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# WHOLE SCHOOL CULTURE TO FOSTER SOCIAL COHESION IN SRI LANKA

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## Contents

# 01

<b>Introduction, Background and Literature Analysis</b>	<b>7</b>
1.1 Introduction	8
1.2 General education system in Sri Lanka	11
1.3 Social cohesion through education	14
1.4 School culture	19
1.5 Holistic approaches to defining school culture	27

# 02

<b>Field Study Analysis</b>	<b>31</b>
2.1 Field research methodology	32
2.2 Systems and Implementation	34
2.3 Learning and Teaching	36
2.4 Leadership and Professionalism	35
2.5 Rights and Behaviour	35
2.6 Communities and Participation	48
2.7 Social cohesion policies and programmes	49

# 03

<b>Roadmap to foster social cohesion</b>	<b>53</b>
3.1 Systems and Implementation	57
3.2 Learning and Teaching	63
3.3 Leadership and Professionalism	70
3.4 Rights and Behaviour	76
3.5 Communities and Participation	82
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>87</b>

## Abbreviations

A/L	Advance Level
APA	Annual Performance Appraisal
ESCP	Education for Social Cohesion & Peace
ILO	International Labour Organisation
MoE	Ministry of Education
NCFNEA	National Committee for formulating a new Education Act for general education
NEC	National Education Commission
NIE	National Institute of Education
NPRC	National Policy on Reconciliation and Co-existence
NPSCPE	National Policy on Social Cohesion and Peace Education
O/L	Ordinary Level
ONUR	Office for National Unity & Reconciliation
SCPEU	Social Cohesion and Peace Education Unit
SDC	School Development Committee
SDP	Development Plan
SMT	School Management Team
ZEO	Zonal Education Officer

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## The Study

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The National Policy on Social Cohesion and Peace Education (NPSCPE) of Sri Lanka identifies 'whole school culture' as one of the seven key strategic areas where social cohesion should be fostered. A range of initiatives have been introduced by the Government and the NGO sector to implement various aspects of the NPSCPE, however, the whole school culture of this policy is not an area which has been explored in detail by researchers or practitioners. This research was commissioned and funded by the British Council under its flagship education programme, TRANSFORM, and carried out by Save the Children Sri Lanka. TRANSFORM has identified whole school culture as an underpinning aspect of equitable education provision. The research seeks to build a body of evidence on whole school culture fostering social cohesion, and to develop a roadmap to achieve broader social cohesion goals in the general education system. This study comprises first of a substantial literature review which looks at social cohesion in education theory and practice. It next contains a field research component comprising 37 focus groups with students, teachers, parents and education officers, and 29 interviews with education stakeholders. It is based on this literature review and field research that the study proposes its roadmap to fostering and strengthening social cohesion goals in Sri Lanka's general education system.

The NPSCPE was developed to consider the participation of the whole school community in a diverse range of social cohesion initiatives in education, and as such extends beyond ethnoreligious reconciliation efforts trialled in Sri Lanka. The conceptual framework of this study is built on five domains expansively defining the boundaries of whole school culture:

1. Systems and implementation
2. Teaching and learning
3. Leadership and professionalism
4. Rights and behaviour
5. Communities and participation

Taking this broad approach allowed this study to consider various cross cutting aspects which influence social cohesion initiatives within whole school culture, and to identify sustainable pathways to achieve social cohesion goals. This holistic approach also enabled the study to untangle some complex features of the general education system, and to position social cohesion initiatives of whole school culture within an interconnected web of reforms proposed for the general education system.

## The Issues

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The Government of Sri Lanka has made significant investments in social cohesion initiatives in general education by introducing curricular reforms such as stand alone subjects and extra curricular activities such as peace experience programmes. The NGO sector has also supported the Government by implementing various programmes such as psychosocial support initiatives and multifaceted school based development programmes. Whilst acknowledging these achievements, this study nevertheless finds multiple barriers to fully achieving NPSCPE goals to foster social cohesion by whole school culture. Unsurprisingly, these issues have also been identified as common problems within our general education system. Gross inequity in resources distribution between schools, outdated and overburdening curricula, ineffective exam-based assessment methods and weak policy frameworks can all be seen as contributing to the lack of success in achieving social cohesion goals in schools.

The study also found a range of specific issues influencing the effectiveness of social cohesion within whole school culture:

- The policy instruments influencing social cohesion lack clarity and are inconsistently applied, particularly in the areas of equal treatment, acceptable behavioural standards and employee relations.
- Various forms of interpersonal conflict such as bullying and systemic institutionalised practices such as discrimination of certain minorities exist in schools and victimise significant segments of students, parents as well as teachers. These issues are currently addressed by an inconsistent and punitive approach as opposed to one which applies consistent and collaborative approaches such as mediation or conflict resolution.



- The content of social cohesion education does not seem to match with the delivery methods, assessment methods or teacher capabilities. Most importantly there is also lack of connection between what is taught in the classrooms and what is practiced in and outside the schools.
- Inflexible policies or practices, and the largely hierarchical organisational cultures of schools do not support the adoption of democratic and participatory decision making methods which are imperative to foster social cohesion through whole school culture.
- The systems and practices in schools do not encourage students to question, think analytically and adopt creative methods to solve problems. Students have little to no opportunity to meaningfully participate in the decision making processes or in the development and implementation of social cohesion initiatives at their schools.

Evidence gathered in this study indicates that the general education system has a number of strengths, including strong institutions, a diverse workforce and community support. Further, the teachers, students and parents who participated in this study seemed prepared to embrace a diverse range of social cohesion initiatives, from policy

reforms to participation in school decision making. These factors create a coherent foundation to build expansive social cohesion measures within the general education system, so long as the systemic issues plaguing it are also methodically addressed.

Throughout this study, a strong business case emerges which supports adopting a holistic approach for fostering social cohesion by whole school culture. This argument suggests that such social cohesion initiatives increase the ability of the general education system to create a workforce which meets the demands of future labour markets. The study argues that ending discriminatory practices in educational institutions will increase the participation of disadvantaged segments of the population in our future workforce. It further contends that modern workplaces require employees to work in teams to collaborate, creatively solve problems and innovate, and social cohesion initiatives within school culture can help building these skills at a very early stage in students' lives. Arguably, social cohesion initiatives within school culture also facilitate building individuals' capabilities to adapt to unfamiliar environments and to embrace the constant changes taking place in modern workplaces.

## The Roadmap

Supported by both local and international evidence, this study urges stakeholders of general education in Sri Lanka to adopt a holistic approach to address the aforementioned issues. This requires strategies focused on whole school culture to be integrated with other social cohesion initiatives as well as broader reforms proposed by the national institutes such as the National Education Commission. Evidence suggests that isolated social cohesion initiatives are highly likely to fail without systemic reforms in general education sector.

The study ultimately proposes a broad taskforce to address the problems within the entire general education system. Within this taskforce, the study suggests setting up a multi-stakeholder working group on social cohesion initiatives specifically. A summary of the key proposals presented to the taskforce is provided below under the specific domains of whole school culture:

### 1. Systems and implementation

- Adopt a set of policies and procedures to foster social cohesion by whole school culture covering students, teachers and other members of the school community in the areas of code of conduct; grievance resolution; work health and safety; performance planning, development and management; respectful behaviour, and investigation of disciplinary matters.
- Integrate social cohesion related goals and indicators into existing and new systems of data collection, planning, quality assurance and reporting.
- Review and modify the existing social cohesion initiatives to improve their effectiveness including in the areas of integrated schools and peace experience programmes.
- Develop and manage school resources streamlining external funding, resources pooling, infrastructure and human resources development.

### 2. Teaching and learning

- Revise the existing social cohesion education curriculum, considering improvements to the content, and explore the options of delivering social cohesion education through carrier subjects such as history, geography or arts.
- Develop learning and teaching materials, and improve teaching methods to facilitate the delivery of social cohesion education.
- Revise and adopt appropriate assessments methods for stand alone social cohesion subjects.

### 3. Leadership and professionalism

- Build teacher competencies to deliver social cohesion initiatives within whole school culture by adopting a capability framework and providing training, mentoring and peer support initiatives.
- Adopt teacher professional standards through a collaborative approach by engaging teacher representatives and experts, in particularly focusing on standards influencing social cohesion in schools.
- Develop leadership capability framework focusing on social cohesion goals in education, and rollout the leadership programmes through existing systems and new initiatives, targeting principals and teacher-champions.

### 4. Rights and behaviour

- Investigate the existing barriers to equitable education, particularly focusing on disadvantaged groups such as students with disabilities and students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and develop strategies to ensure universal access to education.
- Develop policy and programme initiatives to ensure respectful behaviour in the whole school community, by adopting behavioural standards through codes of conduct, running awareness raising campaigns and building capacities of teachers and students to apply alternative dispute resolution methods such as mediation and justice circles.
- Adopt positive disciplinary methods and ensure consistency in applying such methods through policy instruments, resourcing disciplinary committees and delivering awareness raising campaigns.

### 5. Communities and participation

- Establish efficient school based management models to engage whole school community in social cohesion initiatives, and build community capacities through training, support and funding to deliver school based social cohesion initiatives.
- Identify innovative methods to engage parents in social cohesion initiatives, in particularly to ensure consistency of peace messages received by the student at school and at home.
- Ensure meaningful participation of students in social cohesion initiatives at all levels, from the conceptualisation to develop and delivery of the initiatives by adopting guidelines and providing training for adults and children.

# 1

# INTRODUCTION, BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE ANALYSIS

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- 1.1 Introduction \_\_\_\_\_ 8
- 1.2 General education system in Sri Lanka \_\_\_\_\_ 11
- 1.3 Social cohesion through education \_\_\_\_\_ 14
- 1.4 School culture \_\_\_\_\_ 19
- 1.5 Holistic approaches to defining school culture \_\_\_\_\_ 27

## 1.1 Introduction

Social cohesion through education is one of the key approaches being taken by the Government of Sri Lanka to achieve transitional justice and peace. The reconciliation agenda in the education sector in Sri Lanka is driven mainly by the National Policy on Social Cohesion and Peace Education ('NPSCPE' or 'the Policy')<sup>1</sup> of the Ministry of Education ('MoE'). The NPSCPE recommends that a 'clear focus on school culture and ethos' should be 'developed'<sup>2</sup> and the Policy identifies seven key strategic areas:

1. school curriculum,
2. teacher education,
3. second national language,
4. whole school culture,
5. integrated schools,
6. co-curricular activities, and
7. research.

Concentrating on the above fourth strategic area, this research report aims to build a body of evidence on whole school culture fostering social cohesion, and present a roadmap to achieve broader social cohesion goals in education in Sri Lanka.

This research report was commissioned by Save the Children Sri Lanka and the British Council of Sri Lanka—both agencies aim to take leading roles in developing strategies to reach the destinations proposed in the roadmap. The methodology of this research included a substantial literature review and a field study component including interviews and focus groups. A total of 29 interviews with education officers, NGO workers, teachers and principals were conducted as well as further 37 focus groups with students, teachers, parents and education officers. Field research was conducted in the Western, Southern, Central, Northern and Eastern provinces covering a diverse sample of schools.

This report consists of three chapters: the first chapter provides an introduction, an outline of background materials and an analysis of literature; the second chapter covers an analysis of the field research; and the third chapter presents the roadmap with further analysis to substantiate the proposals.

Although the NPSCPE seemed to have emerged as a direct response to calls for addressing the causes of the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, the Policy is constructed on

a much broader foundation. Its scope extends beyond mere ethnic or religious reconciliation efforts and considers the participation of students, teachers and the whole community in broader social cohesion initiatives in education. Instead of introducing rigid definitions or parameters, the Policy maintains rather fluid boundaries to broaden the horizon of social cohesion efforts in education, thus allowing creative interpretations of social cohesion in education.

For example, by way of framing the goals of the Policy, the 'desired citizen' is explained as one who is democratic in decision-making, can work in a team without conflict, has an open mind, thinks critically, communicates well, solve problems, face challenges, who has discovered inner peace, who is politically enlightened, and so forth.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, acknowledging that 'school culture' is 'difficult to define and measure', the Policy submits that it 'relates to all the sets of relationships, values and practices within the school as well as the school's relationship with the community'.<sup>4</sup> Further, instead of presenting outcomes, it explains how one would 'see or feel' a 'whole school climate' created by fostering social cohesion:

A school with a peaceful environment will be non-violent; it will produce self-disciplined students and teachers, and law-abiding citizens; it will be conducive to the inculcation of cooperative values, human rights and national cohesion in students and teachers; and it becomes a 'popular school' where students actively participate in curricular, co-curricular and community-related activities.<sup>5</sup>

By providing this overarching inspirational picture of whole school culture fostering social cohesion, the writers of the NPSCPE arguably intended the MoE and its stakeholders to adopt a broader approach in developing relevant measures. For this precise reason, this report will adhere to the following broader framework built on five domains in order to define the boundaries of whole school culture. This approach will be supported by the evidence to be presented and elaborated upon in the upcoming sections.

1. **Systems and implementation:** Legislation, policies, equitable resources, school based management, planning and monitoring.
2. **Teaching and learning:** Curricula, co-curricular activities, peace education, informal learning, teaching materials, teaching methods and assessment methods.
3. **Leadership and professionalism:** Leadership, teacher training, professional conduct, and professional standards.



<sup>1</sup> MoE 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 6-7.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

4. **Rights and behaviour:** Equality in education, school violence, discipline, respectful behaviour and, guiding and counselling.
5. **Communities and participation:** Consultation and collaboration, engaging children, engaging parents and participation in school management.

The attributes mentioned under these five domains of whole school culture are not meant to be hierarchical or exhaustive; rather these attributes are an attempt to recognise the complexity of the fabric of whole school culture. These attributes are very much interconnected and interdependent; each factor heavily influences the other. For example, a government policy can influence the curriculum of a particular subject or course, requiring the teachers to develop their professional capacities, and also changing their attitudes towards certain rights or behaviours of their students. On the other hand, if the members of the public demand greater equity in classrooms, for example, respectful behaviour by teachers, the Minister for Education may authorise a certain policy to meet the demands of the public.

The first domain refers to structures of different character, tangible or otherwise. Systems are connected to resources, for example, funding allocation for infrastructure. Arguably, a culture of an organisation is heavily influenced by systems, and in fact, systems are likely to provide a foundation for a culture to grow. Unlike a typical organisational culture, a school culture is very much influenced by 'learning and teaching' aspects (second domain), by which a culture can be steered towards a certain direction. Teachers have a culture within the school culture which has its own existence beyond the specific schools to which they are deployed, and thus, teachers appear to have the most influencing role in the whole school culture as considered under the third domain. The fourth domain covers aspects of rights, values and behaviours, from both positive and negative ends of the spectrum; for example, considering respectful behaviour as well as violent behaviour. Finally, culture is manifested when the whole school community participates in the school environment, either through formal systems, such as school development committees, or through informal mechanisms, such as parent groups. Most of these attributes of whole school culture are also relevant to studies in organisational cultures, thus this exercise will be influenced by theories and practices relating to the discipline of organisational culture.

The NPSCPE is strengthened by several national policy instruments which present broader views on social cohesion. Three of the nine 'national education goals' are identified by the NPSCPE as relevant to social cohesion and peace education:

- (a) the achievement of national cohesion, national integration and national unity;
- (b) the establishment of a pervasive system for social justice, and
- (c) the active partnership in nation-building activities to ensure the continuous nurturing of a deep and abiding concern for one another.<sup>6</sup>

The National Policy on Reconciliation and Co-existence (NPRC)<sup>7</sup> outlines policy principles beyond the boundaries of ethno-religious harmony to incorporate broader equity principles such as power sharing, gender equality and dignity for every citizen. This approach gives a broader mandate to the schools as well to expand the scope of social cohesion initiatives beyond the lines of ethnic and religious harmony. Accordingly, we use the terms 'social cohesion' and 'peace' interchangeably in this document. This broader approach to define social cohesion is very much supported by education scholars and practitioners. Social cohesion has been defined as 'the shared values and commitment to a society' by all its members<sup>8</sup> and described as 'the capacity of a society to ensure the welfare of all its members, minimising disparities and avoiding polarisation'.<sup>9</sup> Social cohesion is also explained as 'the glue that bonds society together, promoting harmony, a sense of community, and a degree of commitment to promoting the common good'.<sup>10</sup>

These theoretical perspectives combined with the local policy foundation direct us to recognise three important aspects to set the conceptual boundaries of social cohesion:

1. **Shared values:** Positive shared values such as equality, harmony, belonging, inclusion, participation, recognition, citizens' welfare as shared by the individuals and institutions.
2. **Commitment and capacity:** The commitment and capacity of a society to uphold its shared values with collective wisdom and empathy.
3. **Sustainable systems:** Systemic barriers which prevent upholding of positive shared values, commitment and capacity are removed by long-term solutions embedded in the legal, political, social and economic systems.



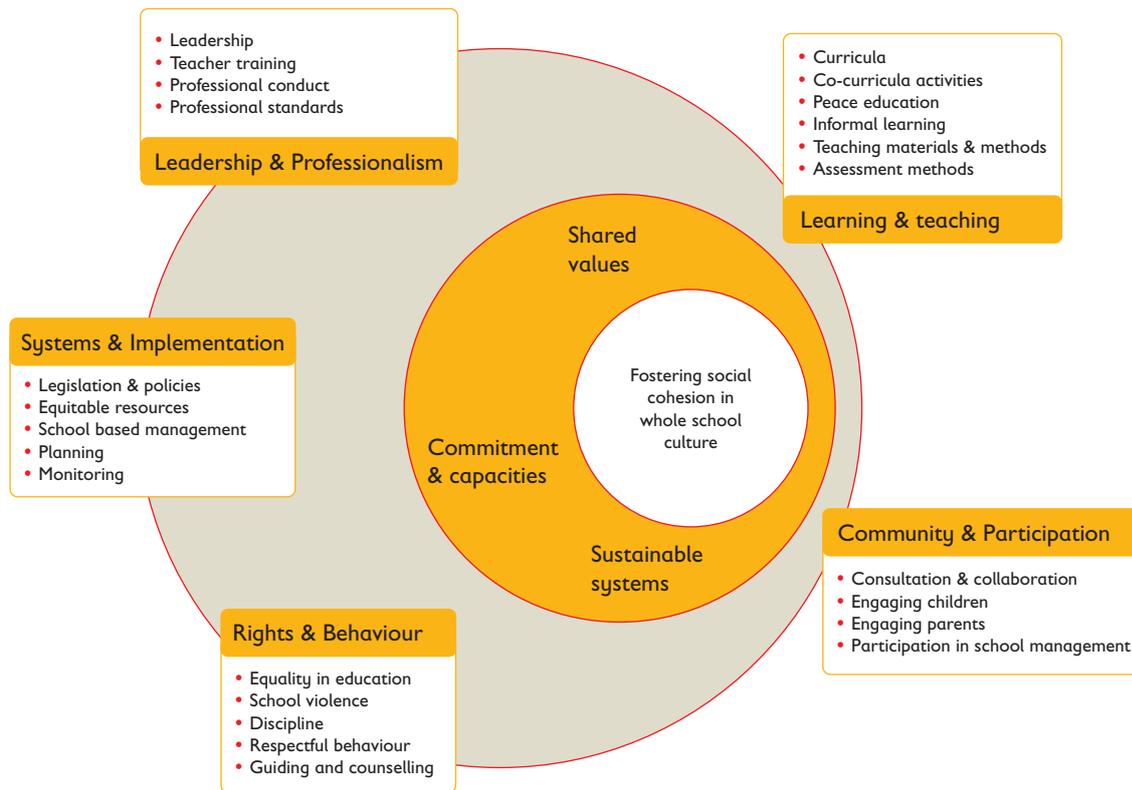
<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 1. The new national goals which have been proposed by NEC are more relevant to social cohesion and the goals have not been adopted and they discussed in the upcoming sections.

<sup>7</sup> ONUR 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted Jenson (1998), in Aturupane and Wikramanayake 2011, p. E2.

<sup>9</sup> The Council of European Union quoted in UNICEF 2014, p. 9. The authors add: 'A cohesive society is a mutually supportive community of free individuals pursuing these common goals by democratic means'.

<sup>10</sup> Colletta et al. (2001), quoted in UNICEF 2014, p. 9.



The knowledge base of this study is built on five important cornerstones which legitimise the proposals of the roadmap to be presented in the third chapter. The NPSCPE and NPRC are the two most important cornerstones. The third cornerstone is the combination of policy recommendations made by the National Education Commission (NEC) and National Committee for formulating a new Education Act for general education’ (NCFNEA), in volumes of reports published in the past two decades. The policy proposals and ideas presented in volumes of international literature cited in this report forms the fourth cornerstone. Finally, the data gathered in the field research activities forms the fifth. Demonstrably, this study is heavily grounded on a home-grown policy foundation as it borrows heavily from the NEC and NCFNEA literature, with a strong set of field data to justify the proposals it makes. As such, it is hoped that local policymakers would find it easy to justify adopting the report’s proposals.

While the NPSCPE can be commended for its creative approach to expanding the horizons of social cohesion in education, its key limitations should be noted. The Policy does not address the underlying work culture issues and does not explicitly attempt to find solutions based on systems or programmes which would help schools embrace a new culture of peace. This is a gap that could reasonably have been expected to be filled by measures developed under the NPSCPE’s fourth policy area, ‘whole school culture’. The Policy also does not identify the interface between social cohesion and workforce strategies including professional standards. The NEC and NCFNEA present a more comprehensive strategy in this regard, and aspects of leadership, professional standards and teacher training will be discussed in the upcoming sections in conjunction with the proposals of NEC and NCFNEA.

## 1.2 General education system in Sri Lanka

The general education system of Sri Lanka hosts about 4.2 million children in approximately 10,000 schools.<sup>11</sup> Nearly 90% of the schools in the country are run by the government and attract nearly 95% of student enrolments. General education consists of the primary (grades 1-5), junior secondary (grades 6-9) and senior secondary (grades 10-13) grade levels.<sup>12</sup> Government schools are categorised for administrative purposes based on the type of education provided to students as well as the grade levels they go up to.<sup>13</sup> There are over 247,000 teachers in government schools with approximately 84% of the teachers being employed in provincial schools, while the remaining 16% are placed in national schools. Approximately 74% of the teaching workforce is female and the average age of the workforce is 44 years. Approximately 45% of teachers have a bachelor's degree, and 50% have GCE A-level qualification.

The Ministry of Education is the highest authority of the education system in Sri Lanka under which many departments and institutions including the teacher's training schools and curriculum development bodies are established.<sup>14</sup> The Ministry has a broad mandate covering a range of functions, including the development and implementation of the National Education Policy.<sup>15</sup> The schools are run by the central and provincial governments collaboratively by a dual management and resource allocation mechanism.

### Inequity in the education system

Inequitable allocation of resources amongst schools have resulted in polarising disparities despite the introduction of certain need-based funding formulae.<sup>16</sup> For example, only 47% of schools have ICT facilities and 14% schools

do not have adequate laboratory facilities.<sup>17</sup> Due to higher demand for better resourced schools, nearly 1,500 poorly resourced schools have less than 50 students each.<sup>18</sup> According to a World Bank report, although about 95% of schools in Sri Lanka are provincial schools which are attended mostly by poor rural children, only 65% of general education spending goes to those schools. In contrast, about 35% of general education spending is allocated mainly to national schools, which only account for about 5% of schools and are typically attended by students from urban, middle or higher income backgrounds.<sup>19</sup>

Children of rural areas leave school early, sometimes without reaching grade 9, partially due to lower school quality and those wanting complete senior secondary education having to move to urban areas.<sup>20</sup> Areas of extreme poverty have significant impact within the education system. For example, disparities are more alarmingly visible in state-run schools in plantation areas.<sup>21</sup> Compared to schools in urban and rural areas, enrolment rates in plantation area schools are the lowest at all education levels.<sup>22</sup>

Authoring the final report of the NCFNEA, Gunawardena GB et al. submit that 'blatant disparity continues making the policy of equal education opportunity a travesty'.<sup>23</sup> The NEC adds that the general education system has the quantitative capacity to educate the entire child population of Sri Lanka up to grade 13, but the quality of education has not risen to meet national expectations in certain important aspects.<sup>24</sup> The NCFNEA notes that policy adjustments will need to consider the removal of disparities and provide equality of educational opportunities for those who have been denied opportunity: 'the participation in school education is characterized by a great imbalance with the privileged enjoying the best while the disadvantaged are unable to either to enrol



<sup>11</sup> Materials presented in this paragraph are sourced from Dundar et al., 2017; Aturupane and Wikramanayake 2011; Gunawardena GB et al., 2009, Wehella 2014, and MoE 2018.

<sup>12</sup> Also note that while the country has the higher primary school completion rates, over 40% of the students fail the GCE O/L. See Perera and Hettiarachchi, 2016, p. 10.

<sup>13</sup> The categories: 1 AB – Schools with Advanced Level Science stream classes; 1 C – Schools with Advanced Level Arts and/or Commerce streams but no Science stream; Type 2 – Schools with classes only up to grade 11, and Type 3 – Schools with classes only up to grade 8. See Perera and Hettiarachchi, 2016, p. 22.

<sup>14</sup> These bodies include Provincial Education Departments, Department of Examinations, Department of Publications, National Institute of Education, National Colleges of Education and Teacher Training Collages.

<sup>15</sup> Wehella 2014, p. 55. The functions of the Ministry include implementation and monitoring of the National Education Plan, management of schools come under the control of the Central Government, maintaining quality and standards of schools by inspection and supervision.

<sup>16</sup> Dundar et al. 2017, p. 15.

<sup>17</sup> Wehella 2014, p. 55.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 2014, p. 55.

<sup>19</sup> Dundar et al. 2017, p. 14. However, it should be noted that the national schools generally have a larger student population.

<sup>20</sup> Dundar et al. 2017, p. 82.

<sup>21</sup> Little 1987, p. 31. For the author's more recent observations on plantation sector education see Little 2007.

<sup>22</sup> Dundar et al. 2017, p. 45.

<sup>23</sup> Gunawardena GB et al., 2009, p. 39.

