

Setting the peace table: early childhood education peace practices vis-a vis the kindergarten curriculum

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Abstract

This study investigated the Peace Education Awareness, Early Childhood Education Domains Awareness and the peace practices of the Early Childhood Education Professionals. There are 123 out of 177 schools that are selected using the Slovin's Formula. A stratified sampling was used to gather the data. For each school picked, all the kindergarten teachers were given survey questionnaires. The data gathering instrument included the Peace Education Awareness Questionnaire Checklist (PEACQ) and Early Childhood Education Domain Awareness Questionnaire Checklist. Mean and standard deviation were used for the descriptive statistical analysis while the Pearson's r was employed for the inferential study. Alpha level was set at 0.01. The study revealed that ECE professionals are highly aware in all the domains. The highest mean is in the Aesthetic /Creative Development Domain. They are also highly aware in all areas of the peace education Knowledge, Attitudes, Values and Skills. It was noted that the Attitudes and Values Content Area has the highest statistical mean. Furthermore, a significant relationship existed between the awareness of Peace education and Kindergarten Curriculum among ECE Professional. This will be a start in assisting the ECE Professionals towards a peace advocacy in the school, in the homes and in the community.

Keywords: peace education, early childhood education, kindergarten curriculum, awareness

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Introduction

“If we are to teach real peace in this world and if we are to carry on a real war against war, we should have to begin with the children: - Mahatma Gandhi

A culture of peace will be achieved when citizens of the world understand global problems, have the skills to resolve conflicts and struggle for justice non-violently, live by international standards of human rights and equity, appreciate cultural diversity, and respect the Earth and each other (Hague Appeal for Peace, 2014).

As a country, we are struggling for freedom and democracy which has been marked by violence and conflict, resulting in considerable loss of lives and property. The quest for national peace has been a lifelong goal of us, Filipinos. Is it possible to have national peace? There are chains of reasons why this "peace" thing seems very unreachable to us.

Peace education had been directed towards the goal of eradicating violence and strengthening the respect for human rights and other fundamental freedom. These peace concepts have been introduced mostly to specific courses in the tertiary and graduate school levels in their curriculum. Since peace is not limited to one meaning there is a need to investigate the possibility that peace may also exist in the curriculum of students in the basic education (Perez-Santos, 2013), including preschool level.

The role played by early childhood development programs can be critical to promote the skills that enable children to become agents of change in building peace in their societies. There is evidence that integrating peace education into Early Childhood Education has a positive impact on child 's social and emotional development, and reduction of behavioral problems later in life.

Thus, this study aims to determine the peace practices of ECE professionals and its contributions towards peace education in the early childhood.

Literature Review

Peace and Peace Education

Peace is a powerful word. But what does it truly mean?

The word peace is derived from the original Latin word — “pax”, which means a pact, a control or an agreement to end war or any dispute and conflict between two people, two nations or two antagonistic groups of people.

Johan Galtung, a Norwegian peace scholar, described that the term peace and violence are linked. Peace is the absence of violence and should be used as the social goal. As what His Holiness, the 14th Dalai Lama said, that Peace, in the sense of the absence of war is of little value...peace can only last where human rights are respected, where people are fed, and where individuals and nations are free. A study done by Ezema & Ezema (2012), that peace is essential in attaining lasting development and it is vital to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. In the classroom, peace education aims to develop skills, attitudes, and knowledge with a cooperative approach and by using participatory learning methods and the use of the environment as a source of learning. Attitude to increase tolerance, peer attention, and cultivate a sense of respect (Wahyudin, 2018).

