



Making Education Policy a Force for Peace

WHITE PAPER

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Thabyay - Draft

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Executive Summary

Education is inherently a values-laden endeavor, infusing learners with ideas and knowledge, equipping them with skills, and exposing them to perspectives that shape their behavior in society. Education is intertwined with identity formation, and in education systems developed by states, is a tool for nation-building. As Myanmar undergoes rapid, complex political and economic reforms and undertakes a peace process, education has a critical role to play in shaping the future of the nation. In particular, important consideration must be given to the education sector's potential to catalyze or hinder progress towards sustainable peace. Education can provide pathways to prevent and mitigate violence and shape a culture of peace. This can be supported through culturally and linguistically inclusive curriculum, through integrating peace and non-violence education into learning content, teaching methods, and school culture, as well as through administrative structures that are conflict sensitive, inclusive, and protect the rights of all learners. However, when lacking conflict sensitivity and proactive peace education strategies, education can also fuel and exacerbate violence. Curricular content and language that favor certain groups and perpetuate negative stereotypes, ineffective teaching methods, issues with teacher deployment and recruitment, and lack of local decision-making may contribute to inter-group grievances and aggravate conflict dynamics. Moreover, attention must be paid to the consequences of conflict for the education sector. Armed conflict and outbreaks of inter communal violence directly impact schools and obstruct educational opportunities for learners in vulnerable, conflict-affected areas. All of these dynamics need to be understood, and policies and strategies need to be in place to reduce the forces against peace and strengthen forces for peace in the Myanmar education system.

This white paper looks at the relationship between the formal education sector and peace and conflict dynamics in Myanmar. It discusses critical dynamics in the Myanmar national education system that are, or could become, hindrances to sustainable peace, and offers a vision and strategic recommendations to make the education system more peace-promoting and conflict sensitive. The analysis and recommendations are informed by key informant interviews and a series of grassroots policymaking workshops conducted with civil society organizations and education providers in Yangon, Shan State, and on the Myanmar-Thailand border between November 2016 and May 2017.

This report offers recommendations that align with policy objectives already adopted by the Government of Myanmar and the Ministry of Education in the current education reform process. It takes the National Education Law (2014) as a starting point, which aspires to establish values that are part of a culture of peace, namely democratic citizenship, respect for diversity, human rights, and sustainable development. In particular, the NEL articulates the following objectives of national education:

(b) To produce citizens who respect and follow the law by practicing their civic and democratic duties and upholding standards of human rights.

(c) To develop union spirit and to create citizens who respect, value, preserve and develop all the ethnic groups' languages, literatures, culture, arts, traditions, and

historical heritage and who value and protect the natural environment and who can carry out sustainable development and pass these things on to others.¹

These objectives provide a legal basis upon which to build an education system that could improve social participation and cohesion, and contribute to the long-term goal of national reconciliation in Myanmar. But for this and other policy instruments to be genuine and effective, there is a need for political will and investment in transforming the obstacles and hindrances to sustainable peace that exist in the current education system. This white paper aims to provide insight into those obstacles, and offer actionable recommendations for peace-promoting strategies and proactive peace education initiatives. The discussion and analysis revolve around three thematic issue areas that emerged in our engagement with stakeholders: 1) curriculum; 2) teacher education; and 3) partnerships between government and non-government education service providers. These thematic areas also reflect strategic priority issues in the recently published National Education Strategic Plan (NESP). The white paper offers recommendations for policies and procedures in each of these areas that support the vision of peace developed by stakeholders.

In addition to analysis and recommendations for education policies, this paper provides a case study of a collaborative workshop process for grassroots consultation and policymaking that employs peace education pedagogy. The workshops were designed to “walk the talk” of peace education by using peace education techniques applied to public policy. This paper offers lessons learned from these workshops on the experience of engaging diverse education providers in dialogue and critical reflection on issues in the education system that affect them and the students in their schools. Therefore this project aims to provide insight from a practitioner lens to help inform future consultation and planning processes at a grassroots community level, to make them as inclusive and genuine as possible.

¹ National Education Law 2014, Chapter 2

Summary:

Obstacles to sustainable peace in the Myanmar education system

- Centralized management and administration of education system, and absence of specific policies and procedures to support federalized education system
- Unclear and undeveloped policies and procedures to support inclusive, mother-tongue based/multilingual education
- Discriminatory terminologies in national curriculum
- Discrimination and lack of inclusion and diversity in narratives, histories, and perspectives in the national curriculum
- Students experiencing bullying in schools based on ethnic, linguistic, and religious identities
- Gender segregation in schools
- Gender discrimination in university entrance exam
- Language discrimination in examination and assessment systems
- Teaching methodologies that overemphasize rote memorization; lack of teaching of critical thinking skills and engaged pedagogy
- Imposition of dominant religion and culture in classroom and school activities
- Discriminatory attitudes and insensitivity of teachers toward students from different backgrounds
- Negative/punitive discipline practices by teachers
- Violent home environments reproduced by students in school
- Inadequate teacher salaries
- Lack of locally contextualized curricular content
- Discriminatory teacher recruitment and deployment practices
- Deployment of inadequately prepared teachers
- Construction and renovation of schools without consultation with local community
- Lack of legal recognition of ethnic education systems
- Lack of transfer mechanisms for students from non-government schools
- Lack of protection mechanisms for schools in conflict-affected areas
- Traumatized teachers and students in conflict-affected areas
- Lack of material support to remote schools

