

Promoting Peace Through Education: Hizmet Schools as a Model

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### **BIO:**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The paper will first provide statistics on illiteracy around the world and its impact on peace. This will be followed by a discussion about the general role of education as an instrument of peace. The rest of the paper will describe the role of Hizmet schools in promoting world peace. More specifically, Hizmet Schools' curriculum, pedagogy, and relationship building between students and teachers, home and school, school and community will be examined. The paper will conclude with some recommendations for universalizing the Hizmet educational model for promoting peace.

Key Words: Peace education, Hizmet schools, Global peace, Peace curriculum

***“Education is the best way to serve humanity and to establish dialogue with other civilizations.”***

**Fethullah Gulen (2004, p. 198)**

One of the most important goals of education is to help children to develop the knowledge, attitudes, dispositions, and skills they need to create the conditions for a more peaceful society and world. Translating this noble goal of education into action calls for a thoughtfully-planned curriculum and a dedicated and well-trained teaching faculty that also serve as models of peacebuilders, peacemakers and peacekeepers. In this paper, the topic of educating for peace will be addressed through examining one educational model practiced by a transnational civic movement known as the Hizmet Movement. The paper is organized in six sections: 1) global illiteracy; 2) education as an instrument of and for peace; 3) Hizmet schools' peace curriculum and pedagogy; 4) relationship building between students and teachers, home and school, and

school and community in the Hizmet model; and 5) universalizing the Hizmet educational model for promoting peace.

We begin by surveying the global illiteracy landscape.

### **Global Illiteracy**

According to UN statistics (2023), more than 244 million children around the world are denied access to education. Hundred and thirty million of those are girls (2023). In underscoring the importance of educating women, somebody said, “If you teach a boy, you teach an individual. You teach a girl, a woman, you teach a community”. That is where the activism for the right of all children to education by the 17-year-old Pakistani 2014 Nobel Prize recipient, Malala Yousafzai, is truly phenomenal, especially when looked at and considered against these numbers of children who are denied the right to education. Moreover, it is estimated that only 87 percent of adults around the world are literate. Put together, almost a billion people, nearly one-seventh of the population of the earth, is illiterate, and is denied a basic human right to education.

It would take \$5 billion a year for several years to achieve universal literacy, and to reduce the huge economic and social repercussions of illiteracy. The economic costs of illiteracy are enormous and estimated to be about \$1.9 billion a year. The social consequences of illiteracy to the individual, society, and the world are as, if not more, massive than the economic ones.

Hence, in educating for peace, efforts must first focus on ensuring that the human right to education is available to everyone (Bhat and Jamatia, 2022; Page, 2008). The second step is to ensure that we go beyond literacy to inculcating universal values and principles of peace in students. That is, once literacy is achieved, we must imbue and overlay it with peace literacy. Why and how peace literacy can be promoted through education are discussed in the next section.

## **Education as an instrument of Peace**

Many thinkers, educators, researchers, and organizations around the world envisage education as the path to a global culture of peace. Maria Montessori (1949) asserted that “preventing war is the work of politics, peace is the work of education”, (p.24). Velez and Gerstein (2021) and Harris & Synott (2002) highlight the role of education in promoting peace. More specifically, they stress that educating for peace must consist of teaching encounters that engender a desire for peace and a disposition toward nonviolent and constructive alternatives to managing and resolving conflict. In post-conflict settings, attention is given to the pivotal capacity of education in building and sustaining peace (Bajaj, 2019; Vartan, 2012; Velez, 2021).

Organizations such as Teachers Without Borders (TWB), asserts that “if wars begin in the human mind, then it is through our minds—through education—that war can be vanquished by peace” (teacherswithoutborders.org). Teachers Without Borders is also an impactful contributor to the growing movement toward a global culture of peace by providing teachers with both a minds-on and hands-on framework for peace education. Similarly, Education International (EI), which is the world’s largest global federation of teachers’ trade unions, views education as “the key to uniting nations, bringing human beings closely together,” and promotes education as a human right and public good (EI, 2015). Likewise, Pathways to Peace considers education as “the foundation of a peaceful society (Pathways to Peace, 2015). The United Nation has been pioneering peace education for a long time. The former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon underscored the role of education in promoting peace as follows “Let us pledge to teach our children the value of tolerance and mutual respect. Let us invest in the schools and teachers that will build a fair and inclusive world that embraces diversity. Let us fight for peace and defend it with all our might” (Pathways to Peace, 2015).