One major contribution to the formal inclusion of peace education into the field of early childhood education today is through Montessori classrooms. Research indicates that many Montessori teachers provide explicit and implicit curriculum that fosters “the development of conflict resolution skills, independence, tolerance, confidence, kindness and a respect for other opinions...” (Duckworth, 2006, p. 42). Montessori believed that “Establishing peace is the work of education”. She places efforts to cultivate peace in her own school in three-levels: The individual, which relates to self-awareness, while community refers to the relations with others, and the global refers to the cultural and environmental awareness. In addition, the Reggio Emilia approach to education has been applied to educational settings. The educational philosophy is guided by “an underlying belief that every human being has an equal yet incalculable value and that even the youngest among them are citizens with rights” (McNally & Slutsky, 2017, p. 1932). This approach envisions children as agents of social change that help to produce culture, values, and rights. Children are considered partners in

school—which leads to classroom projects that are influenced by the children’s collective interests, ideas, and experiences—and partners in the community with equal rights and responsibilities (McNally & Slutsky, 2017).

Education for peace implies an active concept of peace through values, life skills and knowledge in a spirit of equality, respect, empathy, understanding and mutual appreciation among individuals, groups and nations (Ohakamike, 2016). United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund’s (UNICEF) describes peace education as the process of promoting the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed to bring about behavior changes that will enable children, youth and adults to prevent conflict and violence; to resolve conflict peacefully; and to create the conditions conducive to peace, whether at an intrapersonal, interpersonal, intergroup, national or international level (Fountain, 1999).

Ian Harris (2013) believes that Peace Education can be used to “inoculate students against the evil effects of violence and to teach them the skills to manage their conflicts in a nonviolent way and by motivating them to choose peace when they encounter conflict”

Education plays a key role in teaching about conflicts, solidarity and global citizenship. The transformation of the educator, the student and eventually the society is the core of peace education (Turey and English, 2008).

Early childhood education as the foundation of peace

The primary years of a child’s life have very significant improvements in development and identity building happen. Early childhood educators can be instrumental in building those capacities.

Betty Reardon (2009) refers teaching for peace as that concerned with creating preconditions necessary for peace. Supporting the importance of including a peace curriculum in early childhood has helped uncover optimal developmental periods of the brain. It is the early years of life that are considered —prime time for brain development which can affect a child’s social capacities, critical to preconditions necessary for peace (Shore(1991) in Alfonso, 2014). Alfonso (2014) strongly believes that early childhood should be used as a place to lay down the building blocks for our future peace leaders. As what Dr. Maria Montessori (1949) say, “we must gather together all the elements of the world and organize

them into a science of peace. To be sustainable...we should walk together on this path of life for all things are part of the universe and are connected with each other to form one whole unity.” As reported by Wheeler & Stomfay-Stitz (2005), a pre-K team in a Maryland school in USA successfully developed a culture of peace with the use of a kindness jar which children could put a slip of paper into when they saw an act of kindness. The process created a culture of peace and kindness in the classroom. This created compassionate, kind environment while children also gained skills critical to bring about peaceful resolutions of difficult situations. Another peaceable practice is the use of a peace corner. These spaces are designed to provide calming alone time for young children who are experiencing big emotions or whose nervous systems are overwhelmed by outside stimuli.

The Teacher of Peace

The conceptualization of teachers as —peacebuilders is rooted in Galtung ‘s distinction between peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding.

Dr. Kothari (as cited in Behera, 2013) articulates that the destiny of a nation is shaped inside the four walls of the classroom. Teachers need not be the only source of peace education but the greatest responsibility in building a nation. They serve as mirrors of future generations in the form of students and an effective element of establishing peaceful atmosphere. The teacher ‘s primary role is to help students become human beings, driven to fulfill their true potential not for their own benefit but for the betterment of the society (Behera, 2013).

As promoted by Walker, Myers-Bowman, & Walls, (2008), teachers of young children are in a special position to teach the peacemaking skills they need to resolve their own conflicts and manage anger, both now and in the future. Educators have a unique opportunity to teach young children ways to find peace that may have a lasting impact on several levels. The study suggested that one must understand peace in different ways and suggest that teachers speak with children about peace, building a vocabulary of peace, as well as providing peacemaking experiences, such as games and activities that emphasize shared decision-making and cooperation.