<sup>24</sup> NEC 2016, p. v.

or stay in the system'.<sup>25</sup> Noting that 'equity, quality and relevance are inter-related' the NCFNEA points out four levels of assessing equity: 'access, participation, achievement or output and outcomes'.<sup>26</sup> It adds that 'even if equity is assured at a particular level in education, if there are disparities in quality, equity is affected. Similarly, lack of relevance often leads to inequity'.<sup>27</sup>

Researching on Sri Lanka's education sector challenges and policy options, Dundar et al. discuss inequity from several angles. The authors find that private tuition is growing mainly due to the 'acute and chronic shortages' of teachers of specific secondary school subjects such as English, mathematics and science, and in some cases private tuition costs take up to 36% of household expenses.<sup>28</sup> They also argue that family background, such as socioeconomic status and parental education, heavily influences students' performance.<sup>29</sup> They add that the gap between rich and poor entering senior secondary and higher education is growing, resulting in inequity in education access and attainment.<sup>30</sup> According to the authors, students in remote areas including those living in plantation areas have 'far lower learning levels than the comparator groups'.<sup>31</sup> Commenting on the urban-rural divide, the authors note that 'education streams offered in small towns and rural areas are limited, reducing the opportunities offered to children in those areas to access science and mathematics streams and learn foreign languages'.<sup>32</sup> As a result, besides being inequitable, the distribution of high school graduates is highly skewed toward the arts and humanities, fields that are not in high demand in the labour market'.<sup>33</sup>

Children with disabilities in particular are struggling within the education system in Sri Lanka, as they are disadvantaged in schools due to a lack of resources; the unavailability of proper assessment systems to identify

appropriate learning and teaching options; and public misconceptions or lack of awareness about disabilities in general. According to a survey conducted by UNICEF, disability or illness was noted as the second most common reason given for children not receiving an adequate education in schools.<sup>34</sup> The National Policy on Disability addresses a range of issues in relation to accessibility in schools, combating negative socio-cultural attitudes, the promotion of inclusive education, and teacher training. However, only around half of children with a disability have transitioned from primary to secondary level, and the enrolment of children with a disability has not significantly risen over time.<sup>35</sup>

Referring to several studies conducted in Sri Lanka, UNICEF notes that one of the main barriers for students with disabilities accessing education is the scarcity of resources such as Braille and audio equipment, or teachers with relevant competencies such as sign language skills.<sup>36</sup> Another barrier is the lack of understanding on disability access issues and provisions of appropriate adjustments to students with disabilities.<sup>37</sup> UNICEF also found that teachers very rarely identified children with disabilities as being within the 'special educational needs group'; they generally focus on other disadvantaged children such as those who have psychological, social and economic problems such as those whose parents were migrant workers or suffered from alcoholism.<sup>38</sup>

UNICEF points out that although gender does not appear to contribute to dropping out from education, gender seems to be a 'socio-cultural barrier' in certain segments of the population.<sup>39</sup> Gender based discrimination in education exists in more subtle ways through 'social scaffolding', as Carter and Osler argue. According to these authors,



<sup>25</sup> Gunawardena GB et al., 2009, p. iii.

<sup>26</sup> 'Relevance is mostly interpreted as related to employment, developing students to be responsible citizens in society respecting accepted norms, knowledge, skills, attitudes and values'. See Gunawardena GB et al., 2009, p. iv.

<sup>27</sup> Gunawardena GB et al., 2009, p. iv.

<sup>28</sup> Dundar et al. 2017, pp. 91, 113.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pp. 43, 47.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>34</sup> 13% of girls and 10.8 % of boys were reporting disability or illness as the reason for non-attendance. See UNICEF 2013, p. 42.

<sup>35</sup> UNICEF 2013, p. 64.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>37</sup> UNICEF 2013, p. 42. This lack of understanding is demonstrated by some teachers' asserting that the children with disabilities should be placed in special education units, rather than making adjustments for them to learn in 'normal' classrooms.

<sup>38</sup> UNICEF 2013, p. 42.

<sup>39</sup> UNICEF adds that in some communities, there may be cultural factors that pull girls out of school and into work. For example, girls were more often employed as minor domestic workers, than boys and approximately 59 % of child domestic workers come from the Tamil-speaking community. Child marriage, especially girls marrying adult men seems to continue, despite the end of the armed conflict during which parents were forced to take the girls out of school to get them married for safety or to prevent their recruitment to military groups including the LTTE. See UNICEF 2013, p. 32.

schools, clubs and colleges are institutions where gender is 'actively forged' and 'where a certain type of "top dog" masculinity is created, celebrated and confirmed.'<sup>40</sup> These aspects will be discussed in detail in the ensuing two chapters which explore how gender-based violence, safety issues, poor facilities and unfair school practices put girls in a disadvantaged position in comparison to boys.

As we explore the theme of equitable resources allocation in schools, it is important that we establish connections between the investment made in schools and the benefits received by the children. The latest line of thinking amongst policymakers and practitioners has shifted towards adopting a child-centric investment rationale which advocates for measuring long term outcomes against the money spent on children. In a Resolution adopted in 2015, the UN Human Rights Council urged States to ensure the rights of children through non-discriminatory treatment, specifically emphasising the 'fundamental link between laws, policies and budgets', pointing out the responsibility of States to ensure that laws and policies 'are translated in to transparent, participatory and accountable budgets and spending for the promotion, protection and realisation of the rights of the child'.<sup>41</sup>

Analysing the child-based expenditures of the Government of Sri Lanka, Save the Children has pointed out that investing in children brings better social outcomes, such as reduced poverty, inequality, and mortality.<sup>42</sup> It argues that investing in children is fundamental to protecting their human rights, and such investment would have profound impact on childhood experiences as well as the child's future capabilities.<sup>43</sup> It further adds that the benefits of investing in children certainly outweigh the cost due to the yield of a 'lifetime of gains'. Most importantly, while making references to social cohesion and investing in children, Save the Children points out that investing in children can help 'promote equitable, inclusive societies, allowing more people to effectively participate in their economic development'.<sup>44</sup> Amongst other things, it suggests that the current paradigm of investment should be improved by

a range of policy proposals.<sup>45</sup> In light of these proposals, financial and governance mechanisms of future social cohesion initiatives can include embedded systems to trace the investment on children and associated benefits, allowing for more rigorous cost-benefit analyses.

### Teacher workforce

Teachers are recruited by the MoE or Provincial Councils, generally for subject-specific job vacancies.<sup>46</sup> Teachers in Sri Lanka would have received their professional qualifications through a Bachelor of Education, National Diploma in Teaching, a Teacher Training Certificate or Postgraduate Diploma in Education.<sup>47</sup> Short-term courses and school-based teacher development programmes provide further training opportunities for teachers at the zonal level as well as provincial and national levels. Although public schools are said to have adequate numbers of teachers, a sizable number of schools do not have the right mix of teachers<sup>48</sup> and their effectiveness has been found to vary.<sup>49</sup> Absenteeism amongst teachers is also found to be high, particularly in rural areas, and this in turn results in disparities in learning outcomes.<sup>50</sup>

Teaching is generally considered a respectful profession in Sri Lanka, however, NCFNEA states that the status of teachers has 'deteriorated' during the last few decades with significant changes occurring in social values.<sup>51</sup> Teachers seem to have little incentive to perform well since promotion is based on the length of the service (tenure) and the pay level remains low in comparison to other countries.<sup>52</sup> It is therefore not surprising that they seek opportunities outside schools for additional pay, particularly by engaging in private tutoring. There is also the persistence of political influence in the appointment, promotion and disciplinary procedures which apply to teachers, principals and education officials.<sup>53</sup> In some cases, teachers have been publically humiliated by politicians for resisting unauthorised external interference.<sup>54</sup> These factors paint a picture of a workforce that is lowly paid, valued less, and subjected to arbitrary political influence.



<sup>40</sup> Carter & Osler 2000, p. 342.

<sup>41</sup> UN Human Rights Council 2015.

<sup>42</sup> Jayasooriya C 2016, p. 8.

<sup>43</sup> Quoting UNICEF (2012) in Jayasooriya 2016, p. 58.

<sup>44</sup> Jayasooriya 2016, p. 58.

<sup>45</sup> Jayasooriya 2016, p. 58. These proposals include effective and efficient resource allocation, quality utilisation, and monitoring.

<sup>46</sup> Dundar et al. 2017, p. 87.

<sup>47</sup> Wehella 2014, p. 69.

<sup>48</sup> Average school-level student-teacher ratio is 14:1. See Dundar et al. 2017, p. 88.

<sup>49</sup> Dundar et al. 2017, p. 84.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>51</sup> Gunawardena GB et al., 2009, p. v.

<sup>52</sup> Dundar et al. 2017, p. 10.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>54</sup> Sooriyagoda, 2018.

## National workforce risk factors

According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), despite the introduction of various curriculum reforms over the years, 'there was little change in the quality of education and the education system still features an over-loaded curriculum, outdated teaching methods, and a traditional examination system that requires only memorising information'.<sup>55</sup> Noting that Sri Lanka has a comparatively lower ratio of government spending per student and comparatively lower levels of student's learning outcomes, Dundar et al. submit that the general education system has failed to produce skills in high demand in a competitive economy.<sup>56</sup> Substantial mismatches can be seen between the demand for and supply of workers.<sup>57</sup>

According to the ILO, Sri Lanka has not produced enough jobs for its labour force, leading to an increase in workforce vulnerability.<sup>58</sup> Dundar et al. argue that in order to become internationally competitive, the system needs to be changed to consider providing the knowledge and skills to meet the demands of employers.<sup>59</sup> The ILO also submits that 'to meet the emerging needs of Sri Lanka's labour market and strengthen economic activity, the education system needs substantial modernisation to equip workers to think and act creatively, work industriously and productively, and be able to innovate and adapt to available technologies to strengthen economic activities'.<sup>60</sup>

Women's participation in the work force is low in Sri Lanka<sup>61</sup> and the ILO asserts that 'mobilising the female workforce is vital, particularly in supporting women leaders who will inspire other females to value and join the workforce'.<sup>62</sup> Thus any reforms to the education system must give consideration to removing barriers experienced by female students in the general education system and introducing measures to improve their participation and performance.

These assertions point towards several serious risk factors in relation to the workforce's capabilities in Sri Lanka. In response, we can say that certain attributes of social cohesion are interwoven with these risk factors. Firstly,

the lower level of female participation in the workforce arguably has some causal links with direct or indirect discriminatory practices in the education system and in society at large. Social cohesion measures can facilitate combating gender-based discrimination within schools, and can thus contribute to improving female participation in the workforce. Secondly, modern workplaces require employees to work in teams to solve problems and innovate, and it is important these teamwork skills are developed at very early stage of the education so that individuals are equipped with the capabilities to collaborate with others when they enter the workforce. For example, values such as empathy reinforced through social cohesion initiatives in the school and skills such as listening, negotiating and resolving conflicts taught in the classroom can be useful in building teamwork capabilities of an efficient future workforce. Finally, adaptability to embrace changes taking place in modern workplaces has been identified as a key employee capability of the future workforce.<sup>63</sup> These types of capabilities intersect with students' capacities which are essential to live and learn together in a socially cohesive environment. For example, social cohesion initiatives such as student exchange programmes are meant to help children adapt themselves into new and unfamiliar environments, and such experiential learning can be extremely beneficial for them in adapting to new working environments as adults. Accordingly, social cohesion initiatives in education also have a strong business case in relation to economic growth.<sup>64</sup> Social cohesion must therefore play a significant role in future attempts to reform the education system to meet the challenges of the modern labour market.

## 1.3 Social cohesion through education

A quality educational system can make a transformative contribution to young populations in countries affected by conflict by instilling positive values in them, creating supportive and tolerant environments; and providing them with the opportunity to build intellectual and social skills.<sup>65</sup> Writing in 'The Promotion of Social Cohesion Through

<sup>55</sup> ILO 2017, p. 3.

<sup>56</sup> Dundar et al. 2017, p. 53. In this study, Sri Lanka was compared to middle-and high-income countries.

<sup>57</sup> ILO 2017, p. 29.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>59</sup> Dundar et al. 2017, p. 53.

<sup>60</sup> ILO 2017, p. 27.

<sup>61</sup> 'The labour force participation rate (LFPR) as a proportion of the total population aged 15–64 was 59 percent in 2013, but there is a significant gender gap: 85 percent of men participate, but only 43 percent of women': Dundar et al. 2017, p. 57.

<sup>62</sup> ILO 2017, p. 4.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>64</sup> Scholars point out that cohesive societies are more effective in achieving collective economic and social goals by uniting diverse groups to forge synergy. See Aturupane and Wikramanayake 2011, p. E1.

<sup>65</sup> Citing Bush & Salterelli (2000) in UNICEF 2014, p. 7.

Education in Sri Lanka', Aturupane and Wikramanayake present four ways that education can contribute towards social cohesion:

- (a) by teaching students the basic principles of what it means to be a good citizen and the consequences of not adhering to those principles;
- (b) by providing students with an experience consistent with these principles that brings them closer to those of different ethnicity and backgrounds;
- (c) by providing equal opportunities to all students, and
- (d) by providing students with a common understanding of citizenship, while incorporating the interests of diverse communities.<sup>66</sup>

The authors submit that cohesive societies are 'more effective in achieving collective economic and social goals', since such societies are better at including and uniting diverse groups and forging synergy.<sup>67</sup> They add that when everyone can exercise the same rights, enjoying the 'feeling of solidarity and comradeship', they are induced towards a greater commitment to achieve common goals.<sup>68</sup>

On the other hand, by promoting a particular idea of national identity that does not incorporate all ethnic communities, education can also play a negative role in countries affected by civil conflict.<sup>69</sup> Such educational practices may result in 'inequality, the polarization or exclusion of social, ethnic or religious groups' and 'thus education could become a base for conflict'.<sup>70</sup> In countries experiencing civil unrest, the content, structure and delivery methods of education could themselves become a catalyst for violence.<sup>71</sup>

UNICEF notes that peace-building approaches require paying more attention to education sector reforms because 'peace-building requires establishing linkages between the causes of conflict and programmatic and structural measures to address those causal factors'.<sup>72</sup> As such, we will refer to various reforms to the education system proposed by various agencies, connecting the social cohesion goals with systemic reforms.



<sup>66</sup> Citing Heyneman (2010) in Aturupane and Wikramanayake 2011, p. E2.

<sup>67</sup> Citing Greaney (2006) in Aturupane and Wikramanayake 2011, p. E1.

<sup>68</sup> Aturupane and Wikramanayake 2011, p. E1.

<sup>69</sup> Cited Buckland (2006), Cardozo (2008) and Davies (2006) in Aturupane and Wikramanayake 2011, pp. 3-4.

<sup>70</sup> Cited Davies (2006) in Aturupane and Wikramanayake 2011, pp. 3-4. Also education can 'manipulate history and textbook content for political purposes or inculcate attitudes of superiority on behalf of elite groups', denying equal access to education through unequal funding mechanisms or discrimination, resulting in further grievances leading to conflict. See UNICEF 2014, p. 7.

<sup>71</sup> Citing Bush & Salterelli in UNICEF 2014, p. 4.

<sup>72</sup> UNICEF 2014, p. 5.

<sup>73</sup> Rashid and Tikly 2010, p. 4.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., pp. 10-33.

<sup>75</sup> UNICEF 2014, p. 9.

<sup>76</sup> Later the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century (ICE) identified LTLT as one of four domains of education, calling it as an approach for 'the development of an understanding of other people in a spirit of pluralism, respect for differences and peace'. See UNICEF 2014, p. 9.

<sup>77</sup> Cremin and Bevington 2017, p. 55.

## Examples of good practices

From the numerous studies conducted on good practices across the globe, an extended list of measures which can be adopted to foster social cohesion in school cultures can be drawn. For instance, the British Council has compiled a set of guidelines for schools in the European Union to improve diversity and inclusion by incorporating a broader approach. The goals of the guidelines are to: raise achievement of all learners; respect and celebrate diversity; promote learner voices; improvement through self-evaluation, and ensuring sustainability of these initiatives.<sup>73</sup> To achieve these goals, four requirements are specified:<sup>74</sup>

- (a) A legal framework which enables the policy makers and practitioners to address issues of inclusion and diversity issues, and make them accountable.
- (b) A policy and funding framework to locally fulfil the legal obligations.
- (c) Local support systems to assist schools with monitoring advising, evaluation, targeted interventions, and facilitating a range of activities including innovation, partnerships, data gathering, reporting, training and sharing experiences.
- (d) Community partnership structures to engage children in decision making and engage with the school community, particularly parents of social disadvantaged backgrounds or minority groups.

A good source of peace education examples come from the documents compiled under the theme of 'Learning To Live Together' by UNESCO.<sup>75</sup> These programmes are delivered by government bodies and NGOs in areas such as policy reforms, curricular design, teacher training, community arts and community engagement.<sup>76</sup>

Although many international good practices have been recorded in literature, only a few comprehensive peace education models can be found. Cremin and Bevington present an education model titled iPEACE,<sup>77</sup> based on Galtung's peace theory. This education model includes two

parts—the first, more responsive part on ‘peace-keeping’ and ‘peace-making’, and the other involving a proactive approach on ‘peace-building’. The responsive iPEACE model focuses on ensuring peace in the school community within existing frameworks such as laws, policies and security measures, and also applying such instruments with care to achieve the peace objectives. Although this model refers to operation and compliance, the members of a school community still need basic relevant knowledge and skills such as conflict literacy and conflict management skills to apply the model.

The responsive approach only ensures bare minimum actions to be taken to maintain peace in school community, but the community still needs to be flexible and even creative when applying policies or procedures. For example, instead of considering policy-based punishment as the only option to control violence amongst students, schools need to apply other conflict management mechanisms such as mediation or restorative justice actions. In contrast, the proactive iPEACE approach is concerned not with looking for simple solutions, but rather in providing frameworks to formulate schools’ own responses to the problem. For this purpose, the school community needs to be assisted to reflect on their peace issues; to explore multiple avenues from holistic perspectives; and to come up with plans for school peace-building. Cremin and Bevington advocate for applying various creative methods such as ‘photo-voice’<sup>78</sup> where photographs are used to engage students and consult them on peace in school or activities.<sup>79</sup> This is more broadly based on the concept of ‘moral imagination’ which seeks to introduce spirituality and aesthetics into peace-building.

### School peace programmes in Sri Lanka

Until the NPSCPE was introduced in 2008, little seemed to have done in Sri Lanka to achieve social cohesion through education, at least in a systemic sense.<sup>80</sup> In its 2009 report, the NCFNEA admits that the Sri Lankan education system has failed to promote nation building by fostering mutual understanding, tolerance and respect for the rich cultural diversity of Sri Lankan society, and education has made little contribution to ensuring social cohesion and stability.<sup>81</sup>

Certain commendable efforts have been made in the past decade to address some of the issues pointed out by NEC. From the social cohesion point of view, key changes introduced to the curricula include the ‘Life Competencies and Civics Education’ subject for grade 6-9 students; the ‘Citizenship, Education and Governance’ subject for grade 10-11 students; and the second national language subject for grade 6-9 students.<sup>82</sup> Textbooks have also been reviewed to exclude any references which are likely to produce negative impacts on social cohesion.

On the other hand, although teacher education on social cohesion has been identified as a key policy decision, many teachers, particularly in rural areas, have not received any guidance or training in this regard.<sup>83</sup> Setting up ethnically integrated schools was a key initiative identified under the NPSCPE, however, to date only 5% of government schools are recognised as integrated schools.<sup>84</sup>

The Social Cohesion and Peace Education Unit (SCPEU) of the MoE was established to coordinate several initiatives and on some occasions the Unit has worked in conjunction with the Office for National Unity and Reconciliation (ONUR). One of the prominent SCPEU programmes is a residential student exchange programme titled ‘Denuwara Mithuro’ (friends from two towns) through which reportedly about 3600 students from Tamil speaking areas and Sinhala speaking areas are given opportunities to form friendships.<sup>85</sup> ONUR has conducted a range of ‘sensitisation’ workshops and training programmes for teachers and education officers. The Student Parliament programme which was organised by SCPEU gave participating students the opportunity to debate certain topics and learn about Parliamentary procedures.<sup>86</sup> There were other one-off programmes such as the ‘Elephant Pass’ project which involved mostly Sinhalese speaking students helping to rebuild the Elephant Pass Railway Station which is located in a Tamil speaking area.<sup>87</sup> Some extracurricular activities such as cultural shows, student camps, debates, dramas and art exhibitions also have been carried out under the initiatives of provincial or Zonal Education



<sup>78</sup> For a detailed discussion on this see Cremin and Bevington 2017, pp. 56-57.

<sup>79</sup> Cremin and Bevington 2017, p. 70.

<sup>80</sup> The policy and the affiliated programmes have been reviewed but the report is not available in public domain for reference.

<sup>81</sup> The NCFNEA adds that ‘erosion in values in contemporary society is reflected in the lack of respect for life, gender based violence, corruption, consumerism and excessive individualism and lack of civic and social responsibility’. See Gunawardena GB et al., 2009, p. 114.

<sup>82</sup> The themes included in these subjects are: law and justice, democracy, multiculturalism, conflict resolution, human rights and duties, social cohesion and reconciliation, international relations, environmental issues, social issues, sustainable development and effective communication. Life Competencies & Civic Education is a compulsory subject in Grades 6 – 9, then it becomes an optional subject in Grade 10-11. Due to teacher shortage of teachers, approximately 45% of schools could offer course of second national language. See Aturupane and Wikramanayake 2011, p. E5.

<sup>83</sup> According a survey conducted in 2010, although 80% of teachers said they understood the concepts of peace and value education only 24% of these were able to demonstrate their understanding by appropriate examples. See Aturupane and Wikramanayake 2011, p. 7.

<sup>84</sup> Aturupane and Wikramanayake 2011, p. E6.

<sup>85</sup> Field interview, May 2019. Also see Aturupane and Wikramanayake 2011, p. E3.

<sup>86</sup> It was reported that by 2011 nearly one third of the Government Schools have participated in the program. See Aturupane and Wikramanayake 2011, p. E3.

<sup>87</sup> Aturupane and Wikramanayake 2011, p. E3.

Offices (ZEOs).<sup>88</sup> Although some of these programmes created continuing friendships between students of different ethnic groups, there were no appropriate systems embedded in them to continuously monitor, evaluate and share the lessons learned. The programmes of both the SCPEU and ONUR mostly focused on interethnic and interreligious harmony, and gender or disability equality issues were not covered adequately.<sup>89</sup>

NGOs also have been engaged in a range of social cohesion programmes in education from during the civil war period to the present. The psychosocial support programme of the German development agency GIZ was aimed at enabling children, youth, their families and communities to live together peacefully in a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual society.<sup>90</sup> Save the Children has implemented a range of initiatives to protect and promote the rights of children, and one of its social cohesion projects included publications of children's booklets on social cohesion themes. UNICEF has also implemented a number of programmes among which its Child Friendly Schools Initiative is a highlight.<sup>91</sup>

One of the most common features of programmes implemented by the government or NGOs is their lack of longevity. Most peace education programmes outside the curriculum seem to be some sort of a pilot initiative, and most of them apart from a few exceptions failed to be integrated into the mainstream by being adopted as a compulsory school activity.<sup>92</sup> NGO programmes generally cease as funding runs out, and government programmes face abrupt restructures or terminations due to changes in governments. Most importantly, there seems to be no long term vision shared between the government and NGOs; no adequate information sharing; or no coordination between agencies to work collectively to identify the gaps and jointly implement strategies to fill those gaps. Isolated attempts are destined to fail because there are layers of complex systemic barriers to social cohesion within and

outside the school system. This study will explore these systemic barriers further in the upcoming sections and address some of these issues in the roadmap presented in the third chapter.

### Peace-building

The term 'peace-building' is used by some researchers and practitioners to explain social cohesion measures. This is, however, criticised as being problematic because the term 'peace-building' is 'politically loaded' and 'can be associated with compromising rights, or as something imposed from the outside'.<sup>93</sup> Johan Galtung successfully overcomes this problem by theorising social cohesion within the context of peace-building through the concept of negative and positive peace: 'negative peace' being defined as the cessation of violence and 'positive peace' referring to structural changes that address social injustices causing violence.<sup>94</sup> According to this theory, while 'physical or psychological acts of aggression' are understood as 'direct violence', 'indirect violence' comprises both 'structural and cultural violence'. Unjust and inequitable treatment or institutional practices can be recognised as structural violence, whereas cultural violence can be understood as the 'discourses, narratives and beliefs that enable structural and direct violence to be enacted'.<sup>95</sup> Aspects of structural and cultural violence are indeed 'interdependent' since the structures provide 'mechanisms for cultural violence' and its continuation.<sup>96</sup> According to Galtung, these multiple forms of violence can be addressed by making 'positive peace' through a three-fold approach: peace-keeping, peace-making and peace-building, as presented earlier.<sup>97</sup>

In this context, peace can only be achieved by addressing indirect structural and cultural violence as much as direct violence—to eliminate these multiple forms of violence schools should introduce activities to keep peace, make peace and build peace.<sup>98</sup> Expanding on this integrated approach to achieve positive peace, Cremin and Bevington focus on three key attributes to be nourished in



<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Field interview with a senior officer of MoE, May 2019. Also note that at the time of the completion of this report, all the programmes of ONUR have come to temporary halt and the programmes of SCPEU are dormant due to changes of the government.

<sup>90</sup> The program was implemented in a s schools in Northern, Uva, Central and Sabaragamuwa Provinces, and it involved training and supporting a carder of teachers to provide counselling and guidance to students. According to the evaluation, the program was mostly successful but was discontinued.

<sup>91</sup> The program set up a school improvement mechanism in primary schools taking a rights-based approach to education while adopting teacher capacity building methods and 'student-centred teaching' approach. The other UNICEF programmes include Positive Classroom Program to prevent corporal punishment and promote positive disciplinary methods, and Social Cohesion Coordinators were trained in schools.

<sup>92</sup> For example certain features of the Child Friendly School Initiative said to have been adopted by the MoE.

<sup>93</sup> Cited Zakharia (2011) in UNICEF 2014, p. 9.

<sup>94</sup> Cited Galtung (1969) in UNICEF 2014, p. 6.

<sup>95</sup> Cremin and Bevington 2017, p. 2.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., pp. 3-4. The three fold approach: (a) addressing direct violence by peace-keeping; (b) addressing structural violence by peace-making (in reactive mode) and (c) addressing cultural violence by peace-building.

<sup>98</sup> Cremin and Bevington 2017, p. 1. Referring to Galtung's theory, Cremin and Bevington thus argue that 'lasting positive peace' in education institutions can be achieved through the 'wise and integrated use of peace-keeping, peace-making and peace-building'.

educational settings: inclusion, wellbeing and citizenship.<sup>99</sup> Inclusion is the process which facilitates every child receiving a quality education regardless of ability, need or identity factors such as gender, sexuality or ethnicity. Wellbeing is a 'state of inner peace' which balances interpersonal relationships and aspects of 'intra-personal life'. Citizenship education helps children to recognise others' personal, social and political contributions and to make 'informed contribution themselves'.<sup>100</sup>

A study conducted by Save the Children Norway identifies several interconnected aspects of peace education which help in building peace: (a) lowering the motivation to engage in conflict and raising the opportunity costs of taking part in armed conflict; (b) delivering critical lessons about nonviolent conflict resolution; (c) posing constraints against the use of violence and promoting human rights; (d) enabling participatory education systems which raise constraints against engaging in armed conflict; and (e) fostering positive socio-economic development can help prevent armed conflict.<sup>101</sup>

### **Social cohesion and 'intercultural culture'**

Scholars have attempted to understand social cohesion from behavioural points of view (focusing on good behaviour and positive interpersonal relations) as well as structural points of view (focusing on the reduction of inequalities, fostering social justice and building an inclusive society).<sup>102</sup> Structural aspects which hinder social cohesion or those features attributing to negative peace could be more embedded in post-conflict societies. Here, post-apartheid literature from South Africa is helpful in contextualising post-war Sri Lanka's problems of social cohesion in education.