**The foregoing begs an answer to the question: what type of education promotes peace and, how is the education done?**

There is a spectrum of focal points in educational programs for peace that seems to revolve around three major themes: conflict resolution training, democracy education, and human rights education. Researchers (i.e., Bhat and Jamatia, 2022, Higgins and Novelli, 2020; Reardon, 1988, 1997, 1995; Roche, 1993, Van Slyck, Stern, and Elbedour, 1999) who focus on these three themes all view education as the vehicle to promulgate a culture of peace.

Many (i.e., Montessori) assert that “without explicit and intentional moral and spiritual education, mankind would inevitably revert to its habit of war” (Duckworth, 2006, p.40). Martin Buber believed that “education worthy of the name is essentially education of character” (Buber and Smith, 1951). In a similar fashion, the Gulen-inspired Hizmet educational project believes in educating the whole person: mind, heart and soul. The next section first provides a brief background about the Hizmet movement before delving into how Hizmet schools serve as a role model for fostering peace.

### **Hizmet Schools**

Hizmet is a Turkish word which means “service,” and stands for a transnational civic movement inspired by the Islamic Turkish scholar, Fethullah Gulen. Gulen was influenced by the peaceful activism, thinking, teachings and writings of Said Nursi, an Islamic scholar who died in 1960. He wrote the Risale-i Nur Collection (Letters of Divine Light), which consists of more than six thousand pages of commentary on the Qur’an. Nursi identified three major challenges and obstacles to humanity’s progress toward peace: ignorance, poverty, and disunity or conflict (Markham and Pirim, 2016; Rahim and Akhmetova, 2019). He proposed a solution

for each: education to dispel ignorance; opportunity, relief, and charity to eradicate poverty; and tolerance, understanding and dialogue to bring about unity and solidarity. Fethullah Gulen put the three solutions Nursi proposed into action. The Hizmet movement he inspired established charitable and relief organizations to help the poor, founded dialogue centers to build bridges among people of diverse backgrounds, and founded schools to eradicate ignorance. To achieve the monumental task of uprooting ignorance, Gulen, much like leading thinkers in education such Horace Mann, John Dewey and Ernest Boyer, stresses the need for schools to be as concerned with developing, shaping, and nurturing character as with academics (Nelson, 2005; Osman, 2010).

There are currently over 750 Hizmet schools operating in more than 170 countries around the world. These schools first started in the 1980s in Turkey, and in the early 1990 spread to Central Asia and gradually to every continent. Many of the schools are in regions and countries that have experienced or are still experiencing hostility, war, social, ethnic, and religious conflict, poverty such as in Bosnia, Nigeria, Philippine, Pakistan, Somalia, Ethiopia. The schools, especially in conflict-ridden and war-ravaged countries like Afghanistan, served as sanctuaries of peace that nurture and expand children's and adolescents' capacity for tolerance, peaceful coexistence, and mutual understanding. In following with Gulen's guidance, the schools have a two-pronged mission: to illuminate the mind with knowledge and kindle the heart and soul in faith and virtue. The schools help children to become caring, empathic, compassionate, principled, and self-disciplined by meeting their psychological needs for belonging, autonomy and competence. The school personnel are well aware that their students will identify and engage more readily with the school and its initiatives when the school satisfies their psychological needs. This is in line with recommendations of character development researchers

and educators. For example, Schaps, Battistich & Solomon (1997) stated that schools can satisfy students' intellectual development and social and ethical growth by providing opportunities for membership in a caring community of learners as well as important, challenging, and engaging learning opportunities. Indeed, Hizmet schools provide such opportunities to their students in a concerted, intentional, and comprehensive fashion to enable and empower them to become effective moral agents who know the good, desire the good, and do the good.

Peacebuilding is promoted in Hizmet schools through a number of factors: (1) inspiration and attentive guidance of Hizmet's spiritual guide, Fethullah Gulen—the master teacher who is affectionately called Hocaefendi by his followers and sympathizers; (2) caring, concerned, and compassionate teachers, administrators and staff members; (3) a curriculum and a pedagogy that engages students' minds and hearts; (4) educating through modeling; (5) cultivation of constructive attitudes and ways of dealing and living with others; and (6) engendering a mastery learning orientation in students. Each of these factors is briefly discussed next.

### **Fethullah Gulen, Peace Inspirer**

Fethullah Gulen is an influential figure in peace education and has advanced a vision and pedagogy for peace. Hizmet educational system derives its inspiration from Fethullah Gulen's faith-based action-oriented philosophy of education. The ultimate goal of education for Gulen is not to produce an individual who will feed the materialistic machine, to land a good-paying job, or to live the good life and enjoy a higher standard of living than those who do not “earn” a degree. To him, the aim of education is to fuse science with spirituality and to raise what he calls a “Golden Generation.” The Golden Generation is one that will use knowledge to: guide its life, strive to continually refine and perfect its development, and serve selflessly so others (all human beings)

can live in peace and harmony. They will, in addition, be good citizens who have deep regard for themselves and others, who are committed to democracy and the core values of justice and caring, and who strive to be civil and considerate in their interactions with others.