Lantieri and Patti (1996) (as cited in Castro, 2010) reminds that as teachers that we have

to transform ourselves before we can expect changes in the learners. Furthermore, personal qualities of a teacher that instructs peace education should be at peace with himself/herself. Being respectful, understanding, patient, tolerant, forgiving, equalitarian, self-confident, fair, cooperative, innovator, and solution-oriented, integrative, empathetic, and unprejudiced are some qualities that feed peace (Polat, 2016).

In the Philippines, Executive Order 570 otherwise known as Institutionalizing Peace Education in the Basic Education Curriculum mandates the Department of Education (DepEd) to actively promote a culture of peace in the education system by incorporating peace education concepts, skills and values in the learning content of basic education, thus it is believed that teachers, especially in the early childhood education are important tools in attaining world peace.

The Kindergarten Curriculum

The National Association for the Education of Young Child (NAEYC) identifies that Kindergarten is a critical year where children's experiences nurture positive approaches learning and prepare children for the academic expectations of the primary grades (NAEYC, 2008).

Children who participate in quality early childhood education —perform better in school and become productive members of the community and society (UNICEF, Philippines).

Republic Act 10157 or The Kindergarten Education Act made Kindergarten the compulsory and mandatory entry stage to basic education. Section 2 of this Act provides that all five (5)-year old children shall be given equal opportunities for Kindergarten Education to effectively promote their physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development, including values formation, so they will be ready for school. This act also recognizes that Kindergarten education is vital to the development of the Filipino child —for it is the period when young mind 's absorptive capacity is at its sharpest.

The Kindergarten Curriculum Framework (KCF) draws from the goals of the K to 12 Philippine Basic Education Curriculum Framework and adopts the general principles of the National Early Learning Framework (NELF). Theoretical bases for teaching-learning in the early years, which are founded on constructivism, integrative, thematic, collaborative,

inquiry-based, and reflective teaching in play-based approaches with application of the Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP); these support the principles of child growth and development, and the learning program development and assessment.

Embedded in the curriculum are the seven domains. The Socio-emotional development, which according to NAEYC when children communicate their feelings appropriately, develop positive relationships with their peers, and come up with ways to solve problems and make peace in their world, they are better able to focus and learn; Values development, as stated by Ormrod (2011), early childhood stage is a beginning for understanding of being mindful of the point of view of others and the classroom is a perfect environment to develop values and attitudes necessary for understanding fairness and justice; Physical Health & Motor Development, where children are expected to develop both their fine and gross motor skills to be efficient and effective movers when engaging in wholesome physical and health activities. Playgrounds are perfect places for a child to develop mental connections, socialize and develop fine and gross motor skills (Thomas, 2017); Aesthetic Development, involves the love and pursuit of beauty in art, music and movement and creates opportunities for the creative expression of emotions, thought, feelings and ideas. Creativity, new and original behavior and/or ideas will be key in developing young children's capacity for peace and should be fostered at this ripe creative age (Ormrod, 2011); Mathematics, for children to be able to challenge world views and question current unfair practices, they must be taught to be critical in their thinking processes. It has the influence that able us to understand global issues and produce new and creative ways of solving some of our greatest problems; Understanding of the Physical and Natural Environment, a strong foundation in scientific knowledge that can teach children important skills such as thinking clearly and in a logical way; possess an open and inquisitive mind, decision and problem solving skills; and Language, Literacy and Communication, wherein children develop language, they use it to convey their needs, emotions and verbally solve conflict. Alfonso (2014) stated that because of these great steps in development, early childhood becomes the crucial time for developing the skills and capacities necessary for peace making, peace keeping, and peace building. These domains are strategically integrated in the content of the blocks of time as contained in the Kindergarten Teaching Guide. Activities tackle different but interrelated domains for the smooth and successful transition of every five-year-old Filipino child from Kindergarten

on to Grades 1 to 12 Basic Education.

Objectives of the Study

The following objectives were pursued by the researchers.