Kock and others criticise 'nation building' as an effort 'driven by a premature logic of unity'. Such an approach 'misses the step of engaging with and resolving the inequalities created by a legacy of structural discrimination' by neutralising the 'national conversation around the traumas of segregation, racism and deprivation'.<sup>103</sup> In a separate article, Wyk argues that an 'intercultural culture' (as opposed to a multicultural one) must be established in South Africa's public schools because such a culture seems to better connect or communicate issues, notions, beliefs, values, and understandings among and between different cultures.<sup>104</sup> The author adds that such a shift will demand critical awareness of

interculturalism and informed commitment by educators and learners to prevent schools from continuing to embody the skewed values and practices of the apartheid era. The author submits that such move will also require stakeholders to summon the political and educational will to transform schools through changing and strengthening their institutional cultures and not viewing efforts to promote interculturalism as optional add-ons.<sup>105</sup>

In light of this conceptual shift towards interculturalism, it is important to reflect on the limitations of social cohesion initiatives in the education sector of Sri Lanka. It is particularly important to ask how much we have embedded solutions into our systems or structures to address multiple issues related to communication, beliefs, values, and understandings among and between different cultures. The other important aspect to consider from the South African context is the continuation of archaic institutional or structural establishments from the conflict era to the post-conflict period. Such systemic stagnation could arguably force progressive measures taken with goodwill to nonetheless come to a standstill. According to Wyk, 'creating an appropriate institutional framework for the transformation of South Africa's schools will be critical, especially insofar as achieving clearer understandings of diversity and interculturalism among students, teachers, administrators, and parents is concerned'. The author adds that 'institutional weakness' has been a major factor causing failures or delays in attempts at transformation and argues that without an effective institutional framework, 'the nation stands in danger of maintaining and strengthening the inequities of the apartheid system of education'.<sup>106</sup> Perhaps this is the most important words of wisdom to be taken from South Africa: all future efforts at fostering social cohesion in educational institutes are likely to fail if such efforts are built on faulty structures.

Discussing variations of social cohesion narratives found in South African schools, Kock et al. point out that 'progressive interpretations' of social cohesion can only be achieved through 'structural and symbolic mechanisms with social justice at their core'. The authors present several proposals to develop a socially cohesive classroom.<sup>107</sup> A blueprint to foster social cohesion in education settings in Sri Lanka should consider these proposals which focus on:

- (a) Creating a positive and productive learning environment through building trust and respect between learners, and dealing with prejudices even when these are uncomfortable to acknowledge;



<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>101</sup> Citing Dupuy (2008) in UNICEF 2014, p. 10.

<sup>102</sup> Cited Sayed et al. (2015) in Kock et al. 2018, pp. 3-4.

<sup>103</sup> Argued citing Barolsky (2013), Staeheli and Hammett (2013) in Kock et al. 2018, p. 10.

<sup>104</sup> Wyk 1997, p. 539.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 539.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 539.

<sup>107</sup> Cited Barolsky (2013) and Sayed et al. (2015) in Kock et al. 2018, pp. 11-12.

- (b) Dealing with inequalities (whether material, learning or other) practically and sensitively to preserve the dignity and inclusion of all learners and maximise learning;
- (c) Engaging with learning materials critically, particularly in how these represent or silence particular issues or identities;
- (d) Facilitating learning that is relevant, context-driven, and sensitive to learners' needs, aspirations and challenges.

## 1.4 School culture

School culture can be described as a 'pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group acquires as it solves its problems, and which are valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel'.<sup>108</sup> Attributes of school culture are likely to be manifested in a range of 'indicators' such as collaboration between teachers; teacher participation in building the school community; teacher participation in extra-curricular activities; involvement of parents; tension or possible clashes involving students or parents; the clarity of school regulations and collective norms, and relational trust (teacher-to-teacher; student-to-teacher, etc.).<sup>109</sup> Indicators of classroom climate may include general characteristics of teacher student relationships; considering students' opinion; conflict handling in classes; transparency in grading; cooperative learning; clarity on behavioural and disciplinary rules in classrooms; and dealing with diversity in classrooms.<sup>110</sup> Aspects of school culture are demonstrated by the school's behavioural rules, trust between each other, the way conflicts are dealt with and decisions are made.<sup>111</sup>

School culture is a determinant of the outcomes expected from formal and informal education. A study conducted in South Australia found that relational leadership and organisational culture were built upon the strength of the inter-relationships between teachers, between teachers and leadership, and between teachers and students.<sup>112</sup> One of the arguments brought forward in this study is that a healthy organisational culture is an 'essential precondition for becoming a school community that can sustainably develop pedagogies that make the difference'.<sup>113</sup> On the other hand, there are systemically driven factors which

hinder such inter-relationships. For example, educational leaders are under systemic pressure to produce outcomes driven by accountability regimes concerned with the school's performance. As a consequence, teachers are increasingly driven by 'individualism' which influenced by an array of 'performativity' processes serving systemic demands.<sup>114</sup>

There is also a strong correlation between school culture and informal learning. By steering informal learning opportunities through curricular or co-curricular activities, schools can achieve social cohesion outcomes within school culture. According to Scheerens who studies the indicators of informal learning, students' informal learning experiences flow from students' self-reflection, dialogue and discourse which are likely to have been triggered in an informal way by handling conflicting situations, and such informal learning can take place only if the students have reflective competencies.<sup>115</sup> The author adds that there are three archetypical situations that could create critical incidents providing informal learning opportunities: conflict situations in schools amongst students or between students and teachers; conflicts associated with differences between cultures, and self-organisation during collaborative student work.<sup>116</sup>

Referring to studies conducted in seven countries, Scheerens demonstrates that how informal learning opportunities at school could shape citizenship education by adopting a teaching approach in which 'teachers reflect on critical incidents in school life with an eye to their pedagogical potential for learning about citizenship'.<sup>117</sup> Commenting on the cyclic feedback loops of informal education, the author adds that while citizenship education is influenced by students' informal learning experiences, the competencies they have gained in informal learning can, in turn, influence informal activities and experiences.<sup>118</sup> Social cohesion initiatives positioned within the context of whole school culture need to harness the benefits of informal learning, not only by students but also by teachers and parents. This is an area which needs to be further explored, within the context of implementing social cohesion initiatives in schools in Sri Lanka.

There is also a strong business case for investing in school culture. Referring to a study of school culture and teachers' organisational commitment, Kardang et al. present a



<sup>108</sup> Citing Schein (2004), Senge et al. (1994) in Iordanidis et al. 2015, p. 574.

<sup>109</sup> Scheerens 2011, pp. 2018-222.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., pp. 2018-222.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p. 206.

<sup>112</sup> Giles & Bills 2017, p. 120.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>114</sup> Citing Ball (2003), Bennett (1998) and Burnard & White (2008) in Giles & Bills 2017, p. 122.

<sup>115</sup> Scheerens 2011, p. 205.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p. 203.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., p. 205.

range of materials to establish the influence of school culture in learning outcomes and productivity. They add that a strong school culture is marked by strong traditions, ceremonies, rituals and symbols, and that in a school with a strong culture, its members are 'strongly attached' to the values of the school.<sup>119</sup> According to this study, not only students but parents and society in general are influenced by the school culture, and it affects the behaviours and motivation of members and their productivity.<sup>120</sup> School culture also affects decision making and communication processes in a school and 'it is related to organisational learning, adaptation, innovation, competition, productivity, performance and organisational commitment'.<sup>121</sup> Kardang et al. further submit that 'collegiality, collaboration, shared decision-making, continuous improvement of teaching practices, and long-term commitment' are the markers to measure the strength of a school's culture.<sup>122</sup>

### Organisational culture in the education system

Culture is defined as a 'mental programme' and a 'construct' which governs people's behaviours, attitudes, and actions.<sup>123</sup> Culture is one of the access points in fostering change processes, and has been studied as a 'conceptual tool for helping organisations to improve the morale, motivation, commitment, loyalty, productivity and profitability of their employees'.<sup>124</sup> Organisational culture refers to 'shared assumptions, values and norms', and 'implicit and indiscernible aspects of organisations, core values and consensual interpretations about practices'.<sup>125</sup> Organisational culture includes both internal dynamic related to the history, such as changes occurred within an organisation, as well as changes introduced through reforms.<sup>126</sup> A school can be classed as a typical organisation, although no single comprehensive organisational theory can fully explain the complexity of a school as an organisation.<sup>127</sup>

Organisational culture can provide a 'consistent outlook and maintenance of values to support decision-making, co-ordination and control'. Yet such consistency can also make the organisation highly resistant to change because many attitudes and beliefs become permanent and unchallenged for too long.<sup>128</sup> Organisational culture is sometimes explained by the phrase 'how things are done around here', thus when people do not share the dominant attitudes and do not feel that they are part of the organisation, their negative emotions could lead to conflict.<sup>129</sup> Unsurprisingly, culture is considered as the most difficult organisational element to change.<sup>130</sup>

Culture is said to be shaped and continued through the organisational environment according to the 'interpretive view' presented by organisational theorists like Johnson and Scholes.<sup>131</sup> In contrast, the 'structural view' presented by Handy sees culture as focusing on how relationships are structured rather than how they are perceived.<sup>132</sup> Handy presents four 'power structures', prompting practitioners to link organisational structure to its culture: power culture, role culture, task culture and person culture.<sup>133</sup> Handy does not show preference of one over the other and observes that employees often believe in the myth that a particular type of culture which works well in one organisation may also be successful in another; thus they become 'inflexible'.<sup>134</sup> An employee can of course thrive in one type of culture but may fail in another.<sup>135</sup>

'Role culture' could be the one most applicable to the general education system in Sri Lanka where multiple divisions, institutes and bureaucrats operate under the MoE which holds the gigantic apparatus in balance. Schools within the larger organisational structure may, of course, display varying cultural values and attributes depending on the community, workforce and leadership. According to Handy, role culture exists in highly defined structured



<sup>119</sup> Citing İpek, 1999 in Kardang et al. 2011, pp. 573-584.

<sup>120</sup> Citing, Leifeste (1999) in Kardang et al. 2011, pp. 573-584.

<sup>121</sup> Citing Kathrins (2007) and Citing Stolp. (1996) in Kardang et al. 2011, pp. 573-584.

<sup>122</sup> Kardang et al. 2011, p. 574.

<sup>123</sup> Citing Hofstede (1980), Dill (1982) and Bergquist (1992) in Gaus et al. 2017, p. 1.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Iordanidis et al. 2015, p. 87. Organisational culture should be differentiated from organisational climate which refers to shared perceptions of behaviour and climate can be easily modified, in contrast to culture, which is characterised by resistance to change.

<sup>126</sup> Lukasik & Norbert 2014, p. 118.

<sup>127</sup> Iordanidis et al. 2015, pp. 573-574. Researching on Greek's primary school culture, Iordanidis et al. submit that the schools generally follow the 'administrative thought of organisations'.

<sup>128</sup> Bell 2013, p. 1138.

<sup>129</sup> Citing Mullins (1994) in Bell 2013, p. 1138.

<sup>130</sup> Citing Schein (1985); Williams et al. (1993) in Cacciattolo 2014, p. 5.

<sup>131</sup> Citing Johnson & Scholes (1993); Trevi-O (2003) in Cacciattolo 2014, p.

<sup>132</sup> Citing Levine (2006) in Cacciattolo 2014, p.

<sup>133</sup> Citing Handy (1993) in Cacciattolo 2014, p. 3.

<sup>134</sup> Handy, 1993.

<sup>135</sup> Citing Handy (1993) in Cacciattolo 2014, p. 3.

organisations where employees have specified delegated authorities. Describing the structure of these type of organisation as a 'Greek temple', Handy explains that role cultures 'put their strengths in their domains, their roles and areas of expertise'. Handy explains that power in role culture is derived from an individual's position, rather than one's expertise and professionalism, and they are known for forming hierarchical bureaucracies. Resultingly, he adds that 'organisations with role cultures are slow in recognising the need for change, and if the need is recognised, it takes a long time for change to be implemented'.<sup>136</sup>

### Organisational culture and qualitative development of schools

Establishing connections between organisational cultures of schools with qualitative development, Lukasik and Norbert argue that improving the quality of a school is dependent on a combination of the individual aspirations of teachers and the aspirations of the school as an organisation.<sup>137</sup> According to these authors, a 'quality school' comprises of a good work atmosphere which they define as 'a school in which both teachers and other educational entities create the best possible climate for educational, professional, and personal development'.<sup>138</sup> Next, they argue that a friendly atmosphere contributes to increased job satisfaction for teachers, improved engagement and effectiveness of educational processes, and lower burnout levels.<sup>139</sup> Finally, they cement their thesis by arguing that school organisational culture is the main factor determining its qualitative development by presenting a list of attributes of schools which we can consider adopting as indicators of positive school cultures. These are: knowledge, experience, skills, teachers' motivation in terms of development and changes; flexibility in acting, thinking and quick learning; school learning community, within which teachers can cooperate and learn together; and a consistent action plan and the means of carrying it out.<sup>140</sup> A careful analysis of these attributes would show that they fit very well in to two of the five domains of whole school culture we have adopted: learning and teaching (second domain) and leadership and professionalism (third domain). We can also

connect the submissions of Lukasik and Norbert with our other domains of whole school culture as presented below.

One of the most compelling aspects of the paper presented by Lukasik and Norbert is the theoretical base they have chosen to establish the interconnectedness of organisational culture and employees. They note that organisational culture is shaped by human views, ways of thinking and behaviour, and culture also has a 'reverse impact' on the behaviour and thinking orientation of the organisation's members.<sup>141</sup> The authors present a set of 'determinants' to describe the organisational culture of schools referring to how culture influences employees minds, hearts, aspirations, attitudes, actions, as well as how culture preserves the organisation's memory.<sup>142</sup> They add:

It is employees who determine the essence of an institution, its development and culture. They create it, change it, and foster its development. It could undoubtedly be claimed that organisational culture follows from individual cultural models [...] Usually the convictions and behaviour of individuals only partly coincide with organisational culture of the institution, however, in the case of educational institutions they are its basic component.<sup>143</sup>

These assertions endorse our approach to define the scope of whole school culture under the last three domains (leadership and professionalism; rights and behaviour, and communities and participation) largely covering the aspects of 'behaviours and convictions of individuals' which are identified by Lukasik and Norbert as 'basic components' of school culture. What is missing in the thesis presented by Lukasik and Norbert is the systemic aspects of the school culture that we have covered in the first domain. It is important to note that holistic culture change is not realistic without changing systems or structures such as legislation, policies and human resources frameworks.

### Teacher culture

The culture of the school's workforce is an integral part of the whole school culture.<sup>144</sup> Teacher commitment is considered as a 'critical predictor of a teacher's job performance and of



<sup>136</sup> Citing Handy, (1993, p. 186) in Cacciattolo 2014, p. 3.

<sup>137</sup> Lukasik & Norbert 2014, p. 119. The authors explain school culture with three 'mutually complementary elements': personal or individual culture of all school entities; interactions between these entities, and organisational culture or the quality of school management (Citing Kuźma [2009] in Lukasik & Norbert 2014, p. 116).

<sup>138</sup> Lukasik & Norbert 2014, p. 118.

<sup>139</sup> Citing Pyżalski (2010) in Lukasik & Norbert 2014, p. 120.

<sup>140</sup> Lukasik & Norbert 2014, pp. 118-119.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p. 118.

<sup>142</sup> 'It [culture] steers the employees' actions by directing at them the expectations as to their attitudes; it implies members' behaviour; it is contained in their minds and hearts and does not lend itself easily to direct observation and measurement; it is developed and shaped in a process; it affects aspirations and activities of employees in a formal, non-verbal and unnoticed way; it allows to identify with one's own organisation, and it serves as the memory of an organisation'. See Lukasik & Norbert 2014, pp. 117-118 (Citing Uździcki (2011)).

<sup>143</sup> Lukasik & Norbert 2014, p. 120.

<sup>144</sup> Sachs and Smith 1998, p. 425.

the quality of education' and therefore as the most 'effective route to school success'.<sup>145</sup> Teachers' commitment can be emphasised as an 'internal force' which refers to their need for greater responsibility and challenge.<sup>146</sup> Their commitment can be also understood as an 'external force' which is driven by a reform movement which expects higher standards and accountability via teachers' voluntary commitment.<sup>147</sup>

Although teacher culture is characterised by uniformity rather than pluralism, 'teachers as an occupational category are not homogeneous, their cultures are not either'.<sup>148</sup> Teacher cultures can be 'fluid, pluralistic and diverse, depending on the environmental, system-level and biographical characteristics of teachers'.<sup>149</sup> Nonetheless, certain studies conducted in Australia shed light on the connection between the teachers' social backgrounds and their value judgements in professional settings. According to one of these studies, teachers' conservatism is a barrier to reforms in Australian secondary schools and their 'operating principles' can be identified as being driven by social conservatism, balance, modesty, survival needs and morality.<sup>150</sup> Another study points out that teachers in Australia generally came from lower socio-economic backgrounds in comparison to those who are in professions such as law, medicine and engineering.<sup>151</sup> Researchers point out that a 'process of anticipatory socialisation' draws people with particular kinds of attitudinal dispositions to teaching and this in the long run tend to reproduce a conservatism within the profession.<sup>152</sup> This trend is likely to be replicated in Sri Lanka, particularly under the circumstances where teaching offers far less remuneration in comparison to careers in, say, law or medicine. Therefore, it is likely that the cultural traits and values driven by the varied pressures of the social backgrounds where most teachers come from dominate the workforce culture of general education.

Teachers' culture strongly influences the learning outcomes of students, particularly through the ways that teachers demonstrate their values in their curricular based activities

as well as daily decision making. Presenting the concept of 'equity culture model' for schools, Wilbur argues that educators need to question the 'tacit beliefs of their culture and reflect upon how equity goals are realised in daily practice'.<sup>153</sup> Elaborating on this, the author articulates a set of four integrated outcomes to be achieved by a teacher driven equity culture: determining self; communicating and collaborating with others; thinking critically and conceptually; and acting justly.<sup>154</sup> The author adds that 'the principles of an equity culture describe a value perspective of the learning process that influences what and how decisions are made about students, curriculum and instruction'. According to Wilbur, gaps exist 'between articulating values and then knowing what to do to make them come alive in practice' and proposes a set of 'equity criteria' as a standard to make explicit the values of an equity culture so that gaps can be narrowed.<sup>155</sup>

The 'Life Competencies and Civics Education' and the 'Citizenship Education and Governance' seem to be the only subjects which have dedicated topics on equity values in Sri Lankan schools, and these subjects also very much focus on articulating the values rather than on applying them. Needless to say, local schools which are driven by the exam-based assessment model are unlikely to invest time and resources on activities aiming to enhance the practical application of equity values, thus the 'gap' described by Wilbur will continue to exist. In the third chapter we will explore options to narrow this gap.

### Human rights and School culture

Peace-building is interwoven with human rights and citizenship education both in a conceptual sense and in practical aspects. A human rights framework can offer the means to challenge and uproot institutionally violent practices such as gender-based discrimination. Examining the feasibility of adopting a human rights framework as a basis for school life, Carter and Osler note that 'a school which claims, "we do not have discrimination here" may espouse equality as a principle but subvert



<sup>145</sup> Citing Tsui & Cheng (1999); Fink (1992) in Iordanidis et al. 2015, p. 575.

<sup>146</sup> Iordanidis et al. 2015, p. 575.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Sachs and Smith 1998, p. 425.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., p. 425.

<sup>150</sup> Citing Connell (1985) in Sachs and Smith 1998, p. 429.

<sup>151</sup> Citing Anderson & Western (1970); Anderson, et al. (1980); Anderson & Vervoorn (1983) in Sachs and Smith 1998, pp. 428-429.

<sup>152</sup> Citing Anderson & Western (1972) in Sachs and Smith 1998, p. 429.

<sup>153</sup> Wilbur 1998, p. 130.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., pp. 132-133.

<sup>155</sup> The criteria proposed by author 'transpose' the biasing elements and guide teachers inquiry into six decision making domains: *variation* (this criterion recognises the 'similarities and differences within and among group. of people. It counters the biasing element of stereotypes'); *inclusive* (criterion controls for linguistic bias, allowing 'femes and males of different background to find and positively identify with implicit and explicit messages); *accurate* (the criterion involves 'seeking information that is date-based and verifiable, and analysing the values that frame it'); *affirmative* ('deters the bias of invisibility exclusion that occurs when groups'); *representative* (this criterion 'seeks and balances multiple perspectives, protecting against the element of imbalance/selectivity, in which only one interpretation [...] is presented'), and *integrative* (this criterion weaves together in a unifying framework the experiences, needs, and interests of [people of diverse backgrounds] for the purpose of determining self, cooperating and collaborating with others, thinking critically and conceptually, and acting justly'). See Wilbur 1998, p. 139.

the implementation of this principle by marginalising or denying legitimate identities'.<sup>156</sup> The authors add that citizenship includes 'cultural and personal dimensions' apart from political aspects and argue that what citizenship education must aim for is not the simple absence of discrimination but the 'lively presence of many opportunities and spaces for citizens and residents to take part in the cultural, economic and political affairs of the community'.<sup>157</sup>

Carter and Osler also conducted an action research on human rights education with male students, and found that rights have little currency within the context of their study because they were equated with weakness. The students' perception was that 'to articulate a right was to deny an aspect of their masculinity; as real men they would have no need for them' and 'to claim a right is to admit to powerlessness within a context of inequality and fear'.<sup>158</sup> According to the authors, the students' perception was that rights were not universal, since they were 'derived from teachers and therefore not innate, with no consistency in who had them or why'.<sup>159</sup> These findings further cement the importance of changing values, attitudes and behaviour of teachers and learners, instead of focusing on textbook-based peace or human rights education.

On applying human rights through education, the Council of Europe proposes 'human rights schools', explaining their environment as 'where participation is encouraged, where views can be expressed and openly and discussed, where there is freedom of expression for pupils and teachers, and where there is fairness and justice'.<sup>160</sup> Emphasising that knowledge alone is inadequate and experience is crucial, the Council of Europe stresses the importance of making sure that reflections are 'both immediate and international'.<sup>161</sup> Similarly, commenting on morality in education, Carter and Osler notes that 'in schools, one must come to realise that there is more to morality than being friendly with your friends [...] If schools do not help students to understand that morality goes beyond personal affection of friends and family, then schools will have failed in moral education and in preparing students to live in a larger society'.<sup>162</sup>

The importance of incorporating human rights into social cohesion is that it helps legitimise the moral values of social cohesion by referring to internationally agreed rights and freedoms and domestically enacted laws including the Fundamental Rights guaranteed by the Constitution. Grounding social cohesion on a human rights platform, particularly by making references to the law, also gives a solid base for social cohesion actions, which makes it harder for certain conservative segments of the society to resist them.<sup>163</sup> Social cohesion programmes in education therefore must have a strong policy framework based on human rights. This idea will be further explored in the third chapter under the first domain (systems and implementation).

### A culture of aggression

Aggression is manifested in the school community in many ways such as bullying by students, corporal punishment by teachers or neglect by parents; such aggression can be associated with cultural underpinnings or even social acceptance.<sup>164</sup> Various forms of 'socially acceptable aggression are reinforced' through the media, public discourse and in education, and society 'inadvertently desensitises vulnerable learners to aggression' making them accept it 'as a means of coping with their social environment'.<sup>165</sup> Sharing research on the patterns of a culture of aggression in a secondary school in South Africa, Myburgh et al. point out that aggression manifested in schools is a consequence of this 'cultural shift' towards desensitisation.<sup>166</sup> According to the World Health Organisation, risk factors for children's aggression emerge at different levels: the individual level focuses on self-esteem and early aggressive behaviour; the relationship level focuses on teachers' poor supervision combined with parents' harsh physical punishment; and the community level focuses on socio-economic settings including environmental factors such as exposure to drugs or gang violence.<sup>167</sup> It is clear that addressing aggression at these multiple levels can be only accomplished by taking a holistic approach which broadly defines the scope of whole school culture. Thus, future school based peace initiatives in Sri Lanka should include mechanisms to address aggression at the individual, relationship and community levels.



<sup>156</sup> Carter & Osler 2000, p. 335.

<sup>157</sup> Citing Richardson (1996) in Carter & Osler 2000, p. 338.

<sup>158</sup> Carter & Osler 2000, pp. 346, 347.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., p. 347.

<sup>160</sup> Citing Council of Europe (1985) in Carter & Osler 2000, p. 339.

<sup>161</sup> Carter & Osler 2000, p. 340

<sup>162</sup> Citing Rest (1989) in Carter & Osler 2000, p. 340.

<sup>163</sup> For example, not allowing girls to play certain sports citing cultural reasons can be challenged by applying human rights instruments.

<sup>164</sup> This is further discussed in the next part under punishment and respectful behaviour, based on the findings of the field study we will demonstrate how certain cultural norms are borrowed to justify aggression.

<sup>165</sup> Citing Allen (2009) in Myburgh, et. al 2015, p. 1.

<sup>166</sup> Citing Grossman (2010) in Myburgh, et. al 2015, p. 1.

<sup>167</sup> Myburgh, et. al 2015, pp. 1-2.

A comprehensive study conducted by Save the Children found an alarming level of corporal punishment, psychological aggression and committing physical abuse to the level of criminal offences in Sri Lankan schools, while a majority of teachers reported that they were unaware or confused about the regulations which prohibit physical punishment.<sup>168</sup> According to this study, the most common reasons for punishment were failing to complete homework, failing to comply with the school's dress code or having 'love affairs'.<sup>169</sup> As pointed out by this report, teachers use punishment as a correction or disciplinary method either due to 'their own experience of it in childhood' or because they are unaware of other strategies to correct misbehaviours, since a majority of teachers have not received any formal training in classroom management, including the use of positive disciplining.<sup>170</sup> Alarming, parents as well as children were ready to 'tolerate' physically abusive punishment, 'if it is done by teachers whom they viewed were skilled in teaching'.<sup>171</sup> Expressing grave concerns over these punitive practices in schools, the report submits a range of recommendations, including providing a clear definition for corporal punishment; informing teachers on the legal framework; informing authorities on procedures to deal with teachers using corporal punishment; and strengthening the student counselling system.<sup>172</sup>

Bullying is a serious problem facing school communities across the globe, and the so called initiation practice of 'ragging' in Sri Lanka has grown to an endemic proportion in some education institutes including schools. Viewing bullying as an iceberg, researchers say that only some 20% of victims display a combination of visible symptoms but the submerged 80% hide a range of social, psychological, and familial issues which need to be recognised and addressed.<sup>173</sup> Bullying can be explained under three broad behavioural categories: physical aggression, verbal

aggression, and social alienation which is considered to be the most pervasive of all.<sup>174</sup> Many children enter such violent or aggressive school environments with tremendous trepidation about the torment they might experience, forcing some children to abandon school altogether.<sup>175</sup> Various studies point out that childhood bullying and other traumatic events can destroy fundamental assumptions about the safety around the child, causing the child to call all positive values into question, and feel abandoned and disconnected.<sup>176</sup> Bullying and other forms of violence in schools are behaviours attributed to the school environment and culture that allow for it, and such school climates are seen to be cultivating a 'culture of violence through a lack of empathy and caring towards students'.<sup>177</sup> The main negative climate factors associated with bullying behaviours include school staff modelling bullying behaviours; ignoring or reinforcing such behaviour; or accepting such behaviour as normal.<sup>178</sup>

The conventional narrative of a penalisation-based approach to address bullying which is largely based on the identification of the roles of the bully, the bullied and the bystander have been criticised. Some scholars argue that these roles need to be abandoned to shift away from 'pathologising' approaches towards dealing with root causes of bullying holistically.<sup>179</sup> Zero tolerance policies against bullying combined with punitive regimes have been rejected by some scholars due to mounting evidence which demonstrate the exclusion of students through automatic suspensions or expulsions to be counterproductive. According to Solinas, 'zero tolerance policies have been linked to weakening school bonds, the possibility of emotional harm, excessive enforcement efforts, and increasing delinquency'.<sup>180</sup> Instead of controlling bullying behaviour, an approach focusing on building and repairing relationships, and helping children to be 'internally driven by good values' has been supported by various segments. According to some findings, school-based bullying



<sup>168</sup> De Silva 2017.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3. The author adds: [...] the use of force towards young people in Sri Lankan schools is widespread. This is further compounded by some parents encouraging teachers to use punishments on their children. And, many students too believe that such punishment is useful. This has led to a punishment-based culture in a young persons' life within the Sri Lankan school system. See p. 5.

