my piece, my peace

Asked what peace is, children drew inspiration from their home, community and surroundings. There was maturity in their innocence. There was resonance in their honesty. Children have a lot to say about peace. It is time we listen.

For children who participated in a study on peace in Asia, peace is not a concept. Peace is an experience brought about by day-to-day living.

Using children-inclusive methodologies and putting premium to children's agency, ARNEC with the support of UNICEF did a perspective survey of children’s views on peace in 2015.

More than a hundred children participated in the survey. They come from Bangladesh, Bhutan, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, and Timor-Leste.

By giving opportunity to draw and share insights, children had diverse perspectives about peace, inspired by their social relations with family and friends, and circumstances in school, neighborhood and the community.

For some children, peace is living in a safe and beautiful natural environment, and made references to green surroundings, mountains and lakes, temples, and flowers and trees.

For others, peace is sharing with others, as well as playing and living together. Yet for others, peace is the absence of violence or harm in the home, school and community.

There is not a single meaning of peace for children, but there is so much children can offer to enrich early childhood development (ECD) with peacebuilding.

Top drawing: Children happily flying kites in lush green surroundings, prepared and interpreted by a child from Bangladesh. Left: A child-respondent from Nepal participates in the perspective study on peace.
Why children's views?

Children's views are important in peacebuilding. No society can afford to rebuild its future without the active participation of its young generation, says experts Schnabel and Tabyshaliev.

However, peacebuilding is dominated by adult-centric discourses and experiences. There is a dearth of literature and studies that conceptualize peace and peacebuilding from the viewpoint of children, and using their views to inform ECD.

Researches on ECD and peacebuilding have cited the importance of child participation, but findings have been silent on children's views.

Dr. Lynn Ang, in a study for ARNEC in 2014, cited that "early childhood and peacebuilding can be conceptualised according to...a rights-based approach, participatory approach and pedagogical approach."

Children's rights to peace and security are part of the wider debate about human rights, says Ang in the literature review. Children have rights, regardless of cultural and ethnic affiliation, gender, geographical location, and socio-economic backgrounds.

In addition, the ARNEC study also raised the importance of "empowering children with opportunities and choices to participate...and...mobilise their roles as peace builders."

The pedagogical approach meanwhile values the roles of schools as sites of socialization to peace.

ARNEC built on Ang's findings and initiated a study in 2015, exploring how children in Asia define and interpret peace and peacebuilding.

Children's views from the perspective survey will help inform strategies in designing programs that link ECD and peacebuilding in the Asia Pacific region.

Full title of the literature review by Dr. Lynn Ang for ARNEC in 2014 is *Early Childhood and Peace Building in the Asia Pacific Region: A Literature Review to Inform a Regional Research Agenda.*

Please contact the ARNEC Secretariat at secretariat@arnec.net for more information.

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To be at peace is to play, sing and dance

*Happy, loved, confident and wonderful*, children said when asked about how they felt about being at peace. Regardless of context, children who participated in the perspective study in Asia stated they just want to play, sing and dance.

They like spending quality time outdoors and playing with others in the community.

Children from Bangladesh stressed they like dancing and flying kites.

Kids from Bhutan and Malaysia value playgrounds. They, too, like playing with friends.

Similarly, children from Bhutan, Nepal and Pakistan mentioned that they like toys, dolls and other play materials.

On the other hand, some children from Pakistan said they like horseriding.

Child respondents from Bangladesh, Bhutan and Malaysia prefer spending time outdoors. Moreover, kids in Bangladesh like to pass their leisure time at the riverbank and in the park, as well as playing in green fields and walking with friends.

Meanwhile, children in Bhutan and Malaysia like visiting temples and spending time in beautiful gardens, respectively.

Being happy and being at peace are associated with freedom to play and meaningful interactions with others.

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Drawing on the left: Mahnaim from Pakistan drew a community where children are happy playing and doing things together.

He says he also likes staying in communities where he, family and friends feel safe at all times.
Child wisdom: what peace is not

Children are against any form of violence in the home and community. Fighting or quarreling are unacceptable to children.

Children from Bangladesh disapproved vandalizing cars and throwing bombs. They also did not like being involved with arguments with friends.

Child respondents from Bhutan and Malaysia considered bullying and scolding by adults as bad behaviors.

Children from Bhutan, Nepal and Pakistan cited beating and hitting by friends and teachers as unacceptable.

