007). It should also serve to develop critical literacy skills in children to “prepare them to become political agents of democratic change” (ibid) so that they can question the root causes of social injustice. In doing so, they uphold the principles enshrined in the 1945 Charter of the United Nations by uniting together to “maintain international peace and security.”

Discussion

Fulfilling the Objective of Peace

The Convention’s fundamental principles of universality, indivisibility, and interdependence guide the purpose of education towards education for children’s rights so that they can be motivated to act as responsible citizens in the pursuit of social justice, where peace is the greater societal objective. To accomplish this, education has to be reformed to embody the democratic principles implicit in the Convention. However, little change has been realized in over a century of attempts to reform education (Goldspink, 2007; Davis, 2012). While the post-modern era is demanding that education better enable students to think deeply and creatively as they collaborate together to alter social practices that obstruct their freedom or welfare (Dewey, as quoted by Miller in Cavoukian & Olfman, 2006), the lack of a coherent framework to guide the purpose of education has precipitated further confusion regarding the best method to apply to education reform. For the most part, reform models are based on neoclassical economic and neoliberal political thinking that emerged in the post-war period and resulted in a top-down model used to reform education that consists of applying private management practices and market-type mechanisms to public administration, including education (Goldspink, 2007). Politicians and government bureaucrats predetermine various curricular objectives and mandatory assessment criteria (Davis, 2012) to implement throughout the system, but what is lacking is a cohesive set of principles and values to guide them. This, combined with a preoccupation with bureaucratic process (Goldspink, 2007), results in a linear top-down model used to reform education with the “negative result of significant educational ‘deform’.” (Pinar, as quoted in Davis, 2012). Furthermore, the emerging post-modern thinking that the purpose of education should be to serve a greater societal good is philosophically at odds with the hierarchic economic and managerial model used to reform education (Goldspink, 2007).

Education Reform Through Rights

The identification of the “capacity for adaptation” as a core competence for twenty-first-century life (Haste, 2009) acts as a useful tool in generating momentum for sustainable change in education reform that is referenced to the Convention. The
current top-down decision-making and centralized policy control that depends on close monitoring of implementation through reductionist accountability measures, limits the capacity of educational institutions to adapt and learn (Davis, 2012). Some education reformers have transitioned from using the top-down linear models of reform to the application of complexity theory methods that harness the robust self-organization possible in a complex system, which is based on understanding education systems as comprising of a complex system of diverse agents operating in highly coupled webs (Goldspink, 2007). While this alternative vision to rendering sustainable education reform that is based in complexity theory (Davis, 2012; Mason, 2009) might be compelling, it is the dual nature of the moral and legal aspects of the Convention that provide the meaningful foundation for sustainable reform because it is strengthened by its dual characteristics – the moral obligations to the Convention’s rights require the legal framework for implementation, and its legal obligations manifest through the human moral capacity to do the right thing.

Authentic democratic participation with the educational goal of amending social injustice and securing international peace requires that children have to become attentive to matters of injustice and the importance in pursuing social justice (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). To do so, it requires that they have dignity, because they cannot question social injustice without it (Ober, 2012). It is the behaviours of those who are dignified that provide the foundation for defending the democratic values of liberty and equality (ibid) so that “conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained” (Charter, 1945). The fulfilment of the legal and moral obligations for States Parties to respect the child’s provision, protection and participation rights outlined in the Convention dignifies the child. This, in turn, creates a foundation for children to consider collective strategies to critically challenge injustice so that they can address the root causes of social problems (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). For education to achieve this, its system has to be reformed to become democratic where the rights of both educators and learners are respected, and where the discipline of the child preserves his or her inherent dignity (Convention, Article 28; Declaration, 2011: Article 2).