<sup>172</sup> De Silva 2017, p. 5.

<sup>173</sup> Solinas 2007, p. 34.

<sup>174</sup> Social alienation, also known as relational bullying, encompasses gossiping, embarrassing others, inciting hatred, scapegoatism, malicious rumour spreading and exclusion from social. See Solinas 2007, p. 35.

<sup>175</sup> Solinas 2007, pp. 30-31.

<sup>176</sup> Citing Herman (1997) & Zehr (1990), Herman (1997) in Solinas 2007, p. 3.

<sup>177</sup> Citing MacDonald (1999) in Solinas 2007, pp. 30-31.

<sup>178</sup> Solinas 2007, p. 36

<sup>179</sup> Citing Coloroso (2002); Twemlow et al. (2001) in Solinas 2007, p. 35.

<sup>180</sup> Citing Sprott et al. (2005); Skiba & Paterson, (1999); Stinchcomb, et al. (2006); Karp. & Breslin (2001) in Solinas 2007, p. 32. Also zero tolerance policies criticised as 'zero thinking policies' or a 'reckless and punitive approach that has an overtone of vindictiveness' because this 'all or nothing' approach forces the schools to choose mandatory suspension or expulsion, 'leaving little flexibility for creative approaches or collaborative solutions' to the issues at hand (Citing Coloroso (2002)), *ibid.*

prevention programmes need to simultaneously improve the quality of the environment, while enhancing students' assets and implementing ways to improve their social emotional competencies.<sup>181</sup> To counter bullying in schools, Cowie and Jennifer propose fostering cooperative group work in classrooms, and argues that such cooperative approaches create opportunities for pupils to 'share ideas, to challenge opposing ideas in a constructive way, to negotiate with one another and to learn to help one another' while promoting self-esteem and a sense of positive identity.<sup>182</sup> In the third chapter, we will further explore options of incorporating these actions into the Sri Lankan education system along with the restorative justice approach discussed next.

### **Restorative justice, mediation and whole school culture**

The creation of a safe space in school for difficult conversations may make it possible for young people to overcome the barriers of denial, secrecy and shame of abuse.<sup>183</sup> Various non-disciplinary methods such as peer-mediation, discussion circles and justice conferencing have been applied in some schools across the world to provide this safe place for the children.<sup>184</sup> In contrast to punitive and retributive responses to wrongdoing, restorative practices attempt to mend the harms done to people and broken relationships, and address the needs of both victim and offender by using a communitarian process to generate resolutions agreed upon by participants.<sup>185</sup> Students may feel more at ease in peer guided conversations, which allow both sides to share their story in the presence of an adult.<sup>186</sup>

Compiling a resource package to counter violence in schools, Cowie and Jennifer emphasise the importance of helping all children to develop more caring attitudes. They add that children's awareness of the impact of violence on others can lead to the active challenging of bullying

behaviour in schools.<sup>187</sup> According to the authors, peer support by students trained in mediation and problem solving can help victims of violence while contributing to a caring ethos at school.<sup>188</sup>

Conducting a doctoral study on conditions necessary for restorative justice to be reflected in school culture, Solinas establishes an interesting link between restorative justice and values or practices affecting social cohesion in schools. When the school community collectively learns and practices restorative justice values and principles through 'democratic modelling', their actions can have a 'serendipitous fit' with relationship building and inclusivity.<sup>189</sup> Solinas further points out that violent recidivism occurs in schools found to be associated with a 'weak sense of community' because in an environment with a strong sense of community people are deterred by the fear of losing status or respect. Thus a sense of connectedness to the community is indeed central to restorative justice, and in turn such connectedness may also result in an inhibition of violence in schools due to the fear of jeopardising important relationships.<sup>190</sup>

Restorative justice conferencing could be one of the key arms in future social cohesion initiatives in schools to replace punitive remedies which have been criticised by scholars and practitioners as being of little or no use in building school communities.<sup>191</sup> Given that local school communities are close-knit via extended families, religious institutions, economic activities, and so on, and especially so outside cities, a restorative justice approach is likely to show successful results. Members of school communities also may show preference for a restorative justice approach over punitive approach based on religious values such as forgiveness and compassion. However, it is important to note that the system needs to have internal mechanisms to prevent rich and privileged parties abusing it to further victimise those who are suffering.<sup>192</sup>



<sup>181</sup> Citing Eccles & Appleton (2002); Weissberg & Greenberg (1998); Cohen (2001) in Solinas 2007, p. 37.

<sup>182</sup> Cowie & Jennifer 2007, Chapter 1,4.

<sup>183</sup> Solinas 2007, p. 26.

<sup>184</sup> School-based restorative justice conferences said to have started in Australia and now the system has been followed by other countries. See Solinas 2007, p. 25.

<sup>185</sup> Solinas 2007, pp. 8-9.

<sup>186</sup> The author however, notes the risk of peer mediation programmes being co-opted by against peers who are seen as 'undesirables'. See Solinas 2007, p. 38.

<sup>187</sup> Cowie & Jennifer 2007.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., Chapter 1, 4, 5. They further submit that a restorative and inclusive approaches create opportunities for adults and children alike to explore range of values such as respect for and empathy towards others; openness to the others' opinions; willingness to negotiate, and commitment to social justice, equality and diversity.

<sup>189</sup> Solinas 2007, pp. 5-5.

<sup>190</sup> Citing Tittle (1980); Spratt, Jenkins, & Doob (2005) in Solinas 2007, p. 26.

<sup>191</sup> See the discussion on punishment in Chapter 3. .

<sup>192</sup> Field study showed that children of influencing and affluent parents generally receive favourable treatment in schools .

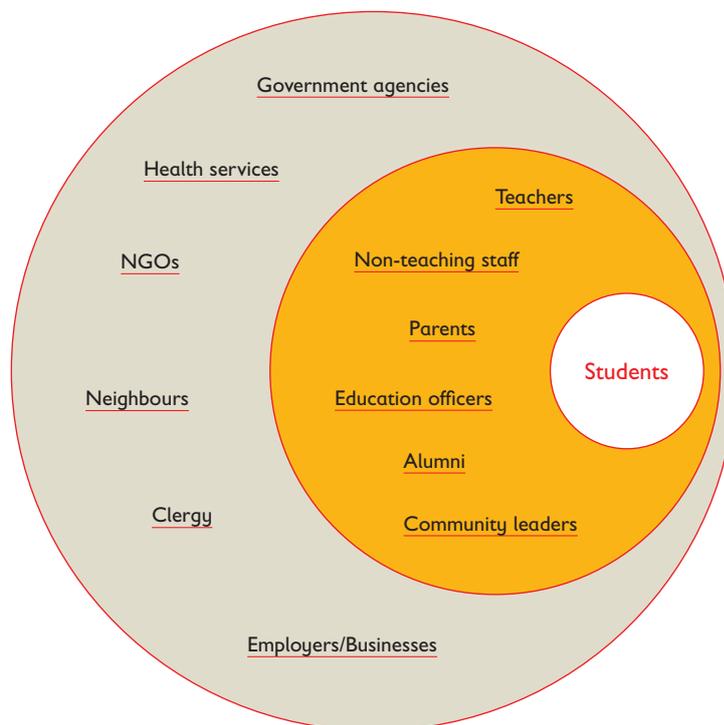
### Whole school culture and community

A whole school community includes students, teachers, principals, parents and non-teaching school staff as well as everyone around the school who is a stakeholder or can influence the school such as alumni, local employers, places of religious worship and various government and non-governmental agencies including health, transport and cultural agencies. Cowie and Jennifer’s resource package to counter violence in schools advocates for a ‘whole school approach’ and argues that if any intervention in schools is to have any chance of succeeding, it needs to involve the community inside and outside the school.<sup>193</sup> This is because success depends on the extent to which all members of the school community ‘feel empowered to participate meaningfully in its development and implementation’. They submit that a sense of lack of ‘ownership’ of the intervention will ‘almost certainly result in resistance’ to a whole school initiative. They also present several factors of ensuring success—for example, leadership with a democratic management style; dynamic communication; and relationships in the community.<sup>194</sup> Pointing out the benefits of a whole school approach, the authors note that it gives an opportunity to draw in a range of skills and expertise from participating community members, and helps educators as well as students build their capacities.<sup>195</sup>

Cowie and Jennifer guides schools to adapt a four-level model of involvement for a whole-school community approach to the promotion of non-violence: information level, i.e. provision of information to the school community; participation level, i.e. seeking the community’s involvement through meetings or workshops; and collaboration level and partnership levels, i.e. facilitating all members of the school community working together to share responsibility.<sup>196</sup>

The whole school approach proposed by Cowie and Jennifer has been validated by a range of studies coming from various disciplines. For example, commenting on bullying prevention programmes, Solinas also proposes a holistic approach because it helps the programme become ‘an integral facet of school life’, and such a programme is ‘less likely to fall victim to the latest in a series of educational fads that come and go in schools’.<sup>197</sup> Referring to peace education in Sri Lankan schools, Aturupane and Wikramanayake submit that peace education cannot succeed in isolation and must be incorporated into multilevel processes of peace-building.<sup>198</sup> These assertions, combined with the volume of evidence presented earlier, demand that schools in Sri Lanka adopt a holistic approach to foster social cohesion through a whole school culture.

### Whole School Community



<sup>193</sup> They note that whole school approach to counter violence has been drawn from extensive experience of training and knowledge of practices in the field, and it is grounded in a number of years of collaborative research across Europe. See Cowie & Jennifer 2007, Chapter 1, 3.

<sup>194</sup> Cowie & Jennifer 2007, Chapter 3, 4.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., Chapter 3, 5.

<sup>197</sup> Solinas 2007, p. 38.

<sup>198</sup> Aturupane and Wikramanayake 2011, p. 4.

## The child's right to participate

While this study looks into various aspects of social cohesion in education, our focus needs to remain constantly on the rights of the child, amongst which the child's right to participate is most crucial in a school culture fostering social cohesion. The child's right to participation is one of the four key principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, alongside non-discrimination; the best interests of the child; and life, survival and development. Article 12 of the Convention provides that 'whenever parents or adults make a decision that affects the child in whatever a manner, the child has the right to express his or her own views and such views should be given due consideration'.<sup>199</sup> Sri Lanka is a signatory to the Convention and has acknowledged the importance of the child's participation at many levels. For example, in its combined fifth and sixth periodic reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Government of Sri Lanka spelled out its commitment to include and promote children's participation in preventive measures to combat violence and other forms of abuse.<sup>200</sup>

To further clarify benefits, methods and obligations, the Department of Probation and Childcare Services has published a set of guidelines.<sup>201</sup> These guidelines provide that the wellbeing of the children can only be ensured by listening to children and respecting their views, and add that the participation of children can make a long-term impact in promoting democracy, development and peace in the country.

Investigating methods of engaging children, Scheerens presents several international examples, out of which student councils and school parliaments have been identified as some of the common methods of engaging children in decision making.<sup>202</sup> Here, they identify the influence of students in Denmark as significant, because students there have a voice even in school activities such as teaching plans.<sup>203</sup> Students also have a dedicated slot in the timetable to discuss certain social or disciplinary issues. In Italian schools, the rights and duties of students are adopted in a 'student statute'.<sup>204</sup> An instrument similar to a 'disciplinary contract' developed by students is used as part

of a school development project in Berlin.<sup>205</sup> Romania has a democratically elected National Council of Students, and they are officially consulted by the Ministry of Education. Scheerens found that students of most schools have an important say in the planning and organising activities of school journals, theatre clubs and school bands.<sup>206</sup> Consulting children is important not only because it helps to identify the issues of children to seek new ideas, but there are other benefits as well.

According to some scholars, participation of students in school councils helps students' personal development and helps improve their social interaction and their sense of active engagement. Such participation is also said to develop their communication skills, their sense of 'political grounding' and their willingness to take responsibility for action<sup>207</sup>. Students engaged in school councils were reportedly more aware of democratic procedures and practices, and were capable of being a representative, asking others' views, arguing a point of view, and being accountable for decisions taken.<sup>208</sup> However, such benefits do not arise when students' participation is facilitated on adults' terms without providing genuine opportunities for students to participate in decision making when such efforts amount to being merely symbolic or tokenistic.<sup>209</sup>

## 1.5 Holistic approaches to defining school culture

A school culture with the strengths to foster social cohesion does not spontaneously materialise simply by delivering classroom education. In this regard, the NPSCPE asserts that 'even the best ESCP curriculum will have little impact if the school culture is antithetical to it, for example, if there are divisions among the students, lack of free speech or democracy, or an acceptance of violence or inhumane punishment as a solution to a problem.'<sup>210</sup>

The materials on social cohesion and whole school culture reviewed in this research were connected to a web of interdisciplinary themes including interpersonal and institutional violence, anti-discriminatory legislation,



<sup>199</sup> Article 12. Further, 51st session of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child adopted a special declaration on children's participation to support of the process of establishing children's participation by states parties.

<sup>200</sup> UN 2017, p.37. This undertaking may have some positive impact on social cohesion initiatives as well since social cohesion initiatives give serious considerations to eliminate violence and abuse against children

<sup>201</sup> Department of Probation and Child Care Services 2015. Further details on this guide will be discussed in the last chapter.

<sup>202</sup> Scheerens 2011, p. 206. Some of these methods have been adopted in schools in Sri Lanka. See chapter 2.

<sup>203</sup> Scheerens 2011, p. 206.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Taylor (2002) cited in Scheerens 2011, p. 206.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> See the discussion on 'participation of children' in the last chapter.

<sup>210</sup> MoE 2008, p. 15.

organisational culture, human resources management mechanisms and information management systems. These materials overwhelmingly supported the need for adopting a holistic approach to address systemic underlining issues linked with social cohesion. For example, collating findings of various researchers who have investigated a number of 'whole school re-culturing' programmes in Europe and North America, McMaster submits that a culture of inclusion requires the 'creation of structures within the school' that provide fertile ground to develop and strengthen a shared commitment and vision to inclusive principles. Here, researchers must look beneath the surface to examine the 'espoused values, norms and rules that provide the day-to-day operating principles by which members of the group guide their behaviour'.<sup>211</sup> Pointing out a Canadian example involving 'indicators of success', the author presents 'essential features' of a whole school programme: a shared vision, committed school leadership, collaboration within the school and wider community, considering inclusion as an issue of social justice, individualised learning approaches and enabling student voices.<sup>212</sup>

Apart from considering these broader aspects of school culture, it is also important that we link whole school culture with the other six strategic policy areas of NPSCPE and NPRC (the national policy). Further, measures proposed to enhance the education system of Sri Lanka by the NEC and international organisations such as the UN and World Bank also need to be considered. This should include in particular the report of the NEC on the 'Proposals for a National Policy on General Education in Sri Lanka' which contains an indispensable set of recommendations to be placed at the very foundation of social cohesion initiatives in education.

### **NPRC Policy Principles**

The nine policy principles of the NPRC are built on the themes of equality, human rights, linguistic rights, national coexistence and diversity, ownership, justice and rule of law, sustainable development, civic consciousness and

transitional justice.<sup>213</sup> All the three policy statements presented under the theme of 'civic consciousness' are important in forming a policy-base for social cohesion initiatives in education:

- (a) Cultivate a sense of responsibility amongst citizens of Sri Lanka to engage in fulfilling their responsibility towards ensuring a fully functioning democracy, fostering a sense of solidarity and a culture where differences are respected and celebrated. This is to advance positive interaction of rights and responsibilities as equal partners in achieving sustainable peace, social cohesion and reconciliation in Sri Lanka;
- (b) Ensure that reconciliation initiatives are accompanied by public education programmes that ensure informed participation of citizens in the process;
- (c) Take proactive measures to promote a culture of moderation that permeates all spheres of the life of a citizen, including the economic, cultural and political.

The NPRC policy clearly and heavily relies on the general education system to implement a wide array of measures emanating from the aforementioned statements. The other important aspect of the NPRC is its nine cross-sectional principles which undoubtedly resonate with some aspects of the five domains of whole school culture. These cross-sectional principles are: conflict sensitivity; cross cultural awareness; victim centeredness; gender responsiveness; efficiency and effectiveness; coordination and complementarity; leadership and sustainability; foresight and innovation, and clear and consistent communication.<sup>214</sup>

### **Proposed goals and guiding principles for a national system of education**

The final report of the NCFNEA notes that 'it is incumbent upon all schools to develop a school culture to provide a child-friendly, democratic, social climate to realise the full potential of children'. The goals presented by the Committee lay a solid ground for future social cohesion initiatives in schools, and almost all of them seem to



<sup>211</sup> Quoted Kugelmass (2006) in McMaster 2013, p. 4.

<sup>212</sup> McMaster 2013, p. 15.

<sup>213</sup> The policy statements under the theme of equality include ensuring of equal access to services and opportunities for everyone; gender equality, equal access to 'substantive freedoms' including freedom of unequivocal non-discrimination. The theme of human rights presents the policy statements, requires the State to provide amongst other things, mechanisms and educational measures to enforce civil and political rights; fulfil economic, social and cultural rights, and to protect the inherent dignity of every citizen. Under the theme of national coexistence and diversity, the policy expects the State to create an inclusive society by setting up mechanisms, and to reinforce the notion of active citizenship. Taking steps to institutionalise women and youth engagement at all levels of the national reconciliation process is recognised as a policy under the theme of ownership, and the theme of justice and rule of law requires the State to take measures to build a society where everyone is equal before the law. The theme sustainable development is explained by the policy statements requiring proactive measures to promote a culture of moderation; quality education towards promoting coexistence, integration, national unity and reconciliation, and ensuring equitable development in all regions and communities in the country. See ONUR 2017, pp. 4-9.

<sup>214</sup> ONUR 2017, pp. 4-9.

<sup>215</sup> Gunawardena GB et al., 2009, p. 15.

have some relevancy to social cohesion.<sup>216</sup> The NCFNEA also presents a set of guiding principles to be adopted in a new education system<sup>217</sup> and themes presented in these principles significantly crosscut the policies of social cohesion in education. These guidelines state that education is a fundamental right of every child including children with disabilities, and that the State should provide equitable opportunity for education of children. Presenting the guidelines, the report also notes that education 'should ensure total and integrated development of the child in a balanced and harmonious way enhancing his/her potential across a range of different dimensions including physical, emotional, linguistic, social, intellectual, aesthetic and spiritual'. Further, the report holds that education should 'promote national cohesion, national integrity and national unity through the curriculum'.

The report also refers to several areas of workforce strategies and provides that human resources development should foster competencies for the benefit of self, society and nation, and professional standards should be promoted to deliver a competent service. The report guides that the link between the school and community should be strengthened to enable the school to grow, and that parents should have a major role in ensuring the total development of the child. These guiding principles combined with the proposed education goals undoubtedly take a holistic approach to education. These goals and principles could therefore greatly inform the holistic approach proposed in this study for a whole school culture to foster social cohesion.

### Holistic education

One of the best examples of conceptualising a holistic approach comes from post-apartheid South Africa. Proposing an education system to embrace interculturalism, Wyk presents several principles to guide institutional transformation in the education sector.<sup>218</sup> Arguing that institutional transformation programmes cannot be viewed as 'optional, extras' or 'add-ons', Wyk submits that such efforts of transformation 'must be seen as essential and non-negotiable components of any strategy to promote educational equity'. He adds that negatively perceived

differences among constituencies were ignored during the apartheid era 'by design', and therefore, if such differences are not taken into account in any transformation efforts in education, 'inequities will be reproduced in the present era'.

Wyk also argues that institutional transformation programmes cannot be based on the unrealistic expectations of previously excluded weaker parties and submits that 'unless all parties can expect concrete benefits, the political will to sustain transformation will be lacking'. Next, he points out that institutional transformation programmes must establish cooperative and integrated efforts for people to realise the benefits of closer interracial relations. Finally, Wyk asserts that 'the success of institutional transformation programmes depends on their ability to promote negotiation and cooperation among various constituencies to encourage the unlearning of prejudices, and as a result, release resources for the development of democracy, productivity, and diversity'.

One of the key underlying proposals of Wyk's submission is to adopt a holistic approach to the institutional transformation project, which also has to be set up on a ground free of the flaws of previously failed systems. By submitting that institutional transformation attempts should not be 'extras' or 'add-ons' Wyk also indicates that transformation measures must be embedded into the core business of education.

Handy points out that schools are the only 'safe practice grounds for life' that we have, and argues that schools should help its students 'to take responsibility for their lives, for their beliefs about the world, and for the others with whom they work or live or meet, as well as touch their imaginations and inspire their souls'.<sup>219</sup> Criticising the conventional style of education, Handy adds that many people's 'school experience' leaves their 'self-esteem in tatters, believing that they are stupid, inadequate, and incapable'.<sup>220</sup> Handy argues that in order to be employable, every child leaving the school should be guaranteed, as a right, that they will have 'three components of survival' which are also the 'building blocks of self-esteem': 'self-confidence, a saleable skill or competence, and social skills of quite a high order'.<sup>221</sup>



<sup>216</sup> The goals: developing a Sri Lankan citizen with love and dedication to motherland through fostering national cohesion, national integrity and national unity; respecting human dignity and recognising pluralistic nature and cultural diversity of Sri Lanka upholding tolerance and reconciliation; recognising and conserving the worthy elements of the nation's heritage while responding to the challenges of a changing world; creating and supporting an environment imbued with the values of social justice and a democratic way of life; promoting a life style based on respect for human values and sustainable development; promoting the physical, mental and emotional well-being of individuals; cultivating the attributes of a well – integrated and balanced personality; developing human resources for productive work that enhances the quality of life of the individual and the nation to contribute to economic development; empowering individuals to adapt to and manage change, and to develop capacity to cope with rapid change, complexities and unforeseen situations, and fostering a liberated world view in keeping with modern knowledge to secure a respectable place in global community. See Gunawardena GB et al., 2009, pp. 1-5.

<sup>217</sup> Gunawardena GB et al., 2009, pp. 6-16.

<sup>218</sup> Wyk 1997, p. 540. Wyk argues that intercultural culture seem to more accurately suggest the action of connecting or communicating issues, notions, beliefs, values, and understandings among and between different cultures aspects.

<sup>219</sup> Handy 1998, pp. 14-15.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., pp. 14-15.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

Handy asserts that the first duty of the school is to help child to build up an 'intelligence profile'; then to encourage the child to develop their preferred set of intelligences and lastly by helping them to apply it.<sup>222</sup> Comparing the compulsory test system in British schools to a 'horse race', Handy notes that 'life is a marathon, not a horse race [...] In a horse race only the first three count [but] in a marathon everyone who completes the course is a winner'.<sup>223</sup> Handy further asserts that the school should help students to access knowledge, rather than 'transfer it all to one's own brain' and adds that schools must not force-feed their students, but teach them how to feed themselves.<sup>224</sup>

According to Handy, the process of education is 'fundamentally skewed' and the system instead needs to build in 'experience of reality' as much as providing 'more opportunities for reflective learning and requalification after school'.<sup>225</sup> Aspects of the education system which Handy criticised appear to have somewhat changed in Britain<sup>226</sup> but Sri Lanka still has not found its way out of stagnation and it has now come to a crisis point. Unless immediate actions are taken, the prophecy which Handy has spelled out for Britain is likely to come true in Sri Lanka:

'The danger is that our traditional schools and colleges will lag behind, designed by people from a world that used to be, for a world that will be no more, rather like our armies, which were always well trained for the last war. If we fail, this time, to leap beyond our own experience, we will fail our youth'.<sup>227</sup>

Serious criticism is emerging against the peace education agenda too, which appears to have been designed mainly in a 'drive to avoid war and promote global justice and international understanding'.<sup>228</sup> Cremin and Bevington argue that although there was a certain degree of success in the field, it was held back by its ties with modernity; being overly concerned with 'binaries and linear thinking'; and over-reliance on science, rationality and reason', thus limiting its 'ability to respond to complexity'.<sup>229</sup> They add that the liberal peace agenda was somewhat limited by its inability to embrace different traditions of global peace. Modern peace education has largely ignored 'ways of thinking and knowing that emanate from the global East and South' due to the undue influence of the dominant international actors working for global security and economic growth.<sup>230</sup> The authors add that peace education 'needs to respond in more sophisticated ways to complexity and globalisation. Models for peace education need to allow for the multiple realities that make up the everyday life of schools, and the need to embrace paradox and contingency'.<sup>231</sup> These assertions combined guide us to mould a home-grown peace education agenda that is based on the most progressive elements of our value system, combining liberal democratic thinking with a commitment to social justice.



<sup>222</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., pp. 16-17.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>226</sup> Also Cremin and Bevington quote Richard Pring to discuss how UK, is still retaining the 'Victorian idea of formal education taking place within a single establishment' which might have been appropriate for educating people to work in factories, offices (before the advent of information technology) and the army, although not a good model for developing the kinds of ethical and creative thinking that are necessary in the twenty-first century: See Cremin and Bevington 2017, pp. 48-9.

<sup>227</sup> Handy 1998, p. 19.

<sup>228</sup> Cremin and Bevington 2017, p. 35.