The

CURRICULUM

- Prioritize peace education in the review and reform of the basic education curriculum to develop inclusive, multicultural curriculum that positively reflects the diversity of Myanmar/Burma.
- Include diverse ethnic education experts with contextualized knowledge and language skills on the National Curriculum Committee.
- Include a thematic advisor on peace education and conflict sensitivity in the Ministry of Education.
- Develop age appropriate and contextualized peace education competencies, including applied skills and subject content, to include in the new Basic Education Curriculum, as part of the package of 21st century skills
- Provide technical training to the Basic Education Curriculum and Textbook Committees on how to evaluate curriculum for conflict sensitivity, bias, and promotion of a culture of peace.
- Analyze language and terminology referring to identity groups in the curriculum (ethnic, racial, religious, political, gender, ability, class, and others). Ensure that terminologies do not reproduce stereotypes, discriminate, or cause conflict.
- Include ethnic education providers from non-government school systems in the Basic Education Curriculum and Textbook committees to review the new curriculum to ensure peace education principles and conflict sensitivity.
- Seek technical assistance from CSOs and non-formal education organizations that have developed contextualized curriculum and training materials in peace related subject areas, including: human rights, child rights, peace and conflict, civic education, inclusive histories of Myanmar, gender, inter-religious dialogue, sustainable development, and others.
- Train Local Curriculum Development Teams in conflict sensitivity and peace education principles

TEACHER EDUCATION AND MANAGEMENT

- Provide sufficient and dignified salaries to teachers to ensure they do not need to supplement income through the tuition system
- Prioritize peace education knowledge, skills, values, and mindsets in the new Teacher Quality Assurance Management Programme and in pre-service and in-service training for teachers
- Require the forthcoming Teacher Education Council to have experts with skills and experience in peace education and conflict sensitivity in its membership.
- Require skills and experience in peace education as a hiring criteria for staff members of the forthcoming National Centre for Teacher Professional Development (NCTPD)
- Train teacher trainers and mentors (TAMs) in peace education competencies.
- Integrate peace education competencies and professional standards into the new Teacher Competency Framework, for example:
- Use peace education approaches and activities in pre-service and in-service teacher training that educators can easily replicate in the classroom.
- Strengthen the MoE's capacity in teacher training by learning lessons from non-government education providers

PARTNERSHIPS WITH NON-GOVERNMENT EDUCATION SYSTEMS

- Create procedures and guidelines for meaningful, transparent, consultation and dialogue with local communities regarding education service provision. Consistently apply these procedures and guidelines with local communities before beginning any new construction or upgrades of schools or deploying new teachers.
- Conduct a conflict analysis as part of the development of the National School Infrastructure Investment Plan.
- Ensure new infrastructure is built in consultation with local communities in a way that does not exacerbate conflict dynamics.
- Develop a conflict sensitive assessment framework to assess needs for new schools and teachers. Conduct conflict assessments in collaboration with local communities as part of the consultation process.
- Include community leaders/members, parents, students, teachers and school leaders in consultations.
- Deploy new teachers to newly constructed schools and mixed administration schools in an equitable, transparent, and conflict sensitive manner that responds to the needs of local communities.
- Establish an accreditation system to legally recognize and affirm ethnic education providers and create transfer pathways to government schools.
- Recognize attainment of students who have studied in ethnic schools, refugee camp schools, and migrant schools through acceptance of their transcripts and placement at grade level.
- Provide supplemental support to students transitioning from ethnic schools, refugee camp schools, and migrant schools
- Create a financial support mechanism for schools outside of MOE administration in consultation with these schools and education systems

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Introduction

What is education for? This question points to a critical issue at the heart of Thabyay Education Foundation's Education for Peace Policy Project. Education is inherently a values-laden endeavor, infusing learners with ideas and knowledge, equipping them with skills, and exposing them to perspectives that shape their behavior in society. Education is intertwined with identity formation, and in education systems developed by states, is a tool for national identity and state-building. In its positive expression, education, whether in formal or non-formal settings, undertakes this project through a participatory and democratic approach that advances dignity, rights, and well-being for *all* at local, national, and global levels. In its negative form, education can be a tool of control and exclusion, privileging certain groups and narratives, and may be marked by structural forms of discrimination and barriers to development. In Myanmar, education has a critical role to play in equipping citizens for democratic participation and peaceful coexistence in an extremely diverse and transitioning society. When asking "What is education for?" in Myanmar, this project responds emphatically, "Education is for peace." But such a claim raises significant new questions and challenges—What is meant by peace? Peace for whom? How do we practically implement education for peace?

This white paper is the result of an exploratory project undertaken by Thabyay Education Foundation between November 2016 and June 2017 which sought to answer this and other questions surrounding the relationship between education and peace in Myanmar. In particular, this project asks the question "How might we make education policy a force for peace in Myanmar?" The focus on educational policy development and advocacy represents a new strategic area of Thabyay's work, in alignment with Thabyay's mission of transforming lives and building a peaceful, just and prosperous Myanmar.

Methodology

While not a formal academic research project, this white paper aims to contribute to an evidence base to support educational policy formation through a lens of conflict sensitivity and promotion of a culture of peace. The insights gathered and recommendations offered in this paper are an outcome of consultation with educational leaders in Thabyay's partner network, which primarily comprises non-formal education organizations, CSOs, and schools serving ethnic minority students from marginalized parts of Myanmar. Information was gathered through: a) A desk review of publications, research, and initiatives related to education for peace in Myanmar; b) Interviews and meetings with key informants from 11 education and civil society organizations in Lashio, Yangon, and Maesot between November 2016 and May 2017; c) A Peace Education teacher training workshop in Lashio in November 2016, d) Two collaborative policymaking workshops: one in Yangon in March 2017 with 20 representatives from 15 education organizations, and one in Pyin Oo Lwin in June 2017 with 30 representatives from 9 education organizations. Participants in these interviews and workshops included teachers, teacher trainers, school heads/administrators, educational CSO leaders, and ethnic education system leaders.