A child from Pakistan mentioned he does not like the strict behavior of parents and teachers. He said, "I don't feel good when my teacher or mother treats me strictly while teaching or helping me with my homework."

Drawing above: A child from Bangladesh depicted quarreling between friends as bad for peace.

Not safe, no peace

"I cannot play because it is not safe to play in other places," says a child respondent in Bhutan, reflecting on conditions of non-peace.

There are four things children feel strongly about on conditions of safety for all.

First is lack of safety for children. Children in Bangladesh, Bhutan and Pakistan dislike having no playground, and playing in unsafe or hazardous places.

Next is road accidents. Children from Bangladesh and Malaysia have raised concerns about road accidents, that result to grave injury or even loss of lives.

Third, crimes such as theft and kidnapping. Child respondents in Bangladesh, Bhutan and Malaysia are concerned about burglary, theft and robbery.

Moreover, a child in Malaysia raised apprehensions about kidnapping.

And finally, a concern on cruelty against animals. One child respondent from Bhutan said he does not like cruel treatment of animals.

Myosett says peace is when heroes help

"I like naturally beautiful places with lots of hills, lakes and greens," says a child respondent from Bangladesh reflecting on conditions of peace.

There is peace when "someone falls in the playground, other people—heroes—come to help."

Myosett thinks helping each other is building peace. Her drawing emphasizes sense of community and helpfulness in times of need.

Myosett is from Malaysia.

Peace: living together with comfort

Children explain peace as living together, sharing and helping others. They find peace in eating together; helping family and friends, as well as other people in need; respecting the elderly; and sharing one's toys and things with others.

Next to living together, children find peace in having a clean, calm and beautiful environment.

Children also mentioned that peace means living in a relaxed, quiet, and green environment. In addition, they associated peace with the absence of conflict and violence. Children from Pakistan said that peace is not being scared of anything.

Child respondents made references to violence in the home and community, including bullying and child protection issues in school and in the village.

Moreover, they also described peace as having opportunities to play, sing and dance.

Some children in Bhutan and Nepal valued eating, particularly chocolates, as peace.

When asked about how peace makes them feel, children expressed comfort, love, happiness, pleasure, and confidence.
Children in Asia talk peace...

**Bangladesh: safety**

Children raised apprehensions over road accidents in the community.

A child respondent reflected, “In road accidents, people lose their lives. I feel sorry for them.” Children also described peace as helping others, no fighting, and being free from sufferings.

They associated good things they see in the community, such as mountains, lakes, rainbows, flowers and trees, to being happy and being at peace.

Mahmuda Akhter and her team led the research in Bangladesh. Ms. Akhter is the Executive Director of the Institute of Child and Human Development in Bangladesh.

**Bhutan: environment**

Children see good in having clean surroundings in the village, and flowers and trees in the forest.

They dislike aggression, conflict, and untidy and unsafe places.

As described, peace is harmony, absence of conflict, and giving and sharing, or having a sense of compassion for others.

Most of them associated peace with getting along and playing with friends.

Karma Gayleg, Senior Programme Manager of the Ministry of Education, and his team led the perspective survey in Bhutan.

**Malaysia: cleanliness**

Peace, according to children, means loving, helping and taking care of others.

Malaysian kids talked about cleanliness a lot; they disliked rubbish and untidy areas.

‘Good’ is manifested in physical things in their natural surroundings, their families and friends. ‘Good’ is described as beautiful, clean, tidy, orderly, friendly and calm.

Children dislike violence at home and in the community. One kid mentioned kidnapping as bad.

Deputy Director Ng Soo Boon and Siew Siew Kim of the Ministry of Education led the research in Malaysia.
Why ECD with peacebuilding?
Research shows that early childhood development (ECD) has positive links with social transformations that foster peace at home, in the community, and society.

Studies in the field of neurobiology, economics and developmental psychology have linked ECD with widening life skills, opportunities, and capacities of children.

The human development change theory explains that transformative knowledge, skills and attitudes begin in the formative years of children. Understanding and embracing diversity, inclusion, and collaboration are shaped in early years, enhancing life-long skills and social relations (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2010).

Psychological-emotional change theory meanwhile posits the value of investing in the emotional needs of children and of supporting caregivers to engage in responsive, nurturing interactions with children.

Research shows that if young children are exposed to severe, frequent or prolonged stress, in the absence of nurturing and responsive caregiving, their body's stress response system can become over activated in ways that can disrupt brain development, stunt growth and impair learning. Addressing young children's need for nurturing relationships can help them and societies thrive (UNICEF, n.d.).