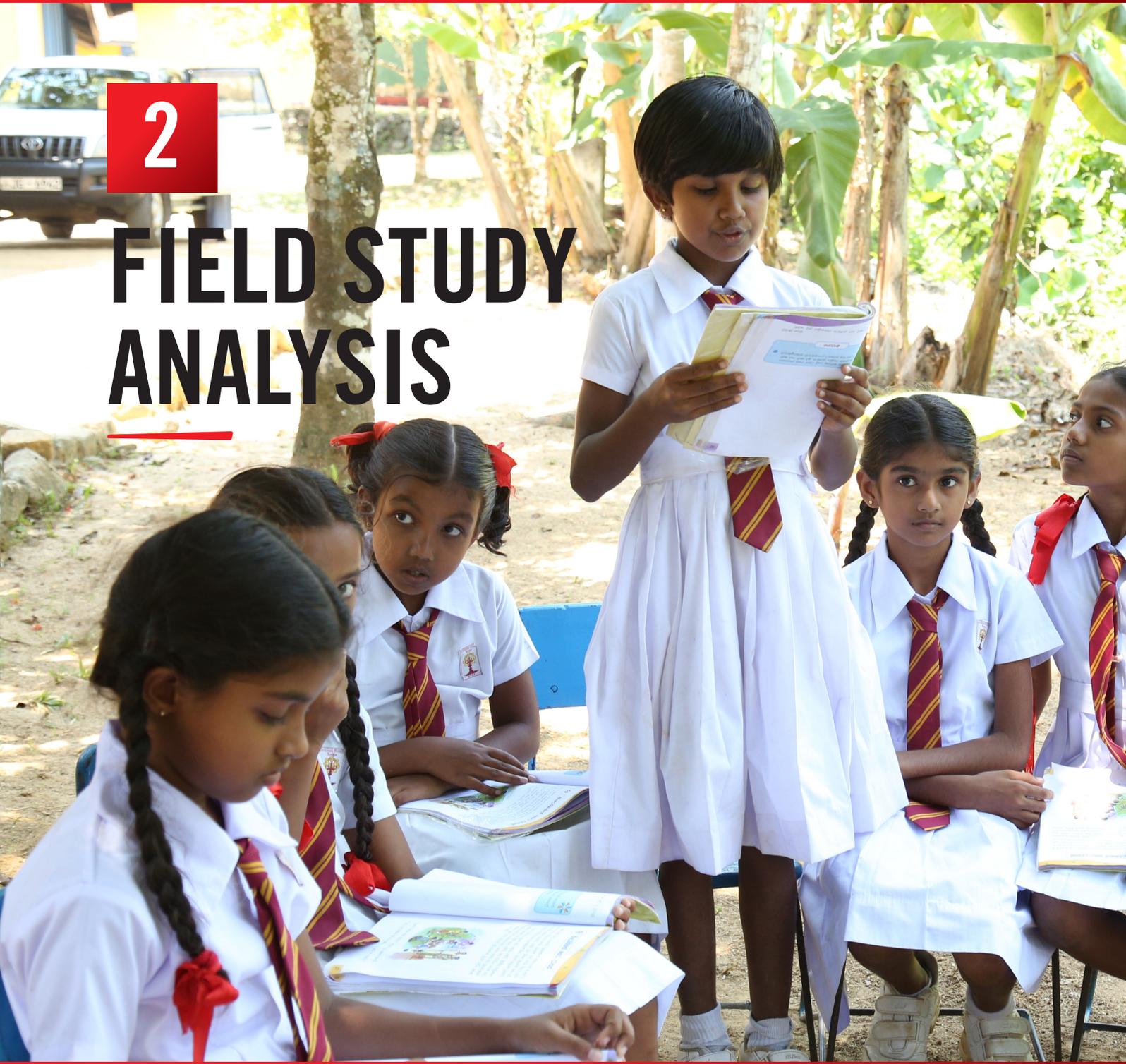
<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

# 2

# FIELD STUDY ANALYSIS



2.1 Field research methodology	32
2.2 Systems and Implementation	34
2.3 Learning and Teaching	36
2.4 Leadership and Professionalism	39
2.5 Rights and Behaviour	42
2.6 Communities and Participation	48
2.7 Social cohesion policies and programmes	49

## 2.1 Field research methodology

The field research component of this report comprises of a comprehensive study conducted in the Western, Southern, Central, Northern and Eastern provinces of Sri Lanka covering a diverse sample of schools.<sup>232</sup> The school sample included a broad cross section of schools from the designated five provinces, including poorly resourced schools as well as comparatively well-resourced schools.<sup>233</sup>

The field study comprised of structured individual interviews and focus group discussions:

- 29 interviews were conducted with teachers, principals and education officers including those holding senior positions in their respective agencies.<sup>234</sup> Several government officers outside the education sector and officers of UN agencies and NGOs were also interviewed.
- 37 focus groups discussions were conducted: 13 focus groups with grade 10 and 11 students, 12 focus groups with teachers and 6 with parents. A further 6 focus

groups were conducted with education officers in Galle, Kandy, Mannar and Trincomalee Districts. Each focus group conducted in schools comprised six to eight members who were nominated by the principal or the teacher in-charge of coordinating the field research activity at that school.<sup>235</sup> All participants of the focus groups were also given a paper based questionnaire to be filled individually. Through the questionnaire, participants were given a list of social cohesion initiatives which were considered as international good practices and were asked to mark their preferences as to implementing those practices.<sup>236</sup>

The teachers, students and parents were recruited for the focus groups from a sample of 13 schools. Five of these schools were Tamil mediums schools (2 Roman Catholic schools, 2 Muslim schools and one school from the Central Province which did not specify the school's religion). Eight of the schools were Sinhala medium schools which did not specify their religion but mostly catered for Buddhist students, except for one mixed school which included a significant number of Muslim students.

**Interviews:** 29 interviews were conducted with the following categories of interviewees:

Province	District	Teachers	Principals	Education officers	Executive level officers	NGO/UN officers
Western	Colombo	1		1	5	3
Southern	Hambantota		1			
Southern	Galle	1		1		
Central	Kandy	1	1	1		
Central	Nuwara Eliya	1	1	1		
Eastern	Trincomalee	2	2	2		
Northern	Mannar	1	1	1		
Northern	Jaffna				1	



<sup>232</sup> The field study covered the administrative districts of Colombo (Western), Kandy and Nuwara Eliya (Central), Galle and Hambantota (Southern) Trincomalee (Eastern), Mannar and Jaffna (Northern). The schools participating in the field study proportionately represented the urban, rural and plantation (estate sector) areas. There was a proportional distribution of girls only, boys only and mixed schools in the sample. We also chose schools which teach in the Sinhalese and Tamil mediums, and amongst them there were schools identifying themselves as Hindu, Christian or Islamic schools. There were no Buddhist schools as such in the sample, but the majority of the schools generally cater only for Buddhist children by having only Buddhist shrines and Buddhist religious activities.

<sup>233</sup> There were also several popular schools, which we call 'elite' schools for the purpose of this study.

<sup>234</sup> Participant identities have been kept confidential as the field study was designed and conducted in compliance with Child Protection Guidelines which also set the parameters for the Research Ethics Framework of Save the Children International. The interview questionnaire covered various aspects of organisational culture including organisational systems such as policies and procedures; and workforce management aspects such as performance management and teacher training, curricular and teaching methods. The questionnaire was mainly used as a guide, hence the interviewees were encouraged to discuss others matters relevant to this study. The interviews were conducted in a language preferred by the interviewees by a multilingual research team, so no interpreters were deployed.

**Students' focus groups:** 13 focus groups were conducted with students in the following configurations:

School location		Medium of instruction			School type		District total
Province	District	Sinhala	Tamil	Mixed	Boys	Girls	
Western	Colombo	3		1	1	1	3
Southern	Hambanthota	2		2			2
Central	Kandy	2		2			2
Central	Nuwara Eliya		1	1			1
Eastern	Trincomalee	1	2	2		1	3
Northern	Mannar		2		1	1	2

**Teachers' focus groups:** 12 focus groups were conducted with teachers in the following configurations:

School location		Medium of instruction			School type		District total
Province	District	Sinhala	Tamil	Mixed	Boys	Girls	
Western	Colombo	3		1	1	1	3
Southern	Hambanthota	2		2			2
Southern	Galle	1		1			1
Central	Kandy	2		2			2
Central	Nuwara Eliya		1	1			1
Eastern	Trincomalee	1	2	2		1	3
Northern	Mannar		2		1	1	12

**Parents' focus groups:** 6 focus groups were conducted with parents in the following configurations:

School location		Medium of instruction			School type		District total
Province	District	Sinhala	Tamil	Mixed	Boys	Girls	
Western	Colombo	1		1			1
Southern	Hambanthota	1		1			1
Central	Kandy	1		1			1
Eastern	Trincomalee	1	1	2			2
Northern	Mannar		1		1		1

### Commonly stated themes

Although participants were asked specific questions on the broader aspects of social cohesion, often they ended up discussing general issues in the education system or issues specific to their school, using the focus groups or the interviews to vent their frustrations.<sup>235</sup> There were three key issues that almost every adult participant have recognised and they were mostly in agreement on the solutions. Firstly, with the existing curriculum, the schools cannot produce the right type of citizens or employees and so the curriculum should be completely reformed. Secondly, most schools do not have adequate resources, and more resources need to be allocated for education and equitably distributed. Thirdly, because teachers are poorly remunerated, suitably qualified and committed individuals are not attracted and retained in the workforce thus recruitment, development and remuneration needs to be improved.

In effect, the data gathered in this field study overwhelmingly demands a complete system overhaul, supporting our previous assertions that without such significant reforms, no social cohesion initiative is likely to succeed. One senior and reputed practitioner spelled this out in bold terms: 'Sri Lanka's education is in crisis. We are neither producing a workforce to meet the demands of the job market, nor are we producing responsible citizens to build the nation'.

Students participating in this field study presented various problems, and also suggested solutions under a number of themes. The most commonly mentioned themes were fairness, participation and security. Firstly, students were very conscious of unfair practices in the school environment and demanded that they should be treated equally and respectfully by their teachers and peers, regardless of their backgrounds or their achievements. Secondly, students were in agreement that their opinions or ideas mattered little to adults at schools, and they stressed the importance of having students' input in the decisions affecting them through consultative mechanisms. Inadequate security was the third issue, with girls outside suburban schools very commonly noting that they are constantly being harassed inside and outside the schools. Both teachers and students were in agreement that they are overloaded and overworked, with teachers lacking a work/life balance and students lacking time for non-study related activities.

## 2.2 Systems and Implementation

The majority of the participants demonstrated a clear understanding of the systemic aspects of the issues they experience at the local level. Most of the interviewees

who are engaged in national or regional level work were able to clearly articulate many systemic issues within the education sector. According to a senior policy advisor and one of most experienced educationalists in the country, 'there is a crisis in education' and the system needs to be 'overhauled'. The policy advisor added that except for Ministerial powers, all the provisions of 1939 Education Ordinance are 'obsolete'. According to this advisor, the model of school originally envisioned by the 'father of free education', Dr. C.W.W. Kannangara, was an integrated and mixed gender school which did not restrict education to the students' mother tongue. It was hoped that this model would foster social cohesion laying the foundation to 'build a nation' post-independence. The advisor noted, however, that 'obviously we have failed to build that Nation State'.

Commenting on the heavily exam-based education that is now prevalent, the advisor noted that 'our education is not balanced. Children have no times to play. The children are not socially brought up'. The advisor criticised the recruitment, training and deployment, and continuous development aspects of the teaching workforce, and submitted that the entire system needs to be reformed. 'Publishing volumes of reports and research papers, we proposed numerous reforms, but no politician is taking the leadership to change the system', the advisor observed. He further added that 'when I ask employers, "are we giving you the right candidates for the jobs?"', they say "no". When I ask the youth who have left school, "did your school prepare you to find a job?"', they reply "no". Obviously we are not doing this right'. The advisor, however, noted that we do not have the human resources to introduce 'radical changes'; hence the changes must be 'incremental'.

### Resource Allocation

According to the participants of the field study, national schools are seen as being well resourced as they receive direct central government funding. Students from schools other than reputed elite schools or national schools, on the other hand, felt the squeeze of not being properly resourced. There is a shared opinion amongst participants that resource allocation should be made based on productivity and needs assessments, and not based on the grade or category of the school. Most respondents from schools acknowledged that there are many inconsistencies and biases in resource allocation to schools and that such inconsistencies are perpetuated at the national and zonal levels. Several respondents referred to tangible differences between their schools and similar neighbouring schools as evidence of such inconsistencies, such as inadequate or improperly maintained buildings in comparison to brand new buildings. A number of respondents stated that the 'ethnicity' of the school determines resource allocation.<sup>236</sup>



<sup>235</sup> Since the participants presented a clear picture on the issues and priorities from their point of view, we tried to incorporate as much as their input into this study.

<sup>236</sup> The schools identify themselves with the medium of instruction (Sinhala or Tamil) or their religious affiliation (Muslim, Hindu or Christian). Some schools admit only the students who follow a particular religion but most schools are open for students of any religion.

Many respondents commented on the Ministry's 'the closest school is the best school' (*langama paasala, hondama paasala*) initiative, identifying it as a good initiative in theory but noting its inconsistency in reality as often the 'closest' schools to students did not receive adequate funding to be 'the best'.<sup>237</sup> Education officers from the Northern Province stressed that having changes in the national curriculum is not practical without ensuring appropriate resource distribution among schools. Parents of children attending a school in Southern Province mentioned further that 'if more subjects are available in the local schools, our children could continue their studies up to A/L remaining in the same school'. Improper resource allocation has flow-on effects not just in facilities but in how teaching is undertaken. For instance, teachers are often being requested to teach subjects that are not concordant with their qualifications due to teacher shortages.

### Administration of Schools

Respondents brought up a number of issues relating to the administration of schools, and most of them proposed radical changes. There is a 'disconnection' between various administrative arms, and according to education officers, the institutions falling under the Ministry work in different and often conflicting tracks. The main reason cited for this disconnection is that personnel at the highest levels of education administration are not from the education sector, while those who actually are from the education sector remain at lower levels, not being able to progress upwards due to 'institutional' or 'political' reasons. This disconnection results in those at the top having no experience and knowledge of the realities on the ground level, and the higher officers also being disinterested in addressing problems within classrooms.

Evidence of these administrative inadequacies can be seen in the formulation of School Development Plans (SDPs), which are pivotal to the operation and management of schools and cannot be implemented in schools without the Secretary of Education's approval. If the plans are amended in the approval process, which often occurs, the amendments can entail 'impractical procedures' and schools will be required to eventually follow ineffective measures. The schools which alter the SDPs for the sake of practicality or effectiveness run the risk of reprobation from higher authorities during later evaluations.<sup>238</sup> Many respondents at the principal level raised the fact that

the practices they have at their schools are often more effective than the policies imposed by the Ministry of Education through circulars.

### Data Collection and Sharing

The field study found that a large volume of information, from attendance data to disciplinary data, is collected across the education system, yet this is not properly stored, processed, reported, shared or used for planning purposes.<sup>239</sup> The lack of proper data infrastructure is especially detrimental to the formulation of policy, and for making top-down resourcing decisions. Many respondents noted that sharing this data with zonal offices or the Ministry requires technologically sound systems which are not currently available to all schools. Several principals also noted the particular difficulties in data collection and sharing in rural and inaccessible regions, and the lack of necessary resources such as computers and trained staff. The problem of inadequate information management also extends to administrative activities. A NIE lecturer noted that there was no system to share the results of school monitoring visits of the NIE and the ZEOs.<sup>240</sup>

### Health and Safety

Most schools have their own arrangements for health and safety. This includes emergency evacuation procedures, security arrangements at the school entrances, and training teachers or students to provide first aid. Some schools have designated resting places for students who feel unwell or tired. Other than this, there seems to be no adequate national, provincial or school level policies comprehensively covering workplace safety and students' safety. Education officers stated that guided by Government circulars, they monitor the physical environment and that safety was one of the main themes that come under the quality assurance framework, however, there is no evidence to demonstrate that this arrangement has assured any consistency in health and safety in schools.

Students expressed a range of factors which contribute to a school being a safe environment. Among these was the need for properly constructed buildings with proper furnishings and especially free of hazards such as hanging electric wires and dangerous trees and structures. Students also derive safety from safe drinking water being available at all times, as well as properly maintained toilets.<sup>241</sup>



<sup>237</sup> Some teachers commented that the programme's main virtue was changing social attitudes towards benefits received by sending children to local schools, for example the students being less tired and safer, in comparison to children attending schools in the 'cities'.

<sup>238</sup> This risk is lower for issues such as extracurricular activities or attendance, but may be much higher for more consequential issues such as assessment.

<sup>239</sup> The Education Management Information System (EMIS) was established in 2019, and according to a former MoE officer, the Ministry is said to have already processed 100% of teacher data and more than 75% of student data entered into it as of 2020. Most teachers, principals and education officers, however, do not seem not have been familiarised with this new source of data.

<sup>240</sup> The officers instead take the opinions of the school community at a zonal level, however, this information is not always reliable.

<sup>241</sup> The Annual School Census 2008 found that 13.4 percent of schools had no toilet facilities, 19.3 percent lacked water, and 8.5 percent lacked electricity. See UNICEF 2013, p. 39. No recent data is available, however, according to the Minister of Education Mr. Dullas Alahapperuma, 800 schools (approximately 8%) did not have toilet facilities and 582 (approximately 6%) schools functioned without a water supply. See Kuruwita 2020.

Safety also includes proper traffic management, security being provided for students, especially for girls and trained security guards at the school gates. A majority of the schools accessed during the field study had security guards or some sort of security arrangement at the school entrance.

Safety may carry a different meaning to students depending on the school's physical context, and the diversity of physical environments across Sri Lanka creates different security challenges. For instance, students at an Eastern Province school said that their school needs a proper fence to prevent elephants from entering the school premises. A student from the Eastern Province said that 'elephants roam around until early morning when we come for extra-curricular activities or extra classes in school.'

An important element of safety for students was their mode of transport. Although some suburban and rural schools are served by *sisu seriya*, the government's school transportation service, the inconsistent availability of the service is an issue. Since not all families have the means of sending children to school using private transport, some children, mainly from rural areas, end up walking long distances to and from school. A parent in the Eastern Province noted that 'children who are in primary or even pre-school have to walk for half an hour to reach school and another half an hour to return home. Our children go to school like the calves being taken to a slaughterhouse'.

It was clearly noticeable that girls' perception of safety and security was very different to that of boys. Some female students felt uncomfortable taking public transport for a range of reasons, including fearing for their safety and harassment of a sexual nature in particular. Many female students noted that they had to travel together and return early from after-school activities because they did not wish to be harassed by boys and men in public.<sup>242</sup> Parents also concurred that such misbehaviour by male youth was reported at the entrances of private tuition classes and even places of religious workshop, and expressed the need for police security in such areas.

A teacher from the Southern Province supported the involvement of Police, Army and Navy personnel in school security which was organised following the Easter Attacks. On the other hand, many respondents of the Northern and Eastern provinces were not supportive of engaging military in school security arrangements, likely due to their negative experiences concerning the military during the civil war and ongoing militarisation in the regions. These contrasting perceptions between the North and South are

made evident by a student of a Northern Province school who expressed his displeasure about his school's security arrangements of having soldiers with guns at the gate, uniformed officers checking his bags and CCTV cameras which were fixed after a break-in incident: 'when my bags are checked by strangers and CCTV cameras constantly record my movement, I don't necessarily feel safe. I feel like that the school does not trust me and spies on me. I understand that the school has to ensure our safety, but we need safety with freedom'.<sup>243</sup>

## 2.3 Learning and Teaching

Under this domain we explored whether the content and practice of teaching in government schools complemented or contradicted the values, principles and conduct to be adopted in social cohesion initiatives, and whether we have a workforce in the education sector which is capable of facilitating the process of fostering social cohesion by whole school culture. Almost all teachers and education officers who participated in this field study were of the strong view that every aspect of teaching, learning and assessment should be completely reformed to address the issues of the general education system. As one teacher commented, 'we have not upgraded our school system following the trends in other parts of the world.'

Although our research pivots on school culture rather than the entire system, understanding of flawed aspects of the entire education system is important due to three main reasons. Firstly, any social cohesion initiative delivered within an outdated and dysfunctional system is most likely to fail as argued in the previous chapter. Secondly, if social cohesion initiatives are designed with a future-minded vision, they are likely survive in new systems after reforms. Thirdly, with a proper understanding of all issues in the education system, advocates of social cohesion can in fact provide solutions to larger problems in education.<sup>246</sup> Therefore, it is important that we grasp systemic issues in learning and teaching from the points of view of staff and students in the education system, instead of narrowing down our scope to school culture only.

### Curricula, teaching and assessment

The vast majority of respondents felt that there needed to be radical overhauls of the curricula. The primary criticisms of the existing curricula centre on their heavily exam-oriented nature and lack of sensitivity towards children's wellbeing. Some education officers felt that the weight of curricula should be made lighter while improving the 'practical aspects of the education'. They were critical of



<sup>242</sup> Students from an elite girls school in the Eastern Province shared an unfortunate experience of being teased by young boys who came to the film hall located next to the school; however, subsequent to the incident, school teachers and a security guard were deployed to ensure the safety of the school girls.

<sup>243</sup> Most students, mainly from the South expressed that having CCTV cameras within school boundaries ensured their safety.

<sup>244</sup> For example negotiation skills of the future workers can be build through school social cohesion initiatives such as peer supported negotiation.

the kind of students produced by the education system. A teacher of the Eastern Province said ‘we allocate only 20-minutes for the students’ interval, during which time the students can barely have their lunch with no time to play or interact with others. We are creating robots in our education system.’ According to the participants, exams also hinder activity based teaching. Noting the importance of having activities to develop practical skills, teachers at a Western Province girls school offered that ‘the current education system does not allow group activities. If the teachers try to conduct group activities, they would not be able to complete their designated lessons.’<sup>245</sup>

Some education officers felt that current curricula are not providing the right person for the job market. An education officer of the Central Province said that ‘we produce exam-oriented, machine-like children in schools.’ Almost every adult and most children were of the strong view that existing curricula should be changed in order to ensure that youth leaving schools can successfully overcome the challenges they will face in society and have capabilities matching the requirements of the labour market.

### Extracurricular Activities

Many respondents noted the importance of extracurricular activities, especially to bring about social cohesion. Lack of resources was identified as a barrier to organise extracurricular activities such as sports or cultural events. An education officer noted that there should be more games and activities introduced to develop the intelligence of students without just providing rote knowledge, and proposed that NGOs should design programmes to achieve this. Many students lamented the lack of priority being placed on extracurricular activities compared to academic activities, and the lack of opportunities to participate in non-academic endeavours. This was especially adversely felt by female students who said that certain activities, such as cadetting and outdoor pursuits, were not deemed appropriate for them compared to male students. Some students from a mixed school in the Central Province also revealed that they are sometimes ‘blamed’ for participating in extracurricular activities, at the expense of classroom lessons. It was felt that only academic activities were given importance.

The selection of students for extracurricular activities varied and some participants agreed that certain groups or types of students were given preferential treatment in the selection process.<sup>246</sup> An education officer justified

student selection without pre-tests or assessments by sharing her experience. The officer said that when low resourced schools’ teachers are obligated to select students for extracurricular activities, financial and family background are considered in addition to the skills of the students due to lack of school resources. For instance, with an English drama event, if a selected student’s family is not in a position to contribute to the costumes and the school is also not able to cover the expenses, that particular teacher will run the risk of not being able to hold the event. A teacher submitted that the selection of students for the extracurricular activities should be based on transparent selection criteria and processes, without favouring the children of politicians or wealthy professionals against the children of ordinary parents. This statement was concurred by most of the students who asserted that selecting students should be based on the individuals’ skills and not based on the religion, gender or financial background of their parents.

### Social cohesion values

Some participants shared the sentiment that values needed to be inserted into curricula. An education officer remarked that academic education should incorporate the practical use of concepts such as justice, equal rights, and respect. A group of education officers from the Central Province also offered that ‘the curricula should focus on developing attitudes, empathy, appreciation, taste, etc.’ Teachers at a mixed school in the Western Province said that ‘basic law needs to be included in the curricula. When one is not aware of the law they would not take action against injustice.’ They also felt that it wasn’t just a matter of offering the subject: ‘civic education is offered in schools but students just learn by heart without really practicing the content. Even the subject Buddhism offers the opportunity to develop life skills but those are not practically done in classrooms.’ There is a real contrast between the values students learnt and what they practice outside the school. A teacher from the Western Province said:

‘Students learning certain values from books and in the classroom don’t take our teaching seriously and question us because out in real life they are confronted with the opposite of what they have learnt. For example, taking bribes is seen everywhere so even if they are taught that taking bribe is wrong they do not take that seriously. When we talk about a conflict and how to resolve it, students would give us much more serious examples of conflicts that they have seen, so what is taught in school is sometimes too basic for them.’



<sup>245</sup> A principal of Central Province also agreed that ‘the scholarship. exam does not allow us to do activities, but conceded, ‘for schools like ours, the scholarship. exam is important because it helps students entering into a prestigious school.’

<sup>246</sup> According to one Eastern Province principal, students were selected for extracurricular activities based on their achievement in pre-tests conducted. Schools were also required to submit relevant documents as evidence of such pre-tests.’

There was a feeling amongst teachers that existing curricula were based on outdated values, especially relating to gender roles and ethnicity. A teacher from the Central Province noted:

‘Those days the curricula were developed by only Sinhala professionals giving examples from Sinhala villages and Sinhala chronicles. If you look at the illustrations in the textbooks, you can see the mother wearing a Kandyan sari and cooking or sweeping while the father is reading a newspaper. You do not see a mother wearing a pair of trousers or with short hair or reading a book. Are they not suitable to be called mothers? Ethnic biases also can be seen in curricula. One’s own religion is taught to be the best religion and the people from other religions are seen as animals.’

### Recruitment and training

The participants presented numerous issues associated with the recruitment, development and retention of teachers. A central point raised about recruitment was that it is rote and not holistic. Recruitment is done mainly based on examination result-oriented qualifications. Arguably, the examinations and qualifications themselves do not account for instilling concepts of social cohesion in those who pass the tests. It was suggested that opportunity should be given to teaching candidates to pursue their professional qualifications before the teaching appointment<sup>247</sup> and a regional quota system implemented to serve regional schools.<sup>248</sup>

A frequently brought up issue regarding recruitment was the politicised nature of the process, both within and outside schools. Political interference can stretch from the Ministry level down to the ZEOs which flows onto schools.<sup>249</sup> Teachers, principals and education officers are frequently appointed, promoted and transferred not based on the correct qualifications and needs of the schools, but based on the political whims of Ministers, Members of Parliament or Provincial Councillors, whose decisions are rarely challenged.

Nearly all respondents at all levels iterated the importance of education staff being recruited and appointed free of political interference. One education officer in the Eastern Province stressed that political interference prevents properly qualified personnel from serving schools, citing as evidence the fact that only 13 out of 34 principals in their

zone were qualified to be a principal. Education officers from the Central Province suggested that a solution for political interference in education was to make teaching a profession under the public service, similar to doctors, nurses and lawyers,<sup>250</sup> as they felt that positions recognised as professions were less liable to be interfered by politicians. An education officer from the Eastern Province submitted:

‘There are no systems for equality. For example I am from Rathnapura and since I have not gone after the politicians, I work as a director in Trincomalee for years while my colleagues were appointed close to their homes in Rathnapura. There should be a system where the education officers are appointed in remote areas for a certain number of years and then transferred to their preferred areas.’

### Remuneration

Many respondents brought up the need to increase remuneration for teachers so that the vocation can be an attractive career for skilled and committed individuals. Inadequate wages were also seen as a reason for good teachers leaving the profession. A teacher remarked that ‘clever individuals in teaching would try to switch to education administration after sitting for the respective exams because there are no pathways to career advancement in the teaching profession.’ Remuneration also extends to annual salary increments which are meagre in the sector. A teacher from a Western Province school said that ‘to get a yearly salary increment, a teacher has to get several signatures from the school and beg the officer in charge at the Zonal Education Office to process the documents. To get an increment of Rupees 150 or 200, a teacher has to spend more than their increment. This degrades the professional standards of the teachers.’