The workshops used a learner-centered approach and activities informed by peace education pedagogy. In this way the workshops provided a case study for conducting training, consultation, and policymaking with a peace education model. The project sought to build

contextualized concepts of peace and definitions of peace education, and link these to global frameworks. Workshop participants developed visions for future peace in Myanmar, with a focus on the education sector. They analyzed obstacles and threats to peace in the Myanmar education system, and identified strategies to overcome these obstacles. Participants engaged in extensive dialogue and used consensus-based approaches to identify policy priorities and generate recommendations for a policy framework and guidelines to promote conflict-sensitive and peace promoting education.

This phase of the project focused on working closely with ethnic and non-governmental education providers. The rationale behind this approach was to center marginalized perspectives to build a foundation for an inclusive policymaking process. The organizations consulted in the initial phase of the project exist in large part as a response to gaps and barriers in the government education system; therefore in order to move toward the government's goal of universal access to quality education for all, these stakeholders must be well understood and meaningfully engaged. In future stages of the project Thabyay aims to expand the scope of consultation and collaborative policymaking workshops to include MoE government schools, teachers, and administrators.

This work is informed by and builds on several recent initiatives and research projects undertaken by CSOs, NGOs, and international organizations that address the intersection of the education sector with peace and conflict issues in Myanmar. Notable among these are: 1) The Asia Foundation's research on ethnic education systems; 2) UNICEF Peacebuilding, Education and Advocacy Programme's research on The Role of Peacebuilding in Education; 3) Thabyay Education Foundation's report on Conflict Sensitivity in Education Provision in Karen State; 4) The MINE Declaration developed in February 2014 by the Myanmar Indigenous Network for Education. The findings and recommendations contained in this report uphold and affirm many of the conclusions of the aforementioned initiatives. In addition, this report emphasizes strategic approaches for integration of peace education and conflict sensitivity into the Myanmar education system in light of recent policy developments (especially the NESP), with a particular focus on curricular reform, teacher education, and partnerships between government and non-state education providers.

Myanmar Policy Context

The education system in Myanmar has long been a contested space that both shapes and is affected by conflict dynamics among diverse groups. Education has played an important role in ethnic and religious identity formation through the promotion of particular languages, culture, history, and faith traditions in schools. In the pre-independence era, British colonizers' and western missionaries' efforts to create a state education system tended to favor "ethnic minority" elites, thereby engendering divisions between the ethnic minorities and the majority Buddhist and Bamar population.² After the military coup in 1962, General Ne Win's implementation of the "Burmese Way to Socialism" included nationalization of all religious and private schools, broad centralization of educational administration, implementation of a national curriculum, and the banning of ethnic minority languages in schools. This ushered in

² Joliffe, K and Speers Meers, p.7

an era of Bamar-centric language, literacy and culture in the education system, which became a source of grievance for non-Bamar ethnic peoples.³ In addition, the military junta systematically underfunded education, dismantled and neglected universities to suppress political opposition, and instituted curriculum and teaching practices based in rote memorization, thereby depriving students of opportunities to develop creative and critical thinking skills.

Myanmar is beginning to emerge from the era of failed education under military rule, and in recent years the government has made efforts to reform the educational system and make gains toward quality education and access for all learners. In 2012, President Thein Sein initiated an education reform process, and since then several important milestones have been achieved. These include the passage of the National Education Law (2014) and amendments to the NEL in 2015, and the completion of the three year Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR) process. Education reform efforts continued under the new NLD-led government. These include a curriculum reform process, the appointment of a National Education Policy Commission and the publication of the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) 2016-2021. The NESP sets forth ambitious goals and strategies to transform the educational system in Myanmar with a primary focus on “teaching and learning, vocational education and training, research and innovation leading to measurable improvements in student achievement in all schools and educational institutions.”⁴ These education reform efforts emphasize educational quality and access, with an aim of achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 for Education, leveling up to match educational standards of neighboring countries in the ASEAN region, and preparing students for participation in a modern and competitive economy.

Reform efforts in the education sector have been occurring in parallel to the national peace process. The democratically elected government which came into power in 2016 has made both education and the peace process top government priorities, but has treated them as distinct policy areas, though in reality they are inextricably linked. Questions regarding the structure and mechanisms for a federal union carry enormous implications for the administration of education systems, and will need to be addressed in peace process negotiations. Moreover, transformation of educational governance structures, curriculum, and quality of instruction carry great potential to positively impact the peace process, as these have been areas of historical grievance for conflict-affected communities. High-level policy instruments make the connection between peace and education: the National Education Law mentions the role of education in producing democratic citizens who respect diversity, and the NESP states that “Education will play a key role in securing the lasting peace and security of the nation.”⁵ However, there are not yet clear and detailed implementation strategies to ensure that the education system achieves these goals of democratic citizenship, respect for diversity, and promotion of lasting peace and security. There is opportunity and a need to more explicitly integrate education considerations into the peace process, as well as apply peace education and conflict sensitive approaches more systematically in the education reform process. This white paper aims to support this integration through targeted peace education policy recommendations and strategies.