“Tolerance, a term which we use in place of the words respect, mercy, generosity, or forbearance, is the most essential element of moral systems; it is a very important source of spiritual discipline and a celestial virtue of perfected people” (Gulen, 2004, pp.33-34).

### **Faculty & Staff**

The administrators, teaching faculty, and school staff in Hizmet schools view their work as a sacred duty. They view educating students as an awesome responsibility which they assume with a high level of commitment and dedication. Teachers, in particular, believe that in addition to helping students to become top performers in every academic subject, they also deem it their utmost duty to help students in their personal, spiritual and character development. They empower their students to become moral agents who engage in systematic and intentional pro-social behavior. Moreover, the teachers deliberately seek to cultivate virtue in the minds, hearts, and souls of their students. This practice is in line with Lickona’s (2012) thinking, particularly his description of character as comprised of a cognitive, an affective, and a behavioral dimension. The cognitive component is responsible for moral knowing; the affective part carries out the moral feeling; and the behavioral aspect carries out moral action. Thus, an individual with good character knows the good, desires the good, and does the good. Put another way, Lickona (2012) views the cognitive as the place where habits of mind are cultivated, the affective as the site for habits of heart, and the behavioral as the stage where habits of actions or behaviors are activated and enacted. Teachers in Hizmet schools address all of these three dimensions.

## **Dual-Focused Curriculum & Pedagogy**

Hizmet schools deliberately strive to integrate science and knowledge with spirituality. In Gulen's view, the emphasis on cultivating students' mind and heart metaphorically imparts two wings to the learner with which to fly while firmly anchored in universal ethical values. Repeatedly in his writings, Gulen points out the need to blend and adorn knowledge with love so that students become well versed in the modern sciences and acquire the skills to thoughtfully and wisely apply what they learn for the sake of others. In this regard, Gulen's perspective of adorning knowledge with self-sacrificing love is similar to Bertrand Russel (1961) who asserted that "There is only one road to progress, in education as in other human affairs, and that is: Science wielded by love. Without science, love is powerless; without love, science is destructive" (p.158).

## **Educating Through Modeling**

Teachers, administrators, school staff, student mentors and volunteer teachers are selected and hired for their strong academic qualifications and moral and ethical dispositions. The schools fully recognize the potent impact of seeing in addition to hearing. That is, the school personnel are devoted to representing what they preach in action before they preach it or teach it to students. When they speak about universal values such as altruism, honesty, integrity, trustworthiness, courage, respect, tolerance, responsibility, love, and compassion, teachers follow Gulen's guidance of internalizing these values and model them before they instill such values in their students (Yucel, 2010). Gulen strongly urges teachers to represent and model the values before they communicate and inculcate them in their students. Teachers diligently follow this instruction as attested to by the following words of an observer of Gulen-inspired schools "Gulen schools excel in academics because the instructors strive for perfection not only in having a command of

their subject matter but also in (1) loving and caring for their students and (2) developing their own character as much as, if not more than, their students' character" (Woodhall, 2009).

### **Constructive Attitudes & Actions**

Students are socialized in the ideals of tolerance and dialogue, which Gulen regards as "the two roses of the Emerald Hills." This is accomplished by nourishing students with the moral lesson of "without hands against those who strike you, without speech against those who curse you" (Gulen, 2004, p. 54). This dictum is modeled and practiced in schools. Focus is given to the role of self-disciplined training to deepen one's sense and capacity for love and compassion and to put them into action to embrace others. Emphasis is placed on adopting constructive means to resolve differences and conflicts with others.

### **Mastery-Learning Orientation**

Peacebuilding is also fostered by Hizmet schools through making students associate learning with positive outcomes so that they gradually become passionate about learning—both scientific knowledge and self-sacrificial love. The students strive to excel so that they can be instruments of mercy for humanity. The different types of Olympiads that Hizmet schools participate in internationally and locally are an outward expression of students' continual and diligent endeavors to perfect their knowledge and skills and their untiring struggle to refine their character (Dayan and Yildiz, 2022).

To conclude, the worldwide Hizmet educational initiatives are promoting peace in the more than 170 countries they operate in. These schools help boys and girls gain an education

and shower them with hope. They also equip them with universal moral values that instill in them love, respect, peace, and service-oriented ethic for all people of the world.

The Hizmet schools remain committed to being at the forefront of waging global peace. Its educational model is worth emulating by others who aim at educating students to be effective and better prepared to promote the cause of peace in their respective communities.

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