These findings raise many ethical and equity issues, especially posing the questions of whether it is fair to demand teachers on low wages to undertake additional duties to deliver school social cohesion initiatives, and whether it is fair to expect the teachers to acquire a sophisticated skill set required for such initiatives. On the other hand, it is unlikely that a poorly rewarded scheme to engage teachers in social cohesion initiatives would attract skilled teachers. Therefore, a carefully designed remuneration scheme is necessary to engage teachers in any future social cohesion programmes.



<sup>247</sup> A significant proportion of teachers are recruited without teaching qualification.

<sup>248</sup> Some teachers mentioned a regional quota system may bring internal motivation for teachers to have students from their own regions perform well; however, they acknowledged that it could lead to inefficiencies.

<sup>249</sup> There are concerns that curricula also can be politically influenced. Education officers of Northern Province remarked that ‘there will be political influences and influences from the majority community’ on the curricula reform process.’ This is a clear indication of tension between ethnic groups and the fear of the minorities that the majority in power might use school curricula to gain political benefits, for example by re-narrating the history of the country to legitimise claims to ownership of the land.’

<sup>250</sup> According to a NIE lecturer, setting up of professional standards and a licensing scheme would improve the quality of teachers, preventing ineffective teachers to persistently remain in the system.

### The role of education officers

There were differing views on the role of the education officers and their professional conduct.<sup>251</sup> Teachers felt strongly that supervision by education officers could be detrimental as their presence was often a hostile one which negatively impacted their teaching. They especially recommended that they are informed beforehand about teaching inspections and that their supervision was kept confidential. Many teachers expressed a desire for all education officers to have had previous teaching experience, particularly teaching the subjects they are appraising, so that they could be evaluated fairly in a sensitive manner.

Parents were also frequently critical of the pressure placed on teachers by education officers. According to them, teachers were not allowed to fully utilise their class hours due to the additional work given by education officers. This tension between teachers and non-teaching officers cannot be overlooked as a simple administrative matter, especially because the issue poses questions about employees' professional standards and respectful behaviour, which are matters directly concerned with social cohesion. A teacher from the Eastern Province revealed that 'once there was an issue related to a particular teacher and even the security guard of the ZEO and the entire village got to know about it through the education officer. The officers from the zonal office need to protect the confidentiality of the teachers they supervise'.

## 2.4 Leadership and Professionalism

The third domain of whole school culture is very much focused on workforce management and development aspects. As elaborated below, there is a disconnect between various aspects of workforce management. For example, performance appraisal, planning and development in general don't seem to be logically connected, and this means the teacher's individual capacity building requirements are not matched with the trainings they receive. There is also little consistency in managing leaders and building their capacities, while the accountability aspect of the school principal's role has not been articulated or communicated adequately. Field data shows that little attention has been paid to workforce culture in general and so negative aspects of the culture persist, while positive aspects are not harnessed to offer greater outcomes for students.



<sup>251</sup> For the purpose of this research all non-teaching staff excluding principals and including zonal education officers and in-service advisors are considered under the identity of 'education officers'.

<sup>252</sup> Referring to rural schools in the Eastern Province, an education officer said: 'being a principal is like wearing a crown with thorns and it is seen as the most difficult job in the world. They are often accused of bribery but they contribute much more to the school, for example, if the schools are allocated with Rs.100,000 you can see work worth of Rs.500,000 done in that school. The principals mostly get support from the community. In these areas there is no situation for the principals to take bribes from students but to visit their homes and ask the parents to send their children to schools.'

### The role of the principal

Many respondents noted the centrality of the principal within the educational nexus. Education officers pointed out that the principals' performance is the most crucial factor in the school's performance. They have substantial management responsibilities in every aspect of the school, with certain targets being assigned to improve student performance. The principal facilitates in-house teacher training and greatly influences the selection of teachers for external trainings. The principals are also central to the school's discipline. The principal has to constantly engage with the outer circle of the school community including the parents, alumni and local community leaders and service providers.<sup>252</sup> An education officer of the Central Province noted that 'the school means principal and principal means school. Whether a school is good or not depends on the principal.' A teacher from a Western Province girls school observed:

'In most of the schools principals make decisions on their own. If a principal is young, they would work for promotions such as increasing the number of 'A' passes the students receive in exams, and to receive the media spotlight. If a principal is nearing their retirement age, they would not take risks and just try not to create any trouble. To change this, a school needs a board of directors to make decisions, and the board members should include professionals such as a HR manager, an accountant and senior teachers to consult students.'

A NIE lecturer stated that 'everything depends on the principal' and this extends to school culture and values such as equality. For instance, equal treatment of girls and boys is often determined by the principal. These submissions demonstrate that any social cohesion initiative needs to have a strong strategy to win over principals, build their capacities, support them through mentoring or by other means, and most importantly ensure that they lead by example in upholding the values of social cohesion.

### Performance appraisal

Not having a fair and consistent framework of performance appraisal has a significantly negative impact on social cohesion in school culture. This is because teachers are likely to be subject to arbitrary actions of performance management or unfair discretionary treatment, and a school needs to treat its staff in a fair manner before it preaches the same to students.

Teachers' performance is usually appraised annually using the Annual Performance Appraisal (APA) template.<sup>253</sup> Teachers call it 'filling forms' and feel it is a hassle when they have to do it in a rush. A vice-principal from the Northern Province noted that for government schools, appraisal was a tick-the-box exercise. The performance appraisal mechanism also does not offer a proper procedure to systemically manage teachers with poor performance.

Apart from the standard appraisal methods, teachers are rewarded at provincial or national events by handing over letters of appreciation, and in some cases they are rewarded at school level by cash awards, especially when their students receive higher grades and ranks at O/L or A/L exams. However, appraisal of teachers on student performance was felt as unfair by some teachers. A teacher from a Western Province school argued that 'a teacher should not be assessed based on the performance of students in exams but from the outcomes they have achieved in comparison to the previous records, and also how much student attitudes have developed.'

### Teacher capacity building

Capacity development for teachers is usually handled within the schools, by facilitating teacher training in-house, or externally by government or other providers depending on the availability of resources. Most national schools have adequate funds for teacher training. However, many respondents noted an overall lack of resources for teacher capacity building, particularly on leadership, team building and facilitation skills, with schools having to raise funds on their own for such programmes. An NIE lecturer noted that the NIE does not have the power to directly train teachers and must instead train education officers who can cascade the training down to teachers. Some schools rely on third parties to facilitate teacher training, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross or St. John Ambulance for first aid seminars; World Vision for student counselling seminars; or NGOs on specific capacity building areas. An education officer from the Central Province recalled the World Bank once sponsoring capacity building programs for teachers but that the allocations were reduced over time. This shows that reliance on third parties for trainings poses the risk of gaps created by abrupt changes to funding.

There seems to be no consistency across the sector on continuous development for teachers, and how teachers are selected or nominated for training programmes.<sup>254</sup>

One principal mentioned that there was no bias in who was selected for training at their school.<sup>255</sup> On the other hand, some teachers felt that they did not receive fair opportunities to attend national or international level capacity building events such as conferences. A teacher from the Western Province said:

'The Ministry of Education provides foreign training opportunities to the officers of the Ministry with the purpose of cascading those trainings down to the teachers but that never happens. The hierarchy is established in a way that only officers from the Ministry and the principals receive trainings. The Ministry gets international funds but the funds are divided among the officers for their training, and the rest is sent back.'

The developers and organisers of teacher capacity building programmes of future social cohesion initiatives need to take the aforementioned comments into consideration, particularly in enquiring about the way the trainees are selected. There seem to be issues with the cascade down model, and as such, if any train-the-trainer programmes are to be introduced, the trainers need to be provided with ongoing support.

### Teaching Workload

The high workload of teachers was frequently brought up as a serious problem. Teachers complained that although they were instructed to utilise school hours to complete the syllabus, they were unable to do so because they were given additional tasks such as clerical work and managing extra-curricular activities. A teacher from the Southern Province lamented: 'We teach several subjects while committing our time for other responsibilities including extracurricular activities. I feel like a mental health patient when I leave school in the afternoon. Even at home we prepare lesson plans until 1.00 a.m. sometimes. This has a serious impact on our personal lives.'

Parents also stated that teachers are not given enough time to complete the school syllabus. Education officers of the Northern Province suggested that teachers should be given assistants to manage clerical work so that teaching in the classroom will not be affected, and their stress and workload would be reduced. A teacher added 'the school should have officers such as accountants, secretaries, a teacher for sports and an officer for security, so that the teachers don't have to get involved in other areas.'



<sup>253</sup> The APA consists of measures such as attendance, punctuality, the teachers' compliance with guidelines.

<sup>254</sup> Training processes at some schools can be comprehensive. One Central Province teacher said that the school development committee at their school has developed a plan for five years and assigned tasks for each teacher including teacher trainings for capacity building. In some schools, training programmes and the teachers to be trained are selected based on the requests of the teachers and the circumstances. However, several education officers felt that school-based capacity building programmes were not adequate. A teacher commented how training programmes are poorly devised, not being planned according to any gap analysis.

<sup>255</sup> The principal said, 'if a school sends a teacher in lieu of the nominated trainee, the schools must submit justification reports, which curtail certain biases in teacher selection'.

## Private Tuition Classes

Most parents with some financial capacity send their children to private tuition classes outside school hours. Since not all parents could afford private tuition classes, the students are not given a level playing field to perform in exams. Some parents cited inefficiencies of school teachers in completing the syllabus as justification for sending their children to private tuition classes. Parents also stated that due to private tuition classes, children have less time for self-learning, communication and building relationships with their parents. A teacher from the Eastern Province was of the opinion that most teachers are not committed to maximise their students' performance, and to fill this gap a vast number of private classes exist.<sup>256</sup> A group of education officers cited the low wages of teachers as a primary reason for the proliferation of private tuition classes, and added that this could be remedied if standards are raised and better wages are offered. Parents also shared similar views.<sup>257</sup>

Teachers of government schools can provide private tuition to the same school students outside the school charging a fee. There are rivalries between teachers offering private tuition and such rivalries can creep into the school atmosphere. One education officer from the Northern Province pointed out how some government school teachers mistreat students who take private tuition from their competitors. A principal of the Northern Province also recalled a teacher punishing a student for not attending his private tuition class after school. Students strongly felt that the teachers should not treat students unfairly for not attending their private tuition classes.

Private tuition classes will have detrimental impact on social cohesion programmes in schools for a number of reasons. It is obvious that under the existing system, social cohesion programmes will have to compete with private tuition for time and commitment from the students, teachers and parents. On the other hand the rote learning methods imposed on children in private tuition classes will always contradict the participatory learning methods based on critical thinking applied in peace education. Finally, as elaborated above, school teachers engaging in private tuition poses serious ethical issues.<sup>258</sup>

## Teachers' conduct

The nature of the relationships that teachers have with their superiors, peers and students demonstrate many aspects of school culture, and respondents constantly raised issues in relation to the concepts of justice, equality, and values of social cohesion in this regard. Adult participants were in agreement that examinations and qualifications themselves do not account for instilling concepts of social cohesion in education staff. Some principals asserted that the values and competencies of 'respectful behaviour' should be taught at the initial teacher training since most of the 'disrespectful behaviours' they encountered were prevalent among the teachers who had just passed out through Colleges of Education, however, these assertions were contradicted by others.

One of the key issues related to teachers' misconduct or disrespectful behaviour is a lack of clarity in resolving grievances. According to our findings, there seems to be no consistency in handling staff disciplinary matters across the sector, and there are also no proper mechanisms to handle teachers' internal grievances. Disciplinary committees in some schools operate in conjunction with the school management team. In some schools, internal grievances lodged against teachers are discussed in the teacher's welfare society and the teachers' staff meetings if it is applicable to all teachers; however, if confidentiality is required based on the complaint, it is discussed individually. Depending on the gravity of the complaint, there is usually a process of escalating the complaints upwards to the ZEO, and from there to the Ministry if necessary. If a matter is not resolved there, the Ministry has powers to appoint committees to look into the issues.<sup>258</sup>

An education officer from the Eastern Province commented that teachers should be treated as 'a group' regardless of their 'labels' of religion, ethnicity or qualifications. In order to bring this to reality, provincial schools, mostly in the rural areas, had introduced a teacher's uniform.<sup>259</sup> It is also important to note, however, that some seemingly fair practices may not be equitable and in some cases can even be counter-productive because teachers with certain health conditions, carer responsibilities or other issues may require certain accommodations or adjustments



<sup>256</sup> This statement also needs to be understood within the context of remote schools in the Eastern Province, where teachers may have to engage in farming or part time business activities to supplement their income, hence they are likely to use all their casual leave and fail to complete the syllabus.

<sup>257</sup> However, the central issue for parents seems to be the fact that the assessment model is totally based on the exams. Although the teachers in schools are required to cover the syllabus, conduct activities, etc. private tutors only focus on preparing students for exams. Shifting to a total or partial non-exam based assessment model will certainly reduce the priority given to private tuition.

<sup>258</sup> Usually, the grounds of escalation from a school to the Zonal Office would be a teacher acting in a way that is against the Code of Conduct, and in such case, the Zonal Office directly takes disciplinary actions against the teacher after investigations. Also see the discussion on disciplinary procedures in the next section.

<sup>259</sup> It is a requirement that all female teachers except those who are pregnant must wear a sari to school while men have the choice of wearing pairs of long pants and shirts instead of their traditional attire. The dress code is criticised by some commentators as discriminatory against women because of its impracticality, particularly taking public transport. A teacher mentioned that the 'old fashion' dress code is an off-putting factor for many young women to seek a career in teaching.

at work. A teacher of a school in the Eastern Province said that 'all teachers from the Eastern Province are expected to be present at school on or before 7:30 a.m. and their attendance is recorded by machines capturing fingerprint signatures. This system neglects the difficulties of the teachers who are coming from far locations. If late fingerprints are recorded three times in a month, it will be considered as a half-day leave, and the system does not necessarily help the teachers to handle the classroom with peace of mind.'

According to a vice-principal, the influence of senior teachers and teachers who had close relationships with the management could be a barrier to bringing about equality. A teacher in a boys school in the Western Province presented examples of how certain teachers have become the principal's 'favourites', and how they receive favourable treatment over other teachers. Other barriers to creating a culture of equality extend to unfair treatment during lesson scheduling (timetabling) and material favours teachers extracted from students. For example, a NIE lecturer noted the widespread practice of teachers taking gifts from students. The lecturer added that when teachers knew students were from wealthy backgrounds, they would attempt to procure gifts from the parents, but such teachers would also try their luck with poorer students just to see what they could obtain. On the other hand, some participants countered that parents voluntarily offer expensive gifts or favours to teachers to reward them. A teacher from the Western Province revealed that 'I know one teacher who was building his family home who was gifted roofing materials and other building products by parents of the alumni association. The teacher who received those gifts however, has produced good examination results for his students'.

Like in any other workplace, cliques and camps seem to be common amongst teachers, and in some cases some of their practices have reached to an alarmingly unacceptable level. A teacher in an elite girls school in the Western Province commented that some teachers have created a hierarchy based on the duration of the employment in the particular school, rather than qualifications, age or overall service in the education sector, noting that the teachers who had transferred from other schools were pushed to the bottom of the pecking order. They were asked not to sit with the 'seniors' at the staff room, and were ordered to sit at the back rows at official school functions. These dynamics amongst teachers are quickly observed by students and such conduct by teachers would most certainly have a strong negative impact on children. Students often indicated issues caused by the lack of communication and cooperation between teachers, and some of them suggested that teachers need to communicate with each other to coordinate lessons 'without ego'.

## 2.5 Rights and Behaviour

Under the fourth domain of whole school culture, we explored the aspects of equality, respect, violence and punishment. In the field study, a large part of this discussion was centred on ethnicity and religion, though the questions were posed allowing the respondents to interpret the concepts broadly. Some participants however, picked up issues on gender equality and poverty, but most participants did not consider equality as being associated with carer responsibility, disabilities or sexual orientation. The problems raised in the discussions are truly intersectional, and some of the incidents described by the participants demonstrated the complexity of the relationships found within the school culture.

One such example came from a NGO which conducted arts and social cohesion projects in schools in the Eastern province where children from various ethnic and religious groups were brought together through music education. A worker at the NGO explained that:

'The output or the success of school projects was very much dependent on individuals who played key roles in each school. Although the students were ready to mingle with other students of different ethnicities or religions, I have noticed awkward gender dynamics. The children engaged in the programme under the strict control of their parents, and the boys and girls were segregated by adults, so they couldn't work together. Students and teachers of one Muslim school who participated in the project were stigmatised by neighbours who held extremist religious views against music.'

Parent-teacher relationships in some instances can be tense and fraught. A principal recalled an incident where a teacher caught a student consuming drugs, and afterwards the community had gathered accusing the teacher of taking revenge against the student for some other unrelated matter. There can also be conflicts between teachers. An education officer recalled how a teacher spread rumours against another teacher which created a conflict in the school and the community, and on this occasion both teachers were transferred to different schools. A teacher from the Northern Province shared an incident where two teachers were involved in a physical confrontation which ended up with one teacher being pushed to the ground by the other. Yet, no investigations were undertaken and no action was taken against either party. Conflicts amongst parents were also recorded. An education officer from the Northern Province brought up an incident where parents from a village enrolled their children in schools located in a neighbouring town area even though there was a school in the village. This resulted in the parents of the students remaining in the village school protesting, demanding that the students should not be taken to the school in the town because the village school would be left with an inadequate number of students to properly operate.

## Ethnicity, Religion and Equality

All participants acknowledged the importance of students being able to access their right to education regardless of their ethnicity and religion.<sup>260</sup> Most respondents stressed that their schools provided equal access to education for all their students, regardless of their ethnicity and religion. For example, most teachers, education officers and students were of the opinion that appointment of prefects was generally fair in their respective schools.<sup>262</sup> At a surface level, there were acknowledgements of the different ethnicities and religions of students in schools and how they got along, and as proof the respondents presented a range of examples: participating in cultural exchange programmes; participating in musical programmes which brought Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim students together; conducting common assemblies in all three languages; conducting common meditation sessions for students of all religions; providing space for students to observe prayers according to their religion; inviting clergy of different religions to celebrate religious festivals; adjusting timetables on Friday to facilitate Muslim students and teachers attending prayers; and adjusting timetables for Christian teachers to participate in Christian feasts. All students shared their desire to mix with students from different ethnicities and religions, and some recommended awareness programmes on living in harmony in a multi-ethnic society and providing equal opportunities to everyone, including for those with special needs.

Despite a certain degree of respect for different ethnicities and religions generally being shown at most schools, discrimination at much deeper and structural level is evident. A teacher asserted that at their school there were students who were descendants of the indigenous Veddha community who were treated equally but their parents considered that their children were treated less favourably compared to Sinhalese children. Some teachers and parents believed that certain groups are discriminated in the admission process.<sup>265</sup> A principal asserted that schools

generally follow policies to ensure equal treatment to all ethnic and religious groups, but he admitted nonetheless that 'there are a few incidents of biased decisions'. A principal in the Northern Province mentioned that a school justified the enrolment of new students based on a quota allocated for the official religion of the school because 'students of other religions were increasing'.<sup>264</sup>

Some participants claimed that students are treated less favourably when giving rewards and recognition.<sup>265</sup> A principal brought up a number of examples of unequal treatment at their school in appreciating and motivating students. One such example was about a boy from a 'minority religion' who scored 'A' passes in the O/L examination yet was not appreciated at an equal level to the students of the 'majority's religion'. Similarly, a national winner in sports was not appreciated due to his religion, while 'grand celebrations' were organised to appreciate winners belonging to the religion of the majority.<sup>266</sup> Apparently these discriminatory practices are also extended to teachers. On one occasion, a teacher belonging to the minority religion was qualified to become a principal but the school's management didn't give him an opportunity to practice his managerial capacity, so the teacher eventually sought a voluntary transfer to another school.

Sometimes schools have become a point of inter-religious conflicts between communities. One such conflict was reported from a school in the Northern Province where members of the Hindu community blocked the path of a Catholic priest who was invited to a Hindu school to perform a ritualistic procession called the 'way of the cross' during the season of Lent. The main reason for the protest was a Christian holy cross being brought to the school.

Students also appeared to be sensitive to unfavourable treatment based on religion. For example, students from the Central Province stated that 'when we Buddhists



- <sup>260</sup> A number of teachers admitted that they were not aware of any particular rules or a written document about maintaining equality in schools but they were confident that students are treated equally.
- <sup>261</sup> Students mostly felt strongly that the appointment of prefects should be objective and fair, and the school should especially disregard students' race, religion and family wealth. Some students thought that criteria other than academic performance should be taken into account, such as student behaviour, general knowledge and performance in non-academic activities. Some students thought that leadership roles should be offered to those who have talents in diverse areas such as in aesthetics, religious activities, and other extra-curricular activities.
- <sup>262</sup> For example, in a Northern Province school, the principal noted that their prefect selection had no quota system for ethnicity, religion or gender, and that whoever met the eligibility criteria deserved the honour of being a prefect.
- <sup>263</sup> It is important note the dynamics of these discriminatory practices, and discrimination doesn't always take place against the official minorities. For example, a Christian school may discriminate against Hindu or Muslim applicants.
- <sup>264</sup> The quota was set apparently against the government policies. Another teacher pointed out that over 90% of new student enrolments in her school came from religions other than the school's 'official religion', however, this appears to be an exceptional case.
- <sup>265</sup> There is a trend of displaying billboards or banners carrying the names and photographs of students received higher ranks in examinations or competitions. This practice which creates competition between students and schools was not seen positive by some education officers. An education officer stated that they have taken actions not to publicise the ranks and the marks received in examinations by students, and this has helped to reduce the competition.
- <sup>266</sup> Unfair treatment was also found in inter-school events. To minimise bias decisions, some students suggested having a jury recruited from schools and zones who are not in the competition, because a jury from the same school or the division will not be able to exercise bias-free judgments. Students from a Muslim schools stated that students from remote schools should be appreciated and not discriminated during inter-school events.

observe meditation, the students of other religions remain silent but it is good if they can do their prayers as well.' At times, students also find themselves immersed in inter-ethnic or religious tensions. For example, a teacher noted that when Muslim students spoke Tamil in class, some Sinhalese students were discomfited thinking that they were being talked about. A teacher from the Eastern Province added that 'students of different religions study together in the urban Sinhalese schools of my area but the morning religious observations are conducted only for Buddhist students, making the students from other religions uncomfortable.'

Despite all government schools requiring their students to wear standard uniforms, certain issues have been noted in relation to religious attire. A principal from the Central Province stated that Muslim students were required to adhere to the common uniform inside the school, so students must remove head covers at the gate before entering the school. Only during celebrations or festivals of the respective religions were the students allowed in the school in their religious attire. A teacher from the Northern Province mentioned that their Christian school does not allow students of other religions to attend the school in religious attire or wear religious accessories. In this instance, Muslims were not allowed to wear head covers and Hindus were not able to wear holy yarns, despite the Christian students being allowed to wear the holy rosary. Similarly, a principal from the Eastern Province mentioned that a Muslim teacher wearing a hijab was not allowed in school following the Easter Sunday Attacks. This was despite the temporary dress code restrictions being imposed only on niqabs and burqas. Conversely, teachers from a Muslim school criticised the school uniforms worn by non-Muslim children as 'inappropriate' and 'unsafe', especially for girls.

Interestingly, many respondents wanted the schools to be freed from ethnic or religious affiliations. A principal from the Northern Province forthrightly proposed that schools should be 'de-identified from religion'. Some education officers proposed that names of schools should be standard and should not be affiliated to a particular race or religion, thus schools named after Catholic saints or Buddhist monks should be renamed.<sup>267</sup> An officer added that 'when the community starts believing in the achievements of the school, without being distracted by its religion or race, it will be easy to implement a proper system.' Some teachers and education officers expressed that schools should not be teaching religion as a subject and religious education can be provided by churches, temples, and mosques. Some teachers and parents suggested teaching a 'common

subject' comprising ethics or 'moral values' to give students the opportunity to learn the basic concepts of all religions alongside humanitarian values. Conversely, some teachers of a Muslim school stressed that religion should be taught at school, doubling the time allocated in the current timetable.

Students from lower socio economic backgrounds Equality was also raised in the context of the parents' financial circumstances. As previously noted, children of affluent families can be favoured over others by teachers for various reasons.<sup>268</sup> A principal revealed that during the enrolment process, applicants from affluent families were at times prioritised and applicants with poor parents have been rejected. Some education officers discussed the measures taken to reduce the gap between children of rich and poor families, for example, free textbooks and subsidies to purchase uniforms provided by the government and other support provided through private donors. Students of a girls school in the Western Province suggested that schools should supply necessities such as bags to everyone to ensure equality. To justify this, they pointed out that children of affluent families bringing branded school supplies creates social pressure on other students to have similar items, which in turn exerts financial burdens on their parents.

Due to the hardships they experience, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may have complex needs. For example, children of certain seasonal farming and fishing communities in the Northern and Eastern Provinces who annually migrate to and from South have to adapt to a different school environments in each season. Students also wanted the teachers to be sensitive to their economic circumstances and to help them secure financial support. A student from the Western Province revealed that 'my father died a year ago, but I have not received my Suraksha insurance payment yet. When I asked help from teachers, some were sensitive enough to listen to me but the others were rude, and I do not feel like talking to them.'

### Gender in the classroom

Participant girls mentioned the harassment they experience both within and outside the school, some of which was recorded previously, elaborating how girls are missing out of some extracurricular activities due to issues associated with their safety. Gender also has some impact in academic achievements. Girls are generally considered to be enthusiastic in academic work, while on the other hand, boys were seen as poor performers. Parents of a school in the Southern Province commented that boys are not doing well in school compared to girls. A female



<sup>267</sup> However, the practicality of renaming the schools was questioned by education officers of a different province. They pointed out that most such schools have a long history and the name of the school represents that history or the contributions made by its founder. Changing the name of the school now might lead to unnecessary conflicts within the community. They also pointed out that there were limited opportunities to establish new schools with standardised names and without ethnoreligious references.

<sup>268</sup> For example, see the previous discussion under extra-curricular activities.

student from the Central Province added that ‘boys do not participate in classroom discussions. They sit at the back and waste time. If there is a boy who is interested in learning, he is not allowed to study by the ones who are sitting at the back. Due to the fear of being isolated and stigmatised by their peers, they also join the group sitting at the back of the class.’

Gender dynamics found in schools are complex, and according to the participants, the gender of the teacher has a strong impact on classroom outcomes. A teacher argued, ‘they say boys are not interested in studies. That is because there are few male teachers to build up the male personality. From the principal to the lower layers, you see mostly women. How can you then govern the school? This leads to students going astray. If a female teacher hits a student it is an issue. A group of parents added: ‘there are only few male teachers and if more male teachers are in a school there will be more discipline. Female teachers pay less attention to the discipline of male students.’

### Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse is a sensitive yet ever-present topic in discussions of student safety. There are many complexities and barriers to sexual abuse getting detected and reported, and the system responding to such incidences. The reporting of sexual abuse can be haphazard due to conservative social norms. Education officers from the Central Province recalled one incident of preventing a male student who was about to be sexually abused by a male teacher. On this occasion, the zonal office was informed by someone who just happened to be at the school. Central Province education officers also shared an incident of a female teacher sexually abusing a male student.<sup>269</sup> According to a principal from the Central Province, when a teacher was caught sexually abusing a student, the local community came together to expel the teacher from the school, prior to the inquiries.