³ Ibid, p.6

⁴ *National Education Strategic Plan 2016-21*, p. 10

⁵ Ibid, p.7

Findings and Recommendations for Making Education Policy a Force for Peace in Myanmar

1. Vision for the future

A strategy for making education a force for peace in Myanmar requires clearly defined vision, principles, objectives and implementing procedures. This project sought to develop such a strategy from the ground up in genuine, collaborative dialogue with civil society. This process began by asking participants to envision what a peace-promoting education system might look like 15 years from now, after the current generation of children entering the education system have completed basic education. The visions brought forth in this exercise were diverse and inspiring, for example:

"Public schools have rights to determine local education policies and administrations. There are no discriminations against races and faiths, and students are trained in different learning ways, not just passive memorization."⁶

"The presence of a happy learning environment, where people promote justice, appreciation, respect, trust, and adopting simplicity practices"⁷

"A modernized education system, students have a chance to choose their favorite subject, use mother language, and teacher teaches enthusiastically to students."⁸

While varied in their specific expressions, key principles and values emerged in these visions. These principles include:

- Equity. Access and opportunities are provided for all children in Myanmar. This includes free, compulsory, and holistic education for all up to high school and support for students who have fallen behind. In particular with respect to peace education, this includes access to quality education *without the fear of violence* for every child.
- Non-violence. Learning environments are free from all forms of violence including corporal punishment, psychological violence, and bullying. Schools are physically safe and protected from civil war, violent conflict and outbreaks of inter communal violence.
- Inclusion and respect for diversity. Diverse racial, ethnic, religious, gender, ability, and other groups are valued at all levels of the education system and represented in curriculum. Non-discrimination is practiced, and is emphasized by teachers.
- Local decision-making and governance. Community and school leaders have authority to determine educational priorities and policies at local levels that respond the needs and realities of their contexts.
- Student-centered learning. Students are trained in creative, participatory, learner-centered, interactive teaching methods that encourage freedom of choice and emphasize critical thinking.
- Multilingualism. Mother-tongue languages are used as languages of instruction, as well as Myanmar and English for successful participation in national and global society.

⁶ Workshop participants, Yangon, March 2017

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Workshop participants, Pyin Oo Lwin, June 2017

- Mutuality. Values and skills emphasizing mutual interdependence and common humanity are taught and practiced, including trust, unity, appreciation, and knowledge-sharing among diverse people and groups.
- Holism. Peace and well-being in all areas of students' lives are promoted through education, including mental, physical, and emotional health, and safe, non-violent, positive environments at school, home, and in community.
- Care for the environment. Protection of the environment, responsible use of natural resources, sustainable lifestyles and simplicity practices are taught and practiced.

The above principles reflect a comprehensive and holistic understanding of peace responding to both the direct and structural violence currently present in the Myanmar education system. In terms of direct violence, the visions set forth acknowledged a need to eliminate instances of physical and psychological violence in the Myanmar education system—in particular bullying, discrimination from teachers and among students, corporal punishment, and security risks to students and schools due to outbreaks of violent conflict. In terms of indirect violence, these visions reflected the need to overcome structural injustices, in particular the lack of equitable access to educational services, exclusion of certain groups from representation in curriculum (in particular ethnic, linguistic, and religious minorities), and undemocratic educational administration and governance structures that exclude local communities from decision-making. Many of these principles align with the Ministry of Education's policy priorities as outlined in the NEL, NESP and the Basic Education Curriculum Framework. At the same time, these principles center peace and conflict issues more explicitly than existing policy instruments. In this way these visions provide a more proactive peace lens to guide educational policy analysis and formation.

2. Obstacles and Opportunities

This project sought to collaborate with stakeholders to critically reflect on the obstacles that hinder the education system from being a driving force for peace, and identify opportunities for positive change. The issues discussed by key informants and workshop participants fall broadly into three overlapping spheres in the education sector: (i) curriculum; (ii) pedagogy and teaching methods; and (iii) educational settings (including administrative considerations). Taken together, these three areas comprise a systemic framework for peace education that emphasizes peace and conflict sensitivity in the content, form, and structure of teaching and learning (see Figure 1). The content, or curriculum, answers the question of *what* is being taught and learned. Pedagogy answers the question of *how* educators teach and communicate. It includes teaching methods but also includes the teacher-learner relationship. The structure of the educational setting answers the question of *where* teaching and learning occurs, but goes beyond a description of the physical space and infrastructure of the school, and also includes administrative arrangements and the policy or regulatory environment.⁹

⁹ Knox-Cubbon, S. *Dr. Joseph Hungwa Memorial Peace Education Program*, Unit 3.1, p. 2