1. What is the level of awareness among the ECE professionals on the different domains in the Kindergarten Curriculum?
2. What is the level of awareness of ECE Professionals on the peace education knowledge, attitudes, values and skills?
3. Is there a significant relationship among peace education awareness and Kindergarten Curriculum Domain awareness among ECE Professionals?

Method

Research Design

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between peace education awareness and the Kindergarten Curriculum to peace building practices. Specifically, a survey method was used. According to Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun (2012), it is an information that is collected from a group of people in order to describe some aspects or characteristics (such as abilities, opinions, attitudes, beliefs, and/or knowledge) of the population of which that group is a part.

Respondents

The respondents of the study were the Early Childhood Education (ECE) Professionals teaching in the kindergarten in the city of Iloilo, Philippines. A list of all preschools was secured from the directory of the Department of Education-Division Office. Out of 177 schools, 123 were selected through Slovin's formula. A stratified sampling was used to gather the data from 38 public schools and 85 private schools. For each school picked, all the

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kindergarten teachers were given a survey questionnaire. Due to unexpected circumstances, only 104 schools were able to answer the said instrument.

Instruments

Two instruments were used. Peace Awareness Questionnaire- Checklist (PEAQC) was used is an awareness questionnaire-checklist adapted from Pendon (2013) and The Early Childhood Education Domain Awareness Questionnaire- Checklist (ECEDAQC). These were validated by a panel of experts in the field of Early Childhood Education, Peace education and from the Department of Education Provincial Office. These were pilot-tested in students of Diploma in Early Childhood Education. The Peace Awareness Questionnaire Checklist contains forty-five (45) item statements on peace education knowledge comprises of 23 items, attitudes and values with 12 items and skills, with 10 items. The result was a 0.88 indicating a high reliability. The ECE Domain Awareness Questionnaire Checklist which consists of statements from the domains Socio-Emotional Development, Values Development, Physical Health and Motor Development, Aesthetic /Creative Development, Mathematics, Understanding the Physical and Natural Environment, Language, Literacy and Communication. The result was a high reliability of 0.956.

Data Collection

A letter was provided for the Office of Schools Division Superintendent for approval and implementation by the school principals from both public and private schools in the City. Data collection was done by visiting each school and asking permission to give the survey to their kindergarten teachers. A consent form was given to observe the principle of confidentiality. Of the 123 schools that were identified, only 104 teachers were able to give back the instrument.

Data Analysis

Rank, Mean and Standard Deviation were used to analyze the data. Pearson's r was

employed to establish the significant relationship among the ECE Domain Awareness of the Kindergarten Curriculum and the Peace Education Awareness level.

Results

Level of Awareness on the Different Domains in the Kindergarten Curriculum.

Table 1 shows that in terms of Different Domains in the Kindergarten Curriculum, ECE Professionals were more aware in Aesthetic/Creative Development Domain since this ranked first with a mean of 4.12 (SD = 0.69) interpreted as highly aware. On the other hand, it came out that Understanding of the Physical & Natural Environment Domain and Mathematics Domain were the ECE Professionals were less aware since this is at the bottom two with mean 4.02 (0.70) and 3.88 (0.74) respectively. But both were still interpreted as highly aware.

Table 1. *Level of awareness on the different domains in the kindergarten curriculum*

DOMAINS	SD	M	Interpretation	Rank
Socio-Emotional Development	0.60	4.03	Highly aware	4.5
Values Development	0.65	4.06	Highly aware	3
Physical Health & Motor	0.66	4.10	Highly aware	2
Aesthetic/Creative Development	0.69	4.12	Highly aware	1
Mathematics	0.74	3.88	Highly aware	7
Understanding of the Physical & Natural Environment	0.70	4.02	Highly aware	6
Language, Literacy, and Communication	0.71	4.03	Highly aware	4.5
Overall Mean	0.68	4.03	Highly aware	

Level of Awareness of Peace Education Knowledge, Attitudes, Values, and Skills

Table 2 shows that in terms of Peace Education Knowledge, Attitudes, Values, and Skills were more aware in Attitude and Values Content Areas since this ranked first with a mean was 4.26 (SD = 0.63) and was interpreted as highly aware. On the other hand, it came out

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that Knowledge Content Areas were less aware since this is at the bottom with a mean of 3.91 (SD = 0.60) though this was still verbally interpreted as highly aware.