Schools often have to intervene when children are sexually abused outside the schools. Education officers from the Eastern Province noted that many cases of such sexual abuse are not reported, sharing one particular instance of a student who was raped multiple times even throughout the process of an inquiry. They found that inquiries do not necessarily bring any solution to the child and the child gets ‘more deviated from the society’. An education officer from the Central Province shared that ‘once a student was raped outside the school. The parents did not have faith in the lower level officers and they informed the Secretary of the Ministry. The child was transferred to another school maintaining her privacy. We let the general procedure to be carried out with the culprit. Our main focus was to protect the child from unfair treatment from society.’

The respondents also brought up a number of incidents involving ‘elopements’. A vice-principal from the Northern Province recalled an incident of a girl running away with a boy and later not being allowed to sit for the A/L examination. A teacher brought up an incident in another school where a student eloped but then returned to take her A/L exams and was allowed to sit for the exam by the complaint review committee. However, when the same school encountered the same situation with another student later, she was not allowed by the committee. The reason behind this disparity was assumed to be the fact that the earlier student was the daughter of affluent parents.

### Respect and Dignity

There were mixed opinions on the respectful behaviour of teachers. Parents generally viewed them as caring adults. Parents at a small mixed school in the Western Province pointed out that ‘there are teachers who care about students, particularly whose parents have gone abroad or not living with them. Those children seem to be happy at school, more than at home because of the love they are being offered by the teachers.’ According to an education officer, ‘teachers spend at least 10% of their salaries on school development or students.’

Students, however, mostly shared negative experiences. Students pointed out certain practices or habits of teachers which distress and demotivate them. These practices included comparing one student to another; judging the students based on the teachers’ personal opinions; or judging them based on the teacher’s previous negative experiences. They stated that teachers’ behaviour towards students should not be influenced by the teachers’ ‘mood’, and that their personal problems should not have any impact on students. Some students added that teachers should not embarrass the students by pointing out their mistakes in front of others. Students from a school in the Northern Province mentioned that at the gate of the school, teachers or prefects check their haircuts, nails and uniforms, and sometimes they get punished for not complying with the requirements. They said that this jeopardises the students’ motivation to study.

Students also highlighted the teachers’ practice of appreciating a student because of their parents’ position in society or when the parent is a teacher from the same school. Some teachers in fact admitted that in prestigious schools the gap between the ‘haves and the have nots is wide’ and ‘students of powerful parents are treated with more respect.’ Some students felt that schools do not do enough to appreciate their achievements, and that when they do, it is uneven and biased.<sup>270</sup> A student from the



<sup>269</sup> The education officers of the same province also noted that during the past five years no incidents of sexual abuse of female students by teachers was reported, but there were many incidents of male students being abused. The maximum penalty for such offences is to terminate the teacher’s employment while the teacher may face criminal prosecution.

<sup>270</sup> This was also discussed under discriminatory treatment based on ethnicity or religion.

Eastern Province added that ‘not all the fingers are the same. The skills and talents of students outside education should be appreciated. Students shouldn’t be unfairly treated by comparing their skills or achievements to others’.

Disrespectful behaviour amongst students was also brought up as a discussion point, and examples included: rudeness towards juniors; making fun of a student’s mistakes; female students being harassed by male students; bullying; and bringing external conflicts into schools. The students urged that information in relation to complaints against students or on their mistakes should be kept confidential, in order to ensure that they are not ridiculed by others. Students also voiced their concerns of being ‘ragged’ when they move to other schools to complete their A/L studies.<sup>271</sup>

There seem to be competing expectations pinned on the children by parents and teachers, and disregarding the child’s own wishes was seen as an act of disrespect towards the child. A parent correctly pointed out that a child may expect many things from the school other than education: socialising with friends; exposure to different cultures, or presenting their skills or talents. Another parent was sensible to point out that competition among teachers to send their students to university or the goals set by the parents for the child to achieve certain qualifications can exert unnecessary pressure on children, and added that imposing adults’ will on children can lead to the ‘destruction’ of the child’s life. A student from the Northern Province said that ‘the dreams of students should be respected. Dreams, ideas and desires of parents shouldn’t be infused into students’.

### Disciplinary Procedures

Most respondents commented that disciplinary and grievance handling procedures needed significant reforms. One of the serious issues in this regard is the lack of separation between the procedures applicable to students and staff as sometimes the same complaint handling approach is taken to resolve complaints against both teachers and students. Although every school is required to have a disciplinary committee, the disciplinary processes are not consistent across the board. In some schools teachers could lodge complaints directly with the disciplinary committee, whilst in other schools the teachers’ complaints must be lodged with the principal.

Sometimes the teachers could approach the principal only after consulting their immediate supervisors. In some schools, class teachers or the sectional heads take students’ complaints to the disciplinary committee or to the principal. Parents or other individuals outside the school also can make a complaint to the ZEO or to the Provincial Department of Education.

A number of respondents recognised the substantial powers of principals in controlling the disciplinary or grievance handling processes. This stronghold by principals over disciplinary procedures was seen negatively by some respondents. A teacher felt that disciplinary committees were unable to function actively to resolve the problems due to the principal’s tight control. In contrast, another teacher remarked that complaints are addressed with confidentiality by their principal, and in resolving disciplinary matters the principal took help from a group of teachers who are experienced in handling situations to ensure justice to all parties. The issue here then seems to be that disciplinary or grievance handling procedures work differently depending entirely on the personalities and competencies of principals. This lack of standardisation in disciplinary procedures means that the experiences of individuals accessing the process differ greatly, posing questions of equal rights and justice.

The politicisation of disciplinary procedures was frequently brought up by respondents. A teacher from a Northern Province school noted that complaint review committees in a few schools ignore the complaints or did not critically evaluate them if they were against the children of powerful parents or highly paid professionals: ‘for most of the complaints lodged against students who are children of political influencers, highly paid professionals or elite parents, actions will not be taken. However, when there are complaints against ordinary students, actions will be taken.’ In contrast, a principal of a Northern Province school noted that unlike typical complaint handlings, his school separately enquires the aggressor, victim and witnesses. He commented that the same procedure is applicable to everyone even if they have a political background or some other social status. Politicisation can also be external. A NIE lecturer noted ‘there was a school with students using drugs. The drugs were supplied by a powerful politician and the principal could not control it despite the many complaints’. Another similar story was reported by a teacher of a Western Province school.



<sup>273</sup> They found activities such as making them to sing in front of crowds as positive, since such activities help building confidence but condemned emotionally abusive ragging. According to parents, bullying can be addressed by building trusting relationships with their children so that they would be told about incidents of bullying. Some parents recognised the need for parents to actively win the trust of their children, so that issues of bullying, especially outside the school, could be identified and addressed.

<sup>274</sup> An incident was brought up by parents in the Northern Province where a student who was forced to choose bio science stream against his will later entered the university, but was unable to continue his studies and now does odd jobs for a daily wage.

<sup>275</sup> Most schools have disciplinary committees comprised of teachers.

<sup>276</sup> For example, one principal presented a model which involved a multiple parties such as teachers, parents, past pupils, students, zonal educational officers who jointly resolve the grievances or complaints. Another principal commented that upon receiving a complaint that he appoints separate persons to carry out investigations ensuring confidentiality. If the complaint is against a teacher, the investigating team would be formed from the middle management of the school and would use formal and informal ways of getting information for the investigation.

Fear of victimisation is a factor that greatly inhibits legitimate complaints being made, as pointed out by a NIE lecturer: 'most of the time students do not report their issues out of fear. Parents are also scared to complain. Some parents would take the side of the teacher. How many abuses are happening in schools? Everything is swept under the rug.' A principal from the Northern Province brought another perspective to the issues around discipline: 'these days, students are emotionally not strong enough to face situations although they are smart enough compared to the early period. Therefore, controlling the students is a major challenge. We are not allowed to verbally and physically punish, and this leads to the question of how a disciplinary mechanism will work and how to deliver a good person to society and the nation.'

### **Punishment**

During the field study, we noticed canes at almost every school, either placed on teachers' desks or carried by them. When they were enquired, some teachers said that they were just keeping the cane to make the students 'scared' but others admitted that they do cane misbehaving students. According to students, they are caned even for minor matters such as entering the staff room without permission. In some cases, the physical punishment could be severe to the extent of students having to receive medical treatment. One principal brought up an incident where a student was brutally punished by a teacher and the matter was investigated by the Human Rights Commission. Physical punishment is prohibited by law but many teachers and education officers thought it is only 'discouraged' by the Ministry. A student stated that they accept physical punishment 'up to a certain level' but a group of students countered that teachers should approach them in a friendly manner to 'find solutions' when dealing with disciplinary matters. A student from the Southern Province mentioned: 'we come to school in fear of caning when we couldn't do our homework'.

There is a strong belief amongst most teachers and parents that children can't be brought up without corporal punishment. A teacher argued, 'if we do not hit them slightly to punish, particularly when boys are involved in brawls, the parents would create problems'. The complexities around discipline, particularly with parents desiring punishment for their children, are illustrated in comments from one parent: 'it is important at certain times to be strict on students for the purpose of building discipline. It is essential that children experience a little bullying or teasing because they need to get used to such treatment from the society later in their life.' This demonstrates worrying conceptions on punishment held by parents. In contrast, a teacher remarked that they do not punish students due to the fear of having to deal with reprisal from the

parents. A principal brought up an incident of a teacher who physically punished a student having being confronted by the local people who entered the school to chase the teacher away.

When a particular student's behaviours affect other students severely, the school may expel the students by issuing a leaving certificate. Suspensions of students are common, but most schools did not have standard policies to apply. Teachers do engage parents to address some of the disciplinary issues of their children. Some teachers adopt more holistic approaches to punishment by considering the individual student's circumstances. A teacher shared alternative methods the school applies instead of suspension. For example if a student frequently engages in brawls, to minimise any conflicts between students the violent student may not be allowed in school after term tests during which period the teachers are occupied with paper marking.<sup>275</sup> A teacher from the Central Province mentioned: 'if a student is from a single parent family or from a family which is having issues, suspension from school could trigger more unacceptable behaviour. For example, think of a student who was caught with drugs; suspension from school would only do more damage.' Another teacher from the Central Province added: 'I have seen situations where a child becomes more violent when they are punished and made to feel embarrassed. Therefore, it is important that we try to respect the dignity of a child as we punish'

### **Inclusion of children with disabilities**

The views and the stories shared by participants indicate that school communities have very little understanding of the equity issues of students with disabilities as well as their diverse requirements including the complexity of adjustments needed to accommodate them.<sup>276</sup> A NIE lecturer felt that 'it is best for the students with a disability to study at the special unit. It is unfair by the student with special needs as well as other students to have everyone in the same class.' In contrast, students from a school in the Central Province stated that instead of a special education unit, students with an intellectual disability needed to be studying in normal classrooms. They recalled one incidence where a student with a disability was sent to the special education unit but that decision was reversed because the rest of the class protested. In contrast, some parents in a different school had staged a protest demanding a student with special needs be taken out of the school. Some teachers have also been insensitive to the disabilities of their students. An education officer of the Central Province shared an incident where a teacher punished a disabled child by making him kneel down, observing that 'teachers should understand the mental capacity of the student. The parents complained and took the child out of the school.'



<sup>275</sup> Conversely, an education officer of Central Province stated that 'I don't think there is much conflicts among children, as we are told by the media.'

<sup>276</sup> An education officer noted that an awareness programme on promotion of inclusive education is planned to be delivered by the MoE in collaboration with the World Bank.

Another education officer added: 'our teachers sometimes use inclusive education arrangements to cover up their poor performance, arguing that the cause for poor results was having to pay more attention to the children with special needs.'

### 2.6 Communities and Participation

Under the fifth domain of whole school culture, we now explore how a whole school community participates in school culture, identifying various segments of the school community and their relational dynamics. Matters related to this topic were previously discussed under formal mechanisms to engage the community in school management and activities, which are largely centred around the school development committee (SDC). As discussed, not all schools have fully functioning SDCs. Some observations in the field study pose questions about the integrity of SDCs, particularly in relation to democratic decision making. According to some teachers, the School Development Plans (SDP) are developed in processes totally controlled by the principals, and the lack of consultation of stakeholders such as teachers, students and parents results in hierarchical and one-sided SDPs.<sup>277</sup>

Outside these formal mechanisms, a network of informal community connections can be found involving local community leaders, clergy, politicians and public servants from various sectors. Smaller schools outside cities and suburbs seem to have stronger informal community networks attached. For example, one principal explained that they engage the local government workers including Grama Niladharis, Samurdhi officers and Economic Development Officers to come up with remedies to help students experiencing difficulties, particularly if they don't have one or both of their parents.

#### Participation of students

Opportunities for students to participate in socialisation and decision making at schools is generally limited across the board. Education officers of the Northern Province noted that most larger schools have some form of student union or student parliament, but that low resourced schools do not have such mechanisms to engage students. A principal from the Eastern Province explained that the student parliament at their school allows the students to vote for prefects.<sup>278</sup> A principal from the Central Province shared that his school has weekly 'quality circles' at the class level 'allowing the students to showcase their talents

as well as to discuss issues and proposals pertaining to the classroom'. Most students expressed a desire to be more involved with decision making at their schools, which they felt was generally poor across the board. A student from the Eastern Province mentioned: 'bottom to top approach should be practiced in the appropriate circumstances, and students should be involved in crucial decision making, instead of just being informed'.

#### Community Engagement

Some respondents mentioned that community engagement in schools was low, compared to the past. A NIE Lecturer felt that community engagement in urban schools was lower than in rural schools, and added, 'isolation and selfishness can be seen more than before in communities. Only the funeral-aid society functions in villages these days.' The type of community stakeholders and the level of their engagement differs according a number of factors. Elite schools often have active and affluent alumni associations which make significant contributions to the school's development.

Some schools are strongly influenced by religious institutions. A teacher from the Northern Province noted that since her school was a Catholic school and surrounded by the Catholic community, there was a high level of influence from the Parish and the Diocese. The teacher added: 'schools in Mannar are highly influenced by religious elements. The religious community engages in all key decision making. Perhaps that leads to unwanted conflicts and prejudice against minority religious communities.'

An education officer from the Central Province noted that schools in plantation areas are heavily influenced by estate superintendents, estate management and estate trade union leaders. Some estate managers were supporting the education of local children by renovating school buildings, granting leave for parents for school meetings and providing loan facilities for school education. On the other hand, one teacher noted how the 'restrictions and influence of estate management and trade unions connected to political parties highly affects parents' engagement in a negative way.'

#### Parents' Involvement

As pointed out earlier, SDCs, the main formal method of involving parents in school activities, do not function in a consistent manner across the sector.<sup>279</sup> An education officer noted that only 60% of schools saw parents' engagement as mandatory and that the level of parents' engagement depended on the efforts of the principal to engage them. In response, a principal countered that 'the attitude of the



<sup>277</sup> Some such teachers also did note, however, that it is not practically feasible to include the participation of all the stakeholders of a school in key decision-making. Also note that the SDC develops the SDPs, which are to be endorsed by the ZEO, then it is sent to the Provincial Education office where it gets approved by the Secretary of Education. Without the Secretary of Education's approval, the SDP cannot be executed in the school.

<sup>278</sup> It is unclear to what extent they could contribute to school decision making through the prefects.

<sup>279</sup> The SDCs apparently have one parent-representative per class, thus a NIE lecturer saw classroom circles and section-wide meetings as places for parents to express their opinions.

parents is always towards getting something from the school and not giving to the school'. A teacher agreed, saying that 'parents get involved only when it came to exams.' Many respondents in the education sector desired greater parental involvement. Noting that parental engagement has declined in shramadhanas<sup>280</sup> and parent-teacher meetings, a NIE Lecturer offered that 'if parents could get more involved, many problems could be solved'.

According to education officers, parents' engagement in school is comparatively higher in urban areas than at village level schools. A teacher from the Central Province noted that 'estate workers are not much concerned about educating their children. The attitude of parents about the school is that it should be an institution which places no burden on parents. A teacher from the Central Province said: 'not every parent is ready to come to school and see what needs to be done from their end. When presence is expected, only some parents participate. The reasons for the parents' unavailability could be their occupational commitments and their lower educational background.'

A teacher added, 'parents who are professional do not attend school meetings and only parents who are struggling in their day today life are the ones who attend, but they do not provide much input into discussions. If we get input only from the parents who are professionals, the concept of equality is lost.' A teacher from the Western Province added, 'there are parents who are unable commit a day to attend a school meeting; if they do so, they would not be able to feed their family that day.' Some education officers observed that even rural schools have imposed formal attire for parents attending school functions, and admitted that such requirements may deter the participation of some parents, particularly those who are from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

A NIE lecturer criticised the conduct of some teachers saying that 'due to the unprofessionalism and favouritism of teachers or principals, parents don't get very involved in school activities'. A teacher countered that most parent-teacher meetings ended up in arguments and conflicts, and therefore, that schools were reluctant to have such meetings. A parent from the Western Province added: 'if there is an issue that needs to be communicated to the school authority, only one or two parents would be ready to talk to the principal. For instance, if a dress for a concert is too expensive for everyone, only a few parents would come forward to talk to the principal about it. Therefore, unity among parents is important.'

## Participation of alumni

Most schools appeared to have some sort of involvement with their alumni either through an association or informal groups of past students. According to a NIE lecturer, alumni associations dominate the schools in urban areas. An education officer from the Eastern Province also thought that the alumni community is mostly influential only in elite or national schools. Some alumni associations are involved with the school administration through the SDC, while others support the schools by funding projects such as construction or renovation of building facilities and providing scholarships to students. According to a principal, most old students are not interested in contributing to the development of their school, thus schools become dependent on individuals who are interested in 'building up power' and community leaders 'who use their influence to insert their own communal or personal agendas into the school culture'. A NIE lecturer also explained that past pupils at times offer support in exchange for their own personal gains and that school leadership should not bend for such offers.

## 2.7 Social cohesion policies and programmes

Based on our analysis of literature, we have identified a number of initiatives worldwide which help foster social cohesion by whole school culture, and participants were invited to rate the appropriateness or adaptability of these initiatives in their own schools by marking one of the three options of 'yes', 'no' or 'maybe'.<sup>281</sup> The overall results show that all the proposed initiatives were supported by the majority. This feedback will be taken into consideration in the next chapter which presents a roadmap for whole school culture to foster social cohesion.

The proposed initiatives for evaluation were organised under the following four areas:

### Policies

School safety policy aiming to minimise injuries related to violence or physical hazards.

- Internal grievance and complaint handling policy to resolve (a) disputes between teachers, and (b) disputes amongst students.
- A respectful behaviour policy which sets standards on acceptable level of behaviour for everyone in the school community.
- Teachers' performance appraisal policy (teachers and principals work together to plan, develop and manage performance).



<sup>280</sup> Donation of one's labour or time for collective improvement activities such as clean-ups or painting of a common property.

<sup>281</sup> This was done by giving paper based survey questionnaires to the participants of all focus groups. The questionnaires were customised to suit each groups, and were translated into Sinhalese and Tamil. Teachers and education officers were asked to comment on all the 13 initiatives, while the students and parents were asked to comment on nine initiatives affecting them (excluding the ones under 'Supporting and engaging with teachers'. The focus group facilitator explained each initiative in plain language to ensure everyone understood the concepts.

### Supporting and engaging with teachers<sup>282</sup>

- Train-the-trainer programmes to implement new initiatives to improve school culture and performance.
- Setting up teachers’ consultative committees to seek input on specific matters presented by teachers including the principal.
- Setting up teachers’ professional standards frameworks to ensure quality and consistency in the teaching practice.

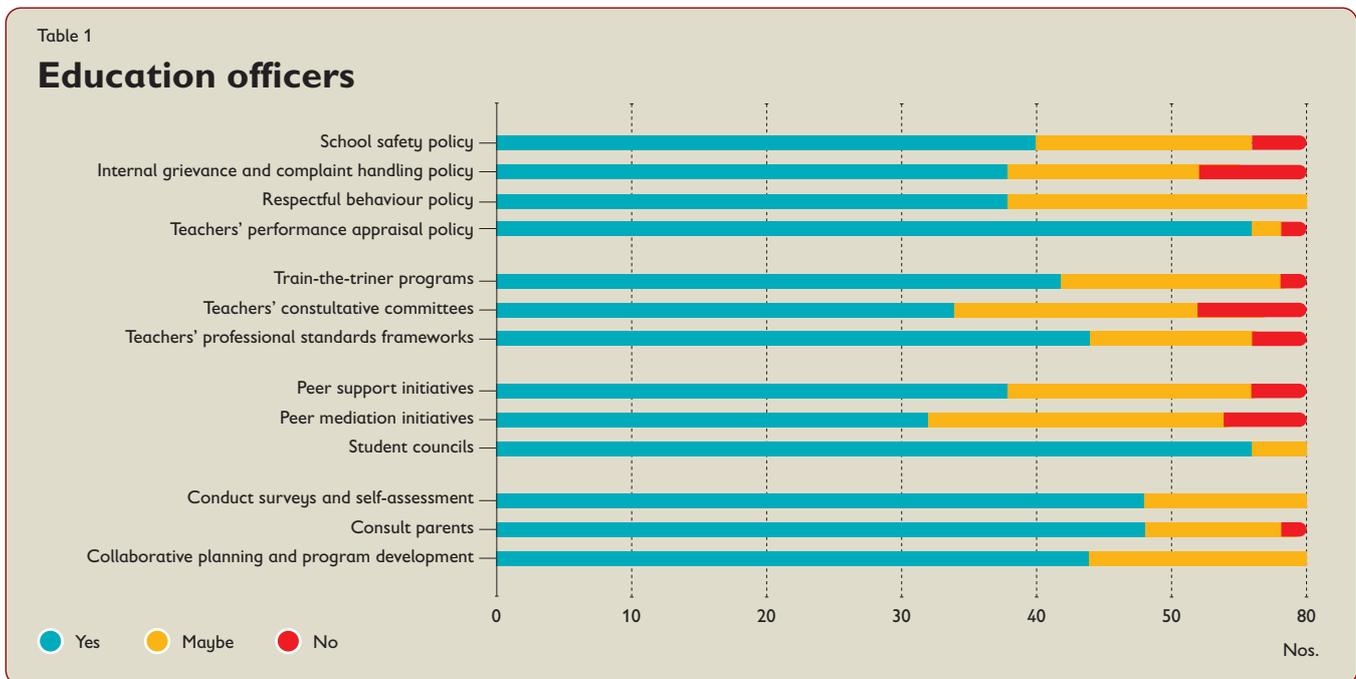
### Supporting and engaging with students

- Peer support initiatives to assist students experiencing difficulties due to bullying, isolation, etc.
- Peer mediation initiatives to train student mediators who can help resolving minor disputes between students.
- Setting up student councils to seek students’ input on specific matters presented by the teachers.

### Supporting and engaging with whole school community

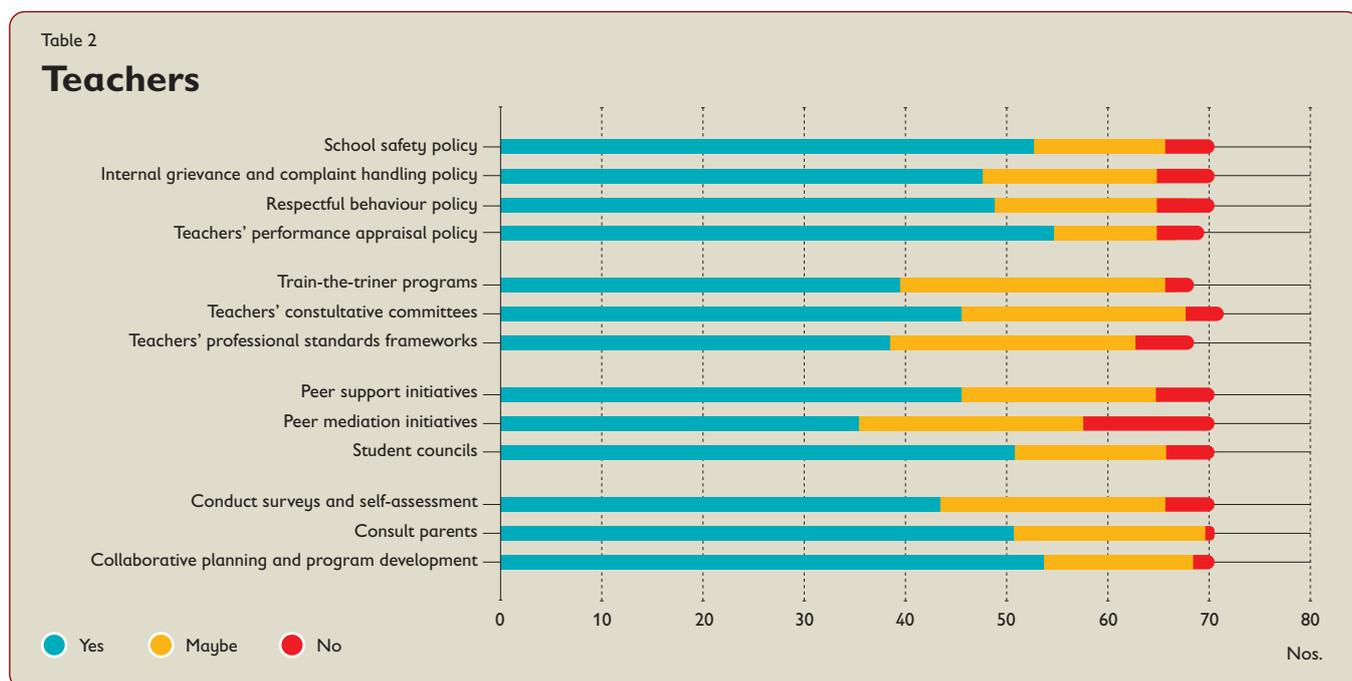
- Conduct surveys and self-assessment to identify gaps and opportunities to improve school culture and performance.
- Consult parents through the school development boards in key decision-making.
- Collaborative planning and programme development to deliver new initiatives to improve school culture and performance.

A majority of education officers supported all these initiatives, however, some have noted reservations to certain proposals such as internal grievance and complaint handling policy; respectful behaviour policy; teachers’ consultative committees, and peer mediation initiatives. On the other hand they supported teachers’ performance appraisal policy and student councils. As a whole, the initiatives under ‘supporting and engaging with whole school community’ received the most widespread support. See table 1 below.