Peace Education is Holistic/Systemic

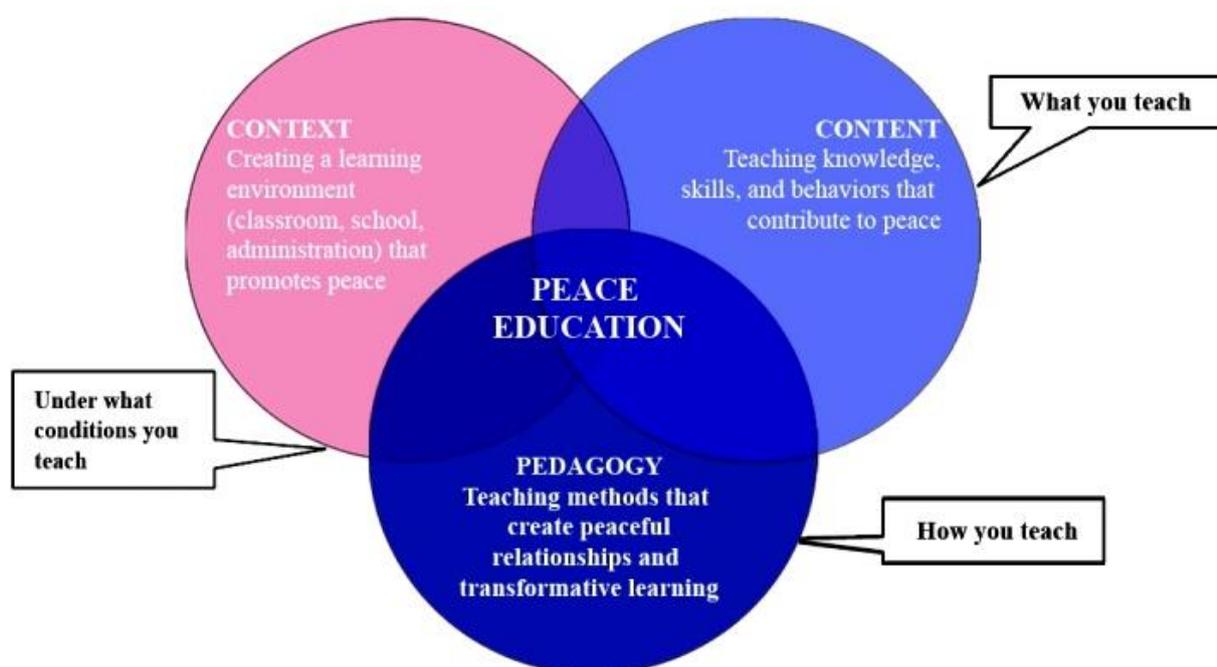


Figure 1: Systemic Framework for Peace Education

i. Curriculum

"We want a curriculum that works for everyone."—participant, Making Education Policy a Force for Peace workshop, Pyin Oo Lwin

The Myanmar national curriculum for basic education is currently undergoing a review process that is slated to be completed by 2019.¹⁰ This is the first comprehensive review of the curriculum in over 30 years and marks a major opportunity for transformation of teaching and learning, though not without significant challenges. The new curriculum will be guided by principles set forth in the National Curriculum Framework, which has been developed and is pending implementation. At a broad level, the values and principles set forth in the National Curriculum Framework provide a foundation that a peace education approach could be built upon. However, in order for curriculum to be genuine force for peace in Myanmar, there will need to be specific and proactive implementation mechanisms to ensure that curriculum is reformed and developed in a way that is peace-promoting and conflict sensitive.

Teachers, educational leaders, and parents consulted in this project identified existing national curriculum as a source of discrimination and emphasized a need for new, inclusive curricula that

¹⁰ Higgins, S et al. *The Role of Peacebuilding in Education, Country Report: Myanmar*, p. 113

respect and represent diverse perspectives and narratives, and that are contextualized to local communities both linguistically and culturally. Most notably, participants pointed to a lack of inclusive ethnic histories and languages in the current national curriculum and viewed this as an obstacle to peace. Participants highlighted Myanmar's immense diversity and emphasized that curriculum does not adequately reflect Myanmar's many languages, peoples, and cultures. Lessons favor representation of the majority ethnic and religious groups. This lack of inclusion may impede positive identity development for non-majority students at an individual level. For example, participants cited instances of students from religious minority groups being forced to participate in Buddhist prayers and rituals at school and being ostracized and bullied by both classmates and teachers for practicing a different religion, and this leading to increased likelihood of dropping out of school.¹¹

In addition to lack of representation and inclusivity, participants identified language and narratives that perpetuate negative stereotypes against certain groups as a force against peace. As an example, stakeholders from areas controlled by ethnic armed organizations cited ethnic minority groups being described as "rebels" in the history lessons, which they viewed as discriminatory and a reason to reject the national curriculum. Biases embedded in the curriculum have the potential to exacerbate conflict dynamics in communities by contributing to ethnic minority grievances against dominant groups.

Participants also pointed to a need for local, contextualized, and relevant curriculum in order to improve conditions for peace.¹² Many stakeholders expressed frustration with the irrelevance and lack of practicality of the current curriculum in relation to both environmental and cultural considerations in their local contexts. They also noted a general lack of curricula on Peace Education themes including tolerance and non-discrimination, inclusion, respect for diversity, religious and cultural literacy, conflict resolution, positive discipline, and gender equality.

A conflict-sensitive and peace-promoting approach would reform curriculum to appreciatively recognize and equitably represent diverse ethnic/minority groups. Curriculum would be accessible in diverse mother-tongues, and have inclusive histories that feature the accomplishments and challenges of Myanmar's diverse ethnic groups, from their perspectives. Language and terminology would need to be conflict sensitive to assure that it does no harm and does not perpetuate discriminatory stereotypes. Moreover, subject areas and thematic content would need to be integrated that teaches students skills for living peacefully in their local contexts and environments, and creating conditions for justice and human rights in broader society. In order to do this genuinely and effectively, mechanisms for curriculum development will need to be in place that draw from diverse, credible, and ethical sources.

¹¹ Interview with Lashio residents

¹² Workshop participants, Pyin Oo Lwin, June 2017

Recommendations to the Government of Myanmar for Making Curriculum a Force for Peace:

- Prioritize peace education in the review and reform of the basic education curriculum to develop inclusive, multicultural curriculum that positively reflects the diversity of Myanmar/Burma, including ethnic, linguistic, religious, gender, ability diversity, and others.
- Include diverse ethnic education experts with contextualized knowledge and language skills on the National Curriculum Committee.
- Include a thematic advisor on peace education and conflict sensitivity in the Ministry of Education.
- Develop age appropriate and contextualized peace education competencies, including applied skills and subject content, to include in the new Basic Education Curriculum, as part of the package of 21st century skills
- Provide technical training to the Basic Education Curriculum and Textbook Committees on how to evaluate curriculum for conflict sensitivity, bias, and promotion of a culture of peace.
- Analyze language and terminology referring to identity groups in the curriculum (ethnic, racial, religious, political, gender, ability, class, and others). Ensure that terminologies do not reproduce stereotypes, discriminate, or cause conflict.
- Include ethnic education providers from non-government school systems in the Basic Education Curriculum and Textbook committees to review the new curriculum to ensure peace education principles and conflict sensitivity.
- Seek technical assistance from CSOs and non-formal education organizations that have developed contextualized curriculum and training materials in peace related subject areas, including: human rights, child rights, peace and conflict, civic education, inclusive histories of Myanmar, gender, inter-religious dialogue, sustainable development, and others.
- Train Local Curriculum Development Teams in conflict sensitivity and peace education principles

ii. Teacher Education

“Students come into class with stereotypes and teachers feel challenged”—Educational leader, Maesot