Recent attempts to reform education have incorporated public engagement in an attempt to better understand and manage the complex structures of education systems within an increasingly dynamic global environment (Davis, 2012; Goldspink, 2007). Because many social, moral, and political agendas are communicated through what is taught, how teachers behave, and how education is organized (Howe & Covell, 2005), it is necessary to establish a principles-based framework that is founded on trust for sustainable education reform (Goldspink, 2007). The alignment of education to the Convention provides a core set of values and principles that are rights based; they recognize the “inherent dignity” (Convention) of every child regardless of his or her identity. Furthermore, it also requires adults provide guidance to children in a manner “consistent with the evolving capacities of the child” (Article 5), thus ensuring that the rights of adults are also protected. It is necessary, therefore, to reform education according these principles to secure a foundation of trust that recognizes the rights of all those involved in the process to work collaboratively in pursuing the final educational
objective of securing world peace. This requires that the education environment endorse pluralism as a necessary requirement for the expansion and improvement of education practice that is divergent from the methods based on conformity (Goldspink, 2007). The focus on social and emotional wellbeing builds a safe and trusting place for risk-taking (ibid), and as communities come together, the dialogue around education reform becomes a horizontal relationship of mutual trust between dialoguers (Freire, 2008). It is within this type of rights respecting environment, founded on the Convention’s principles, that all stakeholders are free to participate democratically to take risks and act responsibly to affect communities in critical ways (Ober, 2012) on the road to peace.

**Conclusion**

In an increasingly globalized and interdependent world, it is important to ensure that the next generation is well versed in critical topics such as sustainable development, human rights and dignity, social justice, and peace. Education offers a viable platform for intentional engagement in an effort to promote sensitive communication and collaboration to secure a more politically stable world that offers opportunities for the optimal development of each child and their contribution to the positive shaping of our world.

A paradigm-shifting proposal to reform the current education system is offered to establish a global foundation of freedom, justice, and peace as proclaimed by the United Nations Charter in 1945. This is accomplished through the alignment of education with the principles of universality, indivisibility, and interdependence enshrined in the Convention. By doing this, the purpose of education is then determined to enable the full development of critically literate rights bearing citizens who, together, are empowered to uphold human rights and question the root causes of social injustice. This can only be accomplished when education systems are reformed to acknowledge and act upon the Convention’s ‘best interest’ principle, which recognizes the inherent worth of each child.

The transition from the current linear, ends-driven system of education that is steeped in the economic and political agenda of a capitalistic society to a rights respecting democratic system is not simple or instantaneous. It entails an effort of international, national, regional, and local stakeholders to consort with communities all around the world. Together, they need to review, adapt, and align current educational policies, curriculum, and pedagogy with the Convention’s principles and provisions, and commit to an incremental fulfilment of its legal and moral obligations for every child within their jurisdiction. In doing so, children can then be empowered with knowledge of their rights, the values that underpin these rights, and the behaviours required for their protection. It necessitates that adults trust children to shape a future that recognizes the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all member of the human family. It further requires adults listen attentively to, and act upon the voices of children, and equip them with the tools they need to construct and establish lasting world peace.

**References**


Global Villages Resources: Educating for a Better World, One Person at a Time. (N.D.) Retrieved from [http://www.globalvillageresources.org/contact.htm](http://www.globalvillageresources.org/contact.htm)


Peace education is the process of acquiring the values, the knowledge and developing the attitudes, skills, and behaviors to live in harmony with oneself, with others, and with the natural environment. There are numerous United Nations declarations on the importance of peace. Information Age Publishing. ISBN 978-1-59311-889-1. Chapter details; and Page, James S. (2008) 'Chapter 9: The United Nations and Peace Education'. In: Monisha Bajaj (ed.)Encyclopedia of Peace Education. (75-83). Charlotte understanding the nature of human dignity and respecting the dignity of others. empathizing with those whose rights are violated and feeling a sense of solidarity with them. recognizing that the enjoyment of human rights by all citizens is a precondition to a just and humane society. 

Education for human rights also gives people a sense of responsibility for respecting and defending human rights and empowers them through skills to take appropriate action. These skills for action include recognizing that human rights may be promoted and defended on an individual, collective, and institutional level. children and youth. students at all levels of education. refugees and displaced persons.