Table 2. *Level of awareness of peace education knowledge, attitudes, values, and skills*

Areas	SD	M	Interpretation	Rank
Knowledge Content Areas	0.60	3.91	Highly aware	3
Attitude and Values Content Areas	0.63	4.26	Highly aware	1
Skills Content Areas	0.65	4.17	Highly aware	2
Overall Mean	0.63	4.11	Highly aware	

Relationship between awareness of peace education and national kindergarten curriculum

Table 3 shows that significant relationship, specifically very strong positive correlation ($r = 0.875$, $p = 0.000$) existed between peace education and Kindergarten Curriculum awareness among ECE Professionals.

Table 3. *Significant Relationship between Peace Education Awareness and Kindergarten Curriculum Awareness Among ECE Professionals*

	N	M	r	sig
PEQC	104	4.11	0.875*	0.000
ECEDAQC	104	4.03		

* $p < .001$

Discussion

It was evident that the over- all mean for ECE Professionals on the Different Domains in the Kindergarten Curriculum was 4.03 (SD = 0.68) and was verbally interpreted as “highly aware”. This implies that ECE professionals are very attentive to the different domains of the Kindergarten Curriculum. The results agree to the report done by UNESCO International Bureau of Education (IBE) Geneva (2006), that Pre-school education in the Philippines at the kindergarten level (age group 5 years) must aim to develop children in all aspects (physical, social, emotional, and cognitive) so that they will be better prepared to adjust and

cope with life situations and the demands of formal schooling; and to maximize the children's potential through a variety of carefully selected and meaningful experiences considering their interests and capabilities. Learning is a fluid process that never stops. The domains are equally important, interrelate and overlap as learning occurs. As they grow and interact with the world around them, they not only exercise their muscles, they learn about the world using the developmental domains. This is also supported by a study done by Perez- Santos (2013) that a curriculum based on a standard had been integrating related expressions and concepts through the different experiences set in the curriculum and performance standards. These peace- related expressions and concepts are knitted together through values---forming activities that mold attitudes and behaviors that lead to peace.

Moreover, it was also very evident that the over- all mean for ECE Professionals on Peace Education was 4.11 (SD = 0.63) and was verbally interpreted as highly aware. This suggests that teachers are very much conscious of the importance of peace education among early childhood education centers. This is supported by the studies of Reardon (1988) which maintains that combining knowledge, skills and attitudes is perhaps desired in the field at this time. She sees peace education as a process that prepares young people for global responsibility; enables them to understand the nature and implications of global interdependence. This result is encompassing since in hindsight, this is what many programs ultimately want to achieve. The study of Harris and Morrison (2013) also confirmed the results and cited that the quality and the effectiveness of peace education are closely related in preventing bullying and creating safe and peaceful cultures at schools. To provide this, children should be taught the alternatives of violence and the skills to live in peace.

With regards to the Relationship between awareness of Peace Education and Kindergarten curriculum, as the peace education awareness of the ECE professionals increases, their awareness of the Kindergarten Curriculum also increases or vice-versa. This observation notes that the contribution of the awareness in Kindergarten Curriculum to the variation on peace education awareness was very strong. The developmental domains are highly interconnected, making early childhood education process truly integrative. With this, peace-building interventions in early childhood must also be integrative, building on the essential interaction among the developmental domain (Chopra, 2012).