Teachers are the backbone of effective learning. The Ministry of Education has identified teacher education and management as one of the most important strategic areas in the NESP. Specifically, the NESP aims to achieve a transformational shift so that “Teachers support, develop and apply interactive classroom teaching and learning benefiting all students.”¹³ This NESP goal provides a point of departure for building a teacher education program that is conflict sensitive and peace promoting, and that can produce qualified “Peace Teachers”. To do so, teaching and learning approaches that proactively build skills and values for peace need to be encouraged.

¹³ National Education Strategic Plan 2016-21, p. 12

In Myanmar, while teachers are widely respected by students and parents, the profession itself is chronically underfunded, and teachers lack adequate salaries as well as professional development opportunities.¹⁴ Participants in this project repeatedly identified the low salaries and lack of support for teachers as an obstacle to peace. Low salaries drive many government school teachers to support themselves financially through the “Tuition” system of offering additional private classes outside of school to pupils who can afford it. This generates cycles of discrimination and corruption within the school systems as tuition students receive favorable treatment from their teachers.¹⁵

Pre-service and in-service training and professional development vary widely across the government education system. There is currently no system for ensuring teacher quality, and teachers are often not prepared with the adequate knowledge and skills base to teach where they are deployed, particularly in remote and ethnic minority areas. Due to a lack of supply of qualified teachers, the daily wage teacher system deploys unqualified teachers after only one month of training, generally to remote areas. Moreover, teachers (especially women) face insecurity, material hardship, and social isolation when deployed to remote areas.¹⁶ This contributes to low motivation and teacher absenteeism. From the perspective of participants in this project, teachers pose an obstacle to peace when they are deployed to ethnic minority communities without adequate understanding, sensitivity, and respect for the local culture, and when they do not speak the local language.

In addition to challenges related to deployment and low salaries, teaching quality and effectiveness are hindered by existing curriculum and assessment approaches under the highly centralized and top-down administration system. Government teachers have historically been expected to implement the national curriculum through a transmission model emphasizing rote memorization to prepare students for accurate repetition on standardized exams. Teachers are not prepared with student-centered pedagogical methods to engage students in creative, participatory, and transformational learning. Stakeholders consulted in this project identified the lack of teacher competencies in student-centered teaching methods as a major obstacle to peace, as these skills are necessary for building critical thinking skills and peaceful classroom and school cultures.

The MoE is already aiming to train teachers in interactive, student-centered teaching and learning methods. To make education a force for peace, these training programs can be designed using peace teaching pedagogy. Examples of skill-building activities for peaceful coexistence include: team-building activities; collaborative (non-competitive) games; debates; negotiations; non-violent communication and active listening activities; personal reflection exercises; group discussions on challenging issues; role play exploring social justice themes, just to name a few. Teachers who are equipped to facilitate learning in this way will be more likely to cultivate mutuality, non-discrimination, and respect for diversity in their classrooms and schools. In addition to teaching methods, teachers will need training in specialized subject areas relevant to peace (see Figure 2).

¹⁴ Higgins, S et al, *The Role of Peacebuilding in Education Executive Summary*, p.6

¹⁵ Meeting with Kalyanna Metta Foundation on their Conflict Analysis of Myanmar Education System

¹⁶ Higgins, S et al, *The Role of Peacebuilding in Education Executive Summary*, p.6

Operationalizing peace teacher competencies into teacher education programs will indeed be a challenge, as it requires a significant investment of time and resources. However, Myanmar currently has dozens of civil society groups that are providing training and capacity building in peace related subject areas, as well as non-government education providers that have developed teacher training and leadership development programs aimed to cultivate facilitation skills and student-centered teaching and learning methods.¹⁷ Government can partner with civil society actors and ethnic education providers, drawing from local experiences and best practices in order to implement teacher training in a more cost-effective and contextualized way.

Recommendations to the Government of Myanmar for Making Teacher Education and Management a Force for Peace

- Provide sufficient salaries to teachers to ensure they do not need to supplement income through the tuition system

Teaching Quality and Competencies:

- Prioritize peace education knowledge, skills, values, and mindsets in the new Teacher Quality Assurance Management Programme and in pre-service and in-service training for teachers
- Require the forthcoming Teacher Education Council to have experts with skills and experience in peace education and conflict sensitivity in its membership.
- Require skills and experience in peace education as a hiring criteria for staff members of the forthcoming National Centre for Teacher Professional Development (NCTPD)
- Train teacher trainers and mentors (TAMs) in peace education competencies.
- Integrate peace education competencies and professional standards into the new Teacher Competency Framework, for example:
 - Facilitation and communication skills to encourage critical thinking through dialogue, debate, negotiation, group discussions, reflection, and other activities
 - Non-violent conflict resolution and classroom management skills
 - Conflict analysis, diversity awareness, and non-discrimination practices to build safe and inclusive classroom and school environments
 - Play-based and arts-based teaching strategies
 - Subject-area knowledge in peace education topics
- Use peace education approaches and activities in pre-service and in-service teacher training that educators can easily replicate in the classroom.
- Strengthen the MoE's capacity in teacher training by learning lessons from non-government education providers (KTWG mobile teacher training and others)

Teacher-Community Relations:

- Establish teacher hiring criteria that give preference/additional points to teachers from local areas who speak local languages.