Moreover, the root cause-justice theory assumes that violence is a function of inequity and inequality in structures and life chances (Yale University & ACEV Partnership, 2012). ECD helps reverse these by investing in children's life skills and values.

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...draw insights from local experience

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Nepal: no to violence
No beating. No fighting. No screaming. No cruelty to animals.
All these, plus love and respect for others, especially the elderly, comprise what peace is for children in Nepal.
Children also described peace as sharing toys and material things with others.
They also do not like dumping garbage on the road and having dirty toilets and homes. Children also frown upon urinating anywhere else. They like clean environments.

Narmaya Thapa and her team led the perspective survey in Nepal. Ms. Thapa is a Programme Coordinator of Save the Children.

Pakistan: no child hitting
Hitting the child and being strict at home and in school are bad, according to children in Pakistan.
For them peace is being happy and not being scared of anything.
Moreover, child respondents support helping others and sharing things, especially to those in need.
They also disapprove of kachra (garbage) in the surroundings, trash on the road, and fire on the street. Children value the environment very much.

Seema Laasi and her team led the perspective study in Pakistan. Ms. Laasi is a Senior Instructor at Aga Khan University.

Timor-Leste: happiness
 Asked what peace is not, children stressed hitting and bullying, bad smell from the piggeries, dogs that bite, and people who steal things.
Associating peace to happiness, children in Timor-Leste highlight opportunities to play, monies parents give them, and beautiful, calm and clean things, surroundings, and community.
They also like the sea as a source of food and the mountains, the sun, and the village that make them happy.

Michael Bismar and his team led the perspective survey in Timor-Leste. Mr. Bismar is an Education Advisor of ChildFund International.
Children in Asia 'draw' peace

A total of 119 children aged 3-8 from six countries in Asia participated in the perspective survey about how they perceive peace.

Young as they are, children experience peace in their day-to-day activities at home and in the school and community. They, too, have their own views about what peace is and what it is not. By asking them to draw what is good and bad in their surroundings and use these drawings to elicit perspectives and feelings, children from Bangladesh, Bhutan, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan and Timor-Leste were able to define and interpret 'peace'.

Their views capture the voices of children about peace and opens the space for imbuing ECD and peacebuilding with insights by and for children. There are nuances that need further study to isolate context-specific insights of children on peace and peacebuilding in the Asia Pacific region.

Prof. Kishor Shrestha of the Tribhuvan University in Nepal led the perspective survey for ARNEC.

ARNEC Buddies Peck Gee Chua for Bhutan and Sarah Rigden for Nepal helped consolidate the report.

Above: Child from Nepal listens and draws her piece about peace.

Way forward for ECD, peacebuilding

There is a need to include peacebuilding in ECD and school curriculums, but more research and advocacy are essential to influence national policies in Asia.

From the lens of child rights and the advocacy for child-inclusive studies, there is scope for deepening linkages between ECD and peacebuilding.

There is also a need to explore further the pedagogical perspective to strengthen ECD and peacebuilding, as schools have a role to play in socializing children and other stakeholders to peace, social inclusion and harmony, non-discrimination, and non-violence.

There is also scope for accommodating national and community contexts in understanding the nuances of ECD and peacebuilding. Children's statements about peace can help practitioners and policy makers identify entry points for ECD and peacebuilding. For instance, children report that communing with nature, engaging in social interactions, and being safe from violence, contribute to a feeling of peace.

These entry points, alongside the nuances of national and community situations of peace in the Asia Pacific, will likely inform the scope and direction for ECD and peacebuilding in the region.

ARNEC commits to moving ECD and peacebuilding forward, through the help of partners and advocates in the Asia Pacific region, and the work of the ARNEC Technical Working Group on ECD and Peacebuilding.

about ARNEC

The Asia-Pacific Regional Network for Early Childhood (ARNEC) is a network established to build strong partnerships across sectors and different disciplines, organisations, agencies and institutions in the Asia Pacific region to advance the agenda on and investment in Early Childhood.

ARNEC has a Technical Working Group on ECD and Peacebuilding that brings together experts, policymakers, and practitioners to explore and promote the added value of ECD on peacebuilding and social cohesion, and reciprocally, the added value of peacebuilding and social cohesion on ECD.

The Group brings a special focus on research and practice on ECD and Peacebuilding in the region, through participatory research, capacity-building, and policy advocacy.

Please contact the ARNEC Secretariat for more information about the perspective survey of children on peace.

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