In the Philippines, the Department of Education (DepEd) have been implementing

Executive Order 570 which is the Institutionalizing Peace Education in the Basic and Teacher Education which mandates the promotion the culture of peace in the educational system by incorporating peace education concepts, skills, and values in the learning content of the basic education. Schools strictly enforce the DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2019 or the National Policy Framework on Learners and Schools as Zones of Peace to guide educator sector towards the creation of safe, inclusive, and conflict-sensitive learning environments. In addition, the Whole School approach was embraced wherein the school has been attempting to infuse the ideas, perspectives, and values of peace in the various aspects of the school's life—curriculum; educational processes; student development programs such as education sessions on conflict resolution, peer mediation, challenging prejudice, and bullying; faculty and staff development programs; materials development; organizational structures and policies; and its socio-political actions (Cawagas, et.al., 2013). It is assumed that Early Childhood professionals must be aware of the fact that they are one of the essential reasons for children's success or challenges. It is through them that children feel comfortable to take risks in learning and feel the support when they are faced with challenges.

Furthermore, Kindergarten Curriculum awareness may not be the only factor that contributed to the difference between or among ECE professionals' peace education awareness, but there were other factors as well that were not considered by this study. These could have possibly been the other factors that may have caused the variation in ECE professionals' peace education awareness. This is supported by the study of Alfonso (2014) which stated that the view of holism is supported by peace educators and is instrumental in creating a curricular model of peace education for early childhood. Kindergarten teachers and other early childhood educators tend to conduct units of study in a holistic manner - interconnecting subject content and focusing on the whole child in all developmental domains. This could be related to the discussion in the work of Zine (2001) on the importance of peace education to the Bachelor of Education programs, to teach future teachers to advocate for students the culture of peace. In addition, the training process of early childhood education programs in Rajabhat Universities in Thailand also included the inclusion of peace education in their teacher training programs and has been integrated into classroom activities and universities' regulations as well (Sri-Amnuay, 2011).

Conclusions and Recommendations

Findings from this study revealed that Early Childhood Educational Professionals felt that they are competent enough to teach the young children in the different domains of the kindergarten curriculum. They considered themselves capable to handle the education of young children especially in the Aesthetic/Creative Development Domain. They seem to be confident in this domain maybe because they believe that the first thing to develop among children is the personal success of each child which is important in developing of self-confidence. This can be seen through children 's literature including creative arts, stories, songs and poems, that ECE teachers use to integrate peace in the classroom. Early childhood teachers help sets the foundation for lifelong learning, behavior, and health. The experiences children have in early childhood programs shape the brain and the child 's capacity to learn, to get along with others, and to respond to daily stresses and challenges. This does not mean that they do not need enrichment activities that will integrate Peace Education in the curriculum. Therefore, it is imperative that ECE professionals enhances the child's skill and ability to engage as active participants of their classroom and their school in order to develop the skills to be active citizens of their world.

Yet, this study revealed some recommendations. The Philippine government through policy makers, may utilize the result of this study by providing appropriate benefits for the early childhood educators and constant training in the field that others may see the importance of early childhood in the future of an individual. The Kindergarten Act of the Philippines stated that Kindergarten education is vital to the academic and technical development of the Filipino child for it is the period when the young mind's absorptive capacity for learning is at its sharpest.

The Department of Education may be made fully aware of the importance of the early education by continuously training and empowering ECE professionals in the subject of peace education. They may also provide ECE professionals an appropriate, safe, comfortable and conducive environment and materials for children to develop their peace-making and negotiation skills. Through this, the teachers may become builders in their respective communities. Early Childhood Professionals are the prime reason of this study for they may be more cognizant of the integration of Peace Education within their classroom and

curriculum. They may be more challenged to be an instrument in sowing the seeds of peace to children to be agents of change. They may be an advocate of peace to start inside their own classroom.

The School Administrators may be attentive to the importance of ECE as a venue to teach peace in order to produce peaceful citizens of the world. A special fund may be allotted in order to elevate the physical environment of the early childhood classrooms for a conducive and healthy place to teach peace.

The parents also need to support Peace Education and this will empower them to start peace education inside their own homes. Peace education is most applicable and viable if it is integrated as a system-wide approach. Initiating conversations about the importance of peace education with colleagues, school administrators, communities and families could be a start to sow the seeds of peace.

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