¹⁷ Peace Education Working Group, Peace Education systems mapping, Yangon, June 21, 2017

- Ensure teachers demonstrate cultural sensitivity, respect for local people, culture, and languages, and competencies in professional and social relations before they are deployed to remote ethnic areas.
- Create pathways for teachers from ethnic education systems and refugee schools to obtain MoE teacher accreditation and licensing.
- Include input from parents, students, and local community leaders in assessing teacher effectiveness.

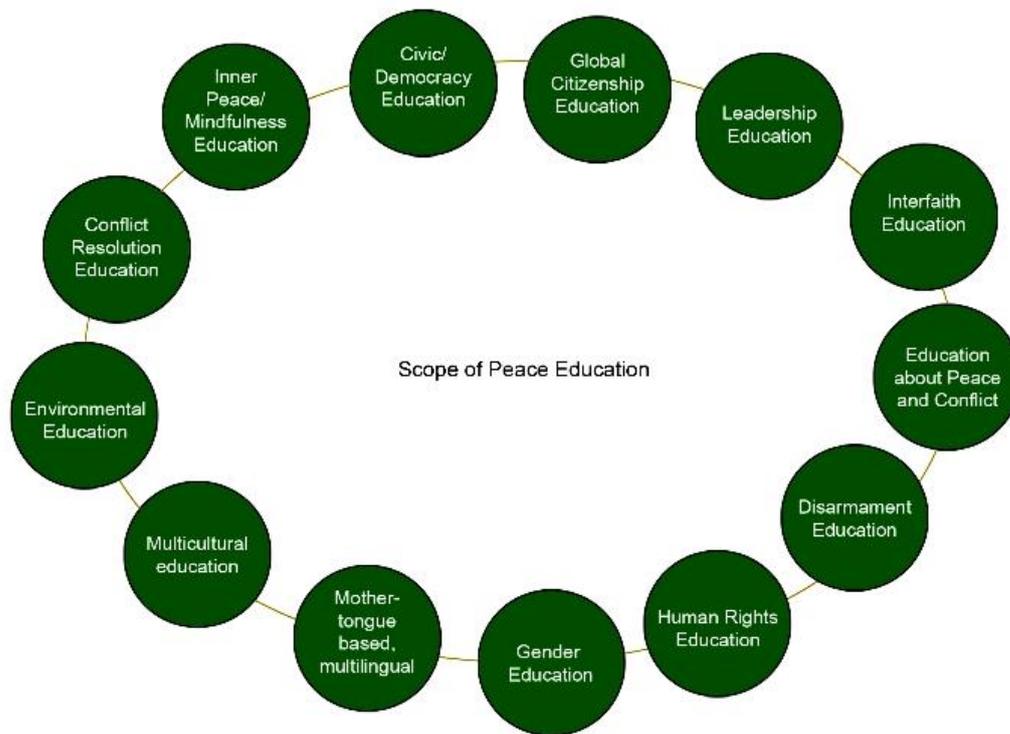


Figure 2: Subject areas relevant to peace education

iii. Partnerships

To speak of the education system in Myanmar is to speak of a system of systems. The current educational landscape is a complex and fragmented arrangement of government schools, private schools, ethnic basic education providers¹⁸, monastic schools, community schools, education CSOs, and other non-formal and alternative education providers and learning centers. In the midst of such complexity, there is a lack of coordination among educational

¹⁸ Joliffe and Speers Meers define Ethnic Basic Education Providers (EBEPs) as “any organization that defines itself in relation to ethnicity and that provides basic education services—kindergarten, primary school, middle school, and high school. This term includes the education departments of ethnic armed organizations, as well as independent civil society, religious, or community-based providers.” (Joliffe, “Strength in Diversity: Toward Universal Education in Myanmar’s Ethnic Areas”, p. 13). In the context of this report Ethnic Basic Education Providers is used to describe entities including the Mon National Education Committee, the Karen Education Department/Karen Refugee Committee Education Entity, the Karenni Education Department, and the Kachin Independence Organization Education Department, as well as education providers not necessarily aligned with armed groups, such as the Chin Education Network, Eastern Naga Development Organisation, Karen Teacher Working Group, Lahu Development Network, Ta’ang Student and Youth Union, among others.

systems, and even with so many education providers, an estimated one million children in Myanmar are still out of school.¹⁹ One of the primary transformational shifts that the MoE outlines in the new NESP is: "All children can access, progress through and successfully complete quality basic education."²⁰ As part of the package of strategies to achieve this goal of universal education, the NESP identifies the need for a Basic Education Partnerships Programme²¹ which will target "other organisations involved in basic education provision, such as monastic schools, private sector schools, community-based schools, schools funded by non-governmental organisations and schools managed under ethnic education systems."²² Such a program must be carefully designed and implemented with conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding strategies.

The histories and motivations behind Myanmar's schooling systems are varied and complex. While this report is not able to sufficiently explore the foundations of these diverse systems and schools, it is important to recognize that conflict dynamics are inherent in the existence of so many players in Myanmar's educational space.

Depending on the context and nature of the relationship between local communities and government, the presence or absence of government schools and educational support systems carries distinct conflict risks and obstacles to peace. In some remote and hard to reach areas, a lack of schools represents exclusion and neglect by the government, and may contribute to communities' grievances toward the government for failure to provide services. At the same time, in some areas ethnic basic education providers represent the aspirations of communities to remain autonomous from Myanmar state control and to preserve and promote education rooted in their mother tongue language and culture.²³ Many ethnic and community schools and schooling systems operate in places where the state government has never had control, and new tensions can emerge if the state government expands its presence into these areas, as has been occurring in Karen State since the signing of the ceasefire in 2012.²⁴ Stakeholders in this project identified government expansion of schools without proper consultation with communities as a major obstacle to peace.²⁵ Schools have been constructed and teachers deployed without consultation of local communities, and communities in areas controlled or supported by ethnic armed organizations viewed this as a continuation of expansionist policies to diminish the power and presence of ethnic non-state actors through administrative rather than military means.²⁶ As efforts to expand access to universal education increase, so too does the need for conflict sensitive coordination and partnership mechanisms between the MoE and non-state education providers. In particular, genuine and meaningful consultation mechanisms between the government and local communities, especially in areas under EAO control, are

¹⁹ https://www.unicef.org/myanmar/education_20838.html

²⁰ National Education Strategic Plan 2016-21, p. 95

²¹ National Education Strategic Plan 2016-21, p. 97

²² National Education Strategic Plan 2016-21, p. 92

²³ Joliffe, S and Speers Meers, p.2

²⁴ Lenkova, "Conflict Sensitivity in Education Provision in Karen State," p.23

²⁵ Focus Group with key informants, MaeSot, May 2017

²⁶ Ibid.

necessary to ensure that schools are serving the real needs of the local population, and not exacerbating conflict dynamics.

Underneath the tensions and questions surrounding the relationship and potential partnership between government and non-government education providers is the foundational issue of decentralization of the education system. The National Education Law expands the possibilities for decentralized educational management, and the NESP states that “the MOE will research, draft and launch a new national policy on decentralized decision making in schools and townships.”²⁷ It is not yet clear how community schools and ethnic education providers will be considered under this decentralization policy, but participants in this project expressed a desire for non-government schools and systems to both maintain autonomy and gain recognition within a decentralized system. Stakeholders identified legal recognition and accreditation of community and ethnic schools and teachers as an important way both to affirm ethnic education providers and pave the way for effective partnership with government to achieve universal access. Stakeholders also expressed a desire for students and teachers to be able to transfer easily between ethnic community schools and government schools, which requires transforming the language and assessment structures in the existing education system.

Recommendations to the Government of Myanmar for Making Partnerships with Different Education Providers Management a Force for Peace

- Create procedures and guidelines for meaningful, transparent, consultation and dialogue with local communities regarding education service provision. Consistently apply these procedures and guidelines with local communities before beginning any new construction or upgrades of schools or deploying new teachers.
- Conduct a conflict analysis as part of the development of the National School Infrastructure Investment Plan.
- Ensure new infrastructure is built in consultation with local communities in a way that does not exacerbate conflict dynamics.
- Develop a conflict sensitive assessment framework for the need for new schools and teachers. Conduct conflict assessments in collaboration with local communities as part of the consultation process.
- Include community leaders/members, parents, students, teachers and school leaders in consultations.
- Deploy new teachers to newly constructed schools and mixed administration schools in an equitable, transparent, and conflict sensitive manner that responds to the needs of local communities.
- Establish an accreditation system to legally recognize and affirm ethnic education providers and create transfer pathways to government schools.
- Recognize attainment of students who have studied in ethnic schools, refugee camp schools, and migrant schools through acceptance of their transcripts and placement at grade level.
- Provide supplemental support to students transitioning from ethnic schools, refugee camp schools, and migrant schools

²⁷ National Education Strategic Plan 2016-21, p.92

- Create a financial support mechanism for schools outside of MOE administration in consultation with these schools and education systems

As Myanmar undertakes its most significant education reform process in many decades, the opportunity is ripe to prioritize peace. Changes to curriculum, teaching, and management may not be quick-fix solutions to ending complex and longstanding conflicts and civil war; but in the long term, education provides a powerful platform for building a more cohesive and peaceful society. At this critical time of reform, political will and leadership is needed that can be both reflective and forward thinking.

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Glossary

Peace education: the process of developing knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that enable learners to: 1) identify and understand sources of local and global conflict, violence, and injustice; 2) prevent violence, both direct and structural; 3) resolve conflict non-violently; and 4) create peaceful and just conditions at all levels, marked by universal standards of human rights, equity, appreciation of diversity, and respect for nature.

Conflict Sensitivity: 1) Understanding the context in which the organization or program is operating, particularly inter-group relations; 2) Understanding the interactions between interventions and the context/group relations; 3) Acting upon the understanding of these interactions in order to minimize negative impacts and maximize positive impacts of a program or other intervention.

Direct Violence: acts of aggression and violence that cause direct harm from one person or group of people to another. Examples include war, riots, terrorist attacks, assault, rape, and bullying.

Structural Violence (or indirect violence): harmful forces resulting from institutions or social structures that prevent people from accessing their fundamental human rights and meeting their basic needs. Examples of structural violence include hunger, poverty, lack of education, and institutionalized racism and sexism. Structural violence is perpetuated by unjust economic and social systems (such as tax breaks for the wealthy or increased military spending instead of spending on basic human needs, and discriminatory laws and practices against ethnic and religious minorities and women).

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Saw Myo Min Thu is the Executive Director of Thabyay Education Foundation. He came to Thabyay in February 2014, after serving in the US higher education system for more than 12 years, including as Director of Admissions and Records at California State University, Bakersfield. Since his return to Myanmar, Saw Myo Min Thu has been an active advocate for a better education system in his country. He holds a BA in international relations from San Francisco State University and an MA in development economics from Williams College.

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