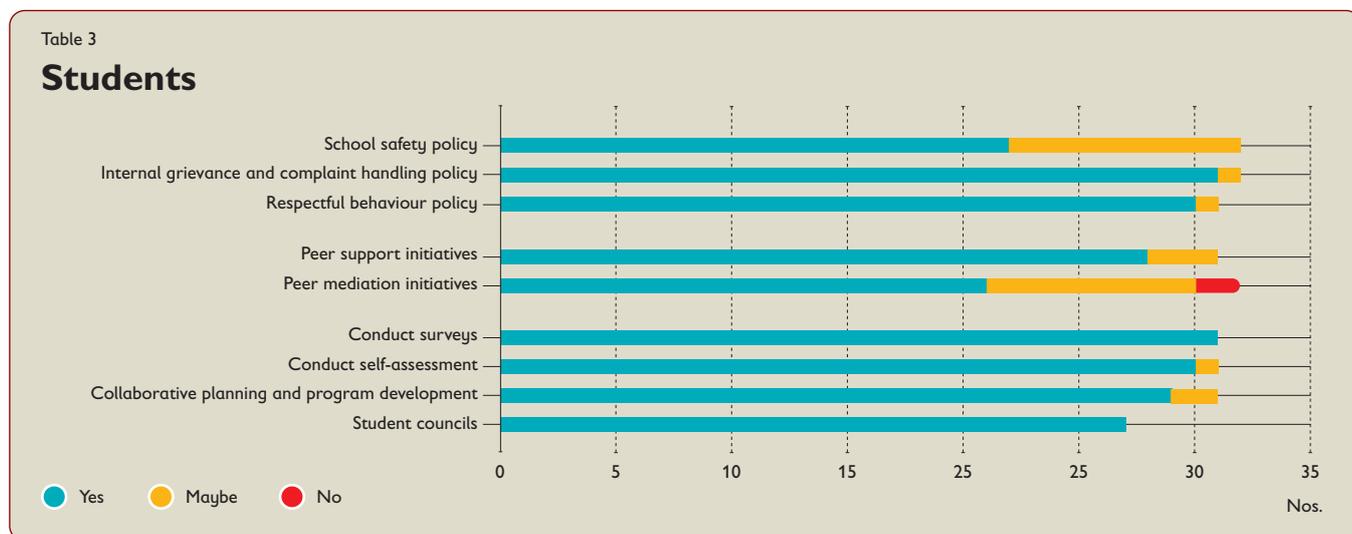


<sup>282</sup> Students and parents were not asked to comment on these initiatives.

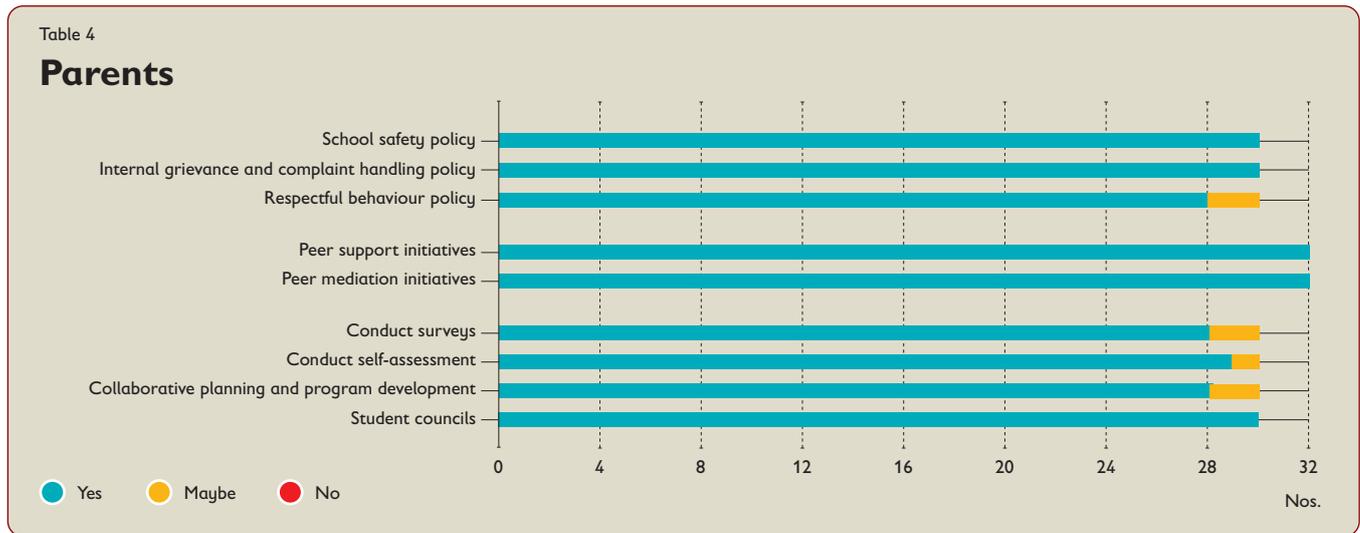
Teachers were the most divided on proposed initiatives, but all the initiatives still received support from the majority. The single initiative receiving the most overall support was teachers’ performance appraisal policy. Teachers seemed somewhat sceptical on peer mediation but the majority still supported the initiative. See table 2 below.



Students were, as a whole, very supportive of new social cohesion initiatives being implemented in their schools. Seven out of nine initiatives received near unanimous support. See below table 3.



As a whole, parents were the most consensual group in their thinking about potential initiatives at schools. A total of five out of nine initiatives received unanimous support with all other initiatives receiving near-unanimous support. No surveyed parent expressed a 'no' opinion on any of the initiatives. See table 4 below.





# 3

# ROADMAP TO FOSTER SOCIAL COHESION

- 3.1 Systems and Implementation \_\_\_\_\_ 57
- 3.2 Learning and Teaching \_\_\_\_\_ 63
- 3.3 Leadership and Professionalism \_\_\_\_\_ 70
- 3.4 Rights and Behaviour \_\_\_\_\_ 76
- 3.5 Communities and Participation \_\_\_\_\_ 82

This chapter urges all stakeholders in education to take a holistic and coordinated approach in social cohesion programmes, taking the radical reforms proposed to the general education system by the NEC and other agencies as a foundation. As consistently argued earlier, we see no evidence to demonstrate that any isolated efforts in specific areas of education are likely to produce long term and tangible results; therefore, we propose that all key players in the education sector should come together to find solutions to the problems.

This proposed collaborative approach has been endorsed by many scholars. For example, presenting the steps to be taken to drive the social cohesion agenda in education through a policy framework, Sinclair submits that multi-year technical and financial agreements between the education ministry and key external actors needs to be negotiated and follow-up processes should be set up to engage various education sub-sectors such as curriculum specialists, textbook writers, university education faculties, teacher training institutions, teacher unions, examination boards, NGOs working in this field, private education associations, and education coordination bodies.<sup>283</sup> Commenting on education reforms, Sinclair says that it is vital to select an approach that is acceptable to the main political groups in the country so that the education reforms will survive a change of government.<sup>284</sup> It is thus important that the reform agenda is led by a consortium of leaders, representing all education stakeholders.

Based on our findings, we propose setting up a Taskforce which should include decision makers of the MoE, including the representatives of the Minister and MPs who hold shadow education portfolios among opposition parties;

Central Government education agencies including the NIE and NEC; the Provincial Councils' education departments; other government ministries and departments which interact with education or social cohesion portfolios; key UN agencies and NGOs working with children in education, social cohesion or other relevant areas; representatives of students, parents and teachers including union members; subject matter experts including local and foreign university academics with a relevant research backgrounds; donor agencies; and employer-representatives of the business community.<sup>285</sup>

The Taskforce should ideally be coordinated by a leadership group comprising the MoE and a non-government agency such as a donor agency with long term commitments to reforming the education system in Sri Lanka. The secretarial accountabilities of the Taskforce should ideally be held by dedicated persons under the supervision of the Secretary or an Additional Secretary of the MoE to ensure regular meetings, follow up actions and coordination of administrative activities. The Taskforce should convene on a regular basis and must come with an action plan and work together to research, consult, develop, pilot, rollout, monitor and evaluate the actions or programmes, ensuring the sustainability of the initiatives. While the Taskforce should holistically address the issues of the education system, a subcommittee within the Taskforce should work on social cohesion initiatives in the education system (while other subcommittees can address other aspects), within which subgroups can be formed in multiple areas including the domains of whole school culture. Proposals based on our study will be presented in the upcoming sections under the headings of the five domains of whole school culture to be considered by the Taskforce.

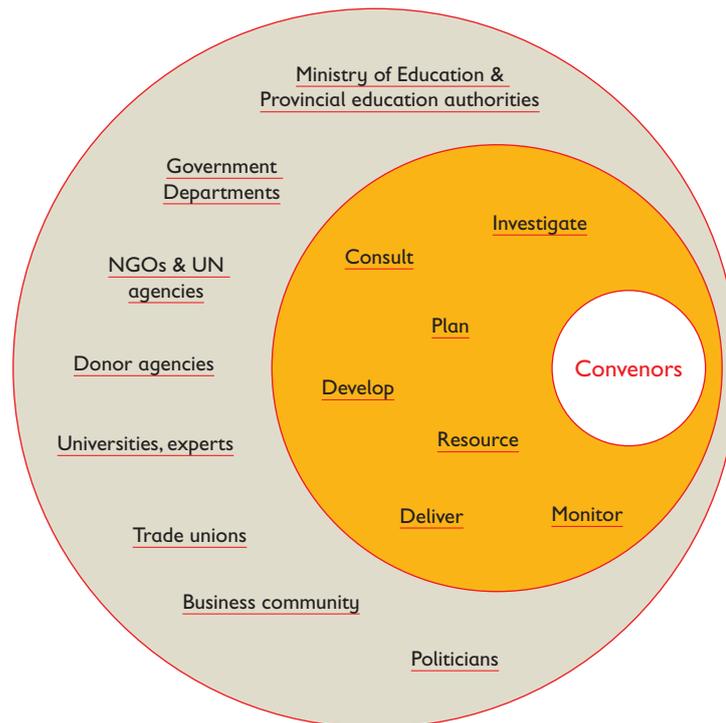


<sup>283</sup> Sinclair 2013, pp. 260-261.

<sup>284</sup> *Ebid.*, p. 43.

<sup>285</sup> NPSCPE also recommends, creating a network to improve cooperation in research, monitoring and evaluation activities related to social cohesion in education. See MoE 2008, pp. 6-7. According to MoE sources, in early 2020 a taskforce has been appointed by the Minister of Education of the caretaker Government to reform the entire general education system, a former MoE officer suggested that the taskforce proposed in our document should be positioned as a special committee within the MoE taskforce. Since further information is not available on the MoE taskforce at the time of finalising this document, we are unable to include any specific proposals.

## Taskforce



Since the scope of this study is limited to fostering social cohesion by whole school culture, the proposals presented in the upcoming sections are predominantly concerned in that area. More research needs to be undertaken on the other six strategic areas of the NPSCPE and the NPRC National Action Plan (which includes many initiatives overlapping with NPSCPE related activities).<sup>286</sup> We do not propose a Plan B, yet all the proposals presented in the roadmap can be scaled down if the resources or commitment cannot be secured to establish the Taskforce. For example, instead of a Taskforce, an interagency network can be set up with terms of reference to improve social cohesion in schools, and individual members of the interagency network can consider implementing one or many proposals presented in the roadmap taking a coordinated approach and sharing resources and experiences.

### NPSCPE actions:

Although the NPSCPE is meant to be a policy document, it contains detailed description of activities to be implemented through a three-tier approach—national, local and school level.<sup>287</sup> The activities proposed in the NPSCPE under the fourth strategic area of whole school culture include acting according to agreed 'roles, rights and duties/responsibilities' of the school community; involvement of students in drawing up Codes of Conduct; promoting 'orderliness and discipline' and ensuring the 'observance of expected norms of conduct' by students and teachers; enabling student participation in decision-making through student forums; 'reducing violence'; proper garbage disposal and 'beautifying' the school to give a sense of peace; displaying works of art by students and artists on the walls; displaying 'inspiring quotations'; proper maintenance of building and furniture; training students and teachers in conflict resolution and mediation;



<sup>286</sup> Under the fourth 'trust areas' of the National Action Plan, priorities related to education including the introduction of 'integration friendly schools' have been identified. See Ministry of National Integration and Reconciliation 2017.

<sup>287</sup> Activities to be implemented at school level includes developing codes of conduct for schools; identifying and promoting students with potentials of building peace competencies and reward them; displaying 'moral instruction' for the day and 'peace mottos'; publishing newsletters on peace; organising day or a week to celebrate peace; appointing class mediators; appointing peace committees, and 'school link' programmes to socialise with students of other schools. Activities to be implemented at national level includes integrated schools; classroom peace education; re-skilling teachers and education leaders; second language learning for Cross cultural understanding; co-curricular activities; student exchange programmes; 'student parliament'; 'friendship forums'; 'peace schools'; conferences; seminars, and arts events such as drama competitions. Local level activities includes peace events; literary and cultural programmes to celebrate common aspects of different cultures and of specific religions and cultural festival; arts programmes including visual arts exhibitions; debates; seminars; special lectures on peace related issues; UN days and Model UN events; media clubs; 'peace camps'; student led magazines and newsletters; community events to promote a second national language and intercultural exchange, and real or virtual student exchange programmes. See MoE 2008, pp. 19-34.

respecting the school culture of 'justice and fair play'; ensuring 'equitable and respectful relationships' amongst staff, parents and students; making school announcements in all three languages; 'explaining' social cohesion activities to the parents; inviting members of civil society and religious leaders to the school to discuss peace and social cohesion; linking with the media to promote the school's social cohesion activities; ensuring schools are 'parent and community friendly', as well as 'child friendly'; 'learning problem solving and critical thinking'; and getting support from religious leaders to implement co-curricular activities.<sup>288</sup>

While the authors of the NPSCPE did not appear to attempt providing an exhaustive list of activities to implement the policy, its approach of providing examples of actions to be implemented in three-tiers is probably meant to inspire the leaders of one of these levels to take up certain initiatives. However, the authors of the policy seemed to have taken somewhat simplistic approach to guide stakeholders in implementing the policy by proposing these sets of activities which lack a substantial programme logic or theory of change. These activities also do not seem to be coordinated at national or provincial levels, and the NPSCPE appears to be less descriptive on the strategic aspects of planning, developing, implementing, monitoring, evaluating, resourcing, and reporting. Unlike the NEC policy documents, the NPSCPE does not appear to have grasped the complexity of the problems in the education system, and it is not positioned within the entangled competing priorities of the reform agenda. For these reasons, we are unfortunately unable to rely only on the NPSCPE actions to develop a roadmap to foster social cohesion by whole school culture. Instead, we will present a more methodical approach to develop a roadmap by focusing on the five domains of the whole school culture.

#### Phases of the journey

The roadmap to foster social cohesion by whole school culture needs to be signposted by key phases. EU Guidelines for diversity education recommend taking a five step approach to implementing school-based social cohesion initiatives: establish priorities through self-evaluation; identify short, medium and long term outcomes to be achieved; develop action plans; monitor progress, and evaluate the initiatives.<sup>289</sup> Commenting on piloting followed by cascaded implementation of peace education initiatives, Sinclair argues that such quick steps of scaling out pilot initiatives to a national level may not be appropriate for peace education programmes because many teachers will be unable to use the methods envisaged; therefore,

scaling up must instead be phased.<sup>290</sup> This type of approach indeed requires long term planning and commitments from the Taskforce partners, and a long term commitment for funding, not only to continue the Taskforce mechanism but also to invest in the new initiatives proposed by the Taskforce.

The proposals presented to be considered by the Taskforce are mainly twofold: those to be considered by national level reforms designed by NEC and NCFNEA, and those which can be adopted at the local level or even at the school level, pending national reforms.<sup>291</sup> While presenting these proposals, it is also important to set certain basic principles for the purpose of avoiding some common pitfalls that the reform agenda could fall into. Firstly, social cohesion initiatives should not add any more workload or stress to overburden the teachers, students or the parents. Secondly, all initiatives need to be embedded in core businesses of education, so that social cohesion initiatives will not be pushed down by other competing priorities. Thirdly, stakeholders should be engaged at all the levels of social cohesion initiatives through consultations and other mechanisms to enhance the participation of stakeholders in planning, developing, implementing and evaluating. Fourthly, instead of radical and rapid changes, the reforms should be implemented in incremental phases, giving adequate time for resources and corporate knowledge to grow. Next, all social cohesion initiatives and reforms in education should be designed with inbuilt mechanisms to ensure equitable resource allocation and programme sustainability. It is also absolutely important to make all reforms and new initiatives completely free of political interference of all types, and these initiatives must also have inbuilt mechanisms to prevent corruption and waste. The initiatives must also be designed with feedback mechanisms to facilitate continuous improvement through self-reflection, learning, sharing experiences and expertise. Finally, the best interests of the student should come first at all times in all initiatives, with no compromise, and in order to achieve this, students' participation should be assured at all levels.

#### Measuring social cohesion outcomes

Measuring the outcomes of social cohesion related education initiatives is extremely challenging due to the complexity of such activities and their impact on school communities and cultures. Despite these challenges, various researchers and practitioners have attempted to come up with tools and systems to measure the outcomes of peace education programmes. For example, a programme in Norway adopted a self-assessment tool to measure



<sup>288</sup> MoE 2008, pp. 30-32.

<sup>289</sup> Rashid and Tikly 2010, p. 37.

<sup>290</sup> Sinclair 2013, p. 45.

<sup>291</sup> Although the option of having a Plan B has not been entertained, if the proposals presented in the roadmap are to be scaled down, these local level proposals can be implemented pending national reforms.

students' attitudes towards human rights and diversity in schools.<sup>292</sup> A 'school culture triage survey' has been reportedly used as a 'school leader's tool' in Kentucky, United States.<sup>293</sup> To measure the learning outcomes associated with school culture and social cohesion, knowledge and skills attributing to 'cultural competency' have been formulated by some practitioners.<sup>294</sup>

A detailed study on the indicators of citizenship education presented by Scheerens is one of the most prominent studies of its kind.<sup>295</sup> Most importantly, Scheerens presents indicators associated with school culture such as collaboration between teachers accompanied by evidence of staff working as a team; teacher participation in extra-curricular activities; involvement of parents, particularly in the 'detection of tensions' among the expectations of teachers and parents; the clarity of school regulations and collective norms, and relational trust amongst teachers, teachers and principals, teachers and students, and amongst students. Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to be introduced for social cohesion initiatives in school culture can be accompanied by these indicators to measure progress and success. Further studies need to be conducted to identify appropriate sets of indicators to measure social cohesion outcomes based on the actual types of strategies to be adopted by the proposed Taskforce.

### 3.1 Systems and Implementation

For the purpose of this study, legislation, policies and establishments including infrastructure and programmes are all considered within the scope of 'systems' on which the school culture stands or exists. These systems may not be considered as features of school culture in isolation—rather, their combination forms the base for cultural norms to be developed. For example, the adoption of a policy which prevents discrimination of students or teachers with disabilities could directly contribute to the shaping of

cultural norms of a school environment to be inclusive of people with disabilities, while certain parts of the school infrastructure is altered to make the school disability friendly (e.g. making the common buildings wheelchair accessible). Similarly, an equitable funding mechanism can ensure setting up benchmarks for the standards of school infrastructure, for example, providing access to a library which holds materials of a certain quality can help fostering a culture of knowledge seeking, critical thinking and debate amongst students. The creation of certain spaces within school premises, for example, flower beds, vegetable plots, play-parks and sanitary facilities established by UNICEF in delivering its Child Friendly School initiative reportedly had an impact on creating a positive learning environment which could be equally enjoyed by both male and female students.<sup>296</sup>

#### Legislation and policies

Legislation and policies form the fundamental framework to introduce reforms in the government school system, and any initiative concerning social cohesion must be arguably backed up by a strong government policy framework.<sup>297</sup> The Fundamental Rights of the Constitution of Sri Lanka provides a strong legal base to support all non-discriminatory practices as article 12 of the Constitution prohibits government authorities including schools discriminating against students or teachers on the base of race, religion, language, caste, sex, political opinion, place of birth or any one of such grounds.<sup>298</sup> The policies or circulars endorsed by Ministers understandably cannot produce the same impact that a piece of legislation passed by the Parliament can; thus both the NPSCPE<sup>299</sup> and the NPRC lack the persuasive capacity to guarantee the implementation of the initiatives presented in the instruments. Numerous proposals presented by NCFNEA, however, bring hope to those who are advocating to establish sustainable social cohesion initiatives in Sri Lanka. Amongst other things, the NCFNEA proposes a new Education Act,<sup>300</sup> demanding an overhaul of the education system. The evidence-base built



<sup>292</sup> Osler and Solhaug 2018, p. 376.

<sup>293</sup> McMaster 2013, p. 6.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>295</sup> In this study, under the area of leadership, the indicators meant to capture the way decisions are made at school referring to the hierarchy, distributed leadership, staff-collectively, degree of discretion of the principal over staff, etc. Under the structures for students' involvement, the indicators are linked to the nature of students' involvement in decision making, and the 'structure' of the students' involvement; e.g. school council, students activities such as school parliament or arts and excursion activities. Indicators of 'classroom climate' refer to various aspects including transparency in conflict handling; cooperative learning; clarity on classroom behavioural and disciplinary rules, characteristics of teacher student relationships; i.e. authoritarian, strict, democratic, distant, etc. See Scheerens 2011, pp. 2018-222.

<sup>296</sup> Wehella 2014, p. 73.

<sup>297</sup> Cremin and Bevington discuss the requirements of basic policies such as school safety and behavioural standards policies in order to maintain peace in schools. See Cremin and Bevington 2017, p. 82.

<sup>298</sup> In *Manuwel Dura Chandani v. Akila Viraj Kariyawasam* (SC.FR.77/2016) the Supreme Court noted: 'The Court would like to place on record that in terms of Article 27(2)(h) of the Constitution it is one of the directive principles of state policy to ensure the right to universal and equal access to education at all levels. The Court also wishes to place on record that the state should ensure that the human rights of the people living with HIV/AIDS are promoted, protected and respected and measures to be taken to eliminate discrimination against them'.

<sup>299</sup> NPSCPE is under review at the time of this document is being compiled.

<sup>300</sup> Gunawardena GB et al., 2009.

with literature, combined with the findings of the field study of this project, overwhelmingly support the systemic changes proposed by the NCFNEA, and enactment of the proposed Education Act is an imperative precondition to fully adopt and implement some important proposals presented in this document to foster social cohesion by whole school culture.

One of the key issues of the archaic legislation related to education in Sri Lanka is the lack of compatibility with the Fundamental Rights guaranteed by the Constitution.<sup>301</sup> MPs who are considering a new Education Act must ensure that the new Act not only upholds the Fundamental Rights guaranteed by the Constitution, but can also meet the rights-based standards set by Fundamental Rights jurisprudence, which is continuing to grow. In particular, a future Education Act should incorporate the rights of the child as recognised by various international covenants, including the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, and all its provisions must be built on the best interests of the child.<sup>302</sup> An Act aiming to reform the general education system also should include provisions to ensure the equity and work health safety of the whole school community, including members of its workforce. Work health safety laws are almost non-existent in Sri Lanka, apart from provisions to ensure safety in industrial setting such as factories.<sup>303</sup> It is of utmost important that Parliament includes provisions to ensure work health safety in places other than factories, so that schools' work health safety can be covered by a uniform regime of legislation.

Any policy review and reform initiative is likely to be more effective if all aforementioned policies are reviewed and rewritten taking an integrated approach by which all the stakeholders are engaged through a wide scale consultation across the regions and sectors. In order to ensure the sustainability of policy reforms, multiple stakeholders' buy-in is absolutely essential, particularly to ensure continuous funding and support to implement the

policies.<sup>304</sup> When introducing policy reforms, it is also vital to adopt an approach acceptable to all political groups, so that the reforms will survive changes of government.<sup>305</sup> Further, the rollout of the policies must also accompanied by a communication strategy to communicate the policy reforms to the school community; a training strategy to ensure that employees have the skills to apply the newly introduced policies; and a monitoring mechanism to ensure compliance.

#### **Equitable resources distribution**

Resource distribution amongst schools should be determined by three equity principles: 'horizontal equity (equally treating those who are equally situated); vertical equity (treating students who have different needs with different levels of resources); and equal educational opportunity (all students should have equal opportunities to succeed without being discriminated against on account of their characteristics or place of residence)'.<sup>306</sup> Aligning the school environment with learning, the NCFNEA emphasises that the psycho-social and physical environment of the school should enable pupils to internalise values.<sup>307</sup> Thus a comprehensive social cohesion framework certainly involves implementing various strategies and programmes which require improvement to infrastructure, funding and human resources.<sup>308</sup>

One of the important initiatives proposed in the NPSCPE is setting up and expanding integrated schools wherever possible.<sup>309</sup> Resources need to be allocated to set up integrated schools in multi ethnic or multi religious areas.<sup>310</sup> A UN report recommends expanding ethnically integrated schools as urban centres become more multicultural due to internal migration.<sup>311</sup> Further, the NPSCPE notes that if setting up integrated schools is not physically possible, programmes need to be introduced to link schools providing opportunities to share experiences in order guarantee a 'peace experience' to every child, for example, through



<sup>301</sup> Article 16 of the Constitution allows the continuous enforcement of archaic laws regardless of their incompatibility with the Fundamental Rights.

<sup>302</sup> Sri Lanka is a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and in its combined fifth and sixth periodic report to the UN, the Government has spelled out its commitment to ensuring peace education and social cohesion. See UN 2017, p.33.

<sup>303</sup> The responsibility of implementing occupational health and safety practices in the country lies chiefly with the Department of Labour supported by the Ministry of Health and the need for reporting accidents, injuries and diseases and the objective of doing so is not understood by many industrialists. See University of Colombo 2016, pp. 7,8.

<sup>304</sup> Sinclair 2013, p. 42.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid., pp. 43, 47.

<sup>306</sup> Quoting UIS, 2007, pp.23-24 in Wehella 2014, p. 15.

<sup>307</sup> Gunawardena GB et al., 2009, p. 115.

<sup>308</sup> Also see details on UNICEF's Child Friendly School Initiative, which included infrastructure development component. See Wehella 2014, p. 73.

<sup>309</sup> MoE 2008.

<sup>310</sup> Segregation of schools along ethnic or religious lines allows little or no opportunities to become aware of other cultures and ethnicities, and in such environments the students learn to think in exclusive terms about their own race and religion, thus causing the children to endorse the stereotyping of characteristics of other ethnic and religious groups. On the other hand, children learn to accept diversity and build mutual understanding if they are allowed to learn and play with other ethnic or religious groups. See Aturupane and Wikramanayake 2011, p. 15.

<sup>311</sup> Aturupane and Wikramanayake 2011, p. 21.

student exchange programmes.<sup>312</sup> Evidence presented in the previous chapters certainly support the aforementioned proposals and the fact that these proposals have the stamp of endorsement of a national policy indeed solidifies a business case for resource allocation.

Next to the curricula reforms, equitable resources allocation must be considered as the highest priority in the educational reform agenda, according to volumes of literature and the findings of the field research. As discussed in the previous chapters, rigorous measures need to be taken to eliminate disparities between better resourced schools and under resourced schools.<sup>313</sup> The first prerequisite to establish equitable resource allocation mechanisms for schools is arguably the emergence of a political leadership with strong commitment to reform the education system, but unfortunately no major political actor has demonstrated a genuine interest in this regard. Pending such reforms in resource allocation, several proposals can be presented within the context of whole school culture fostering social cohesion. Firstly, schools can adopt systems to pool resources, including human resources, and work in partnerships for the purpose of implementing social cohesion initiatives.<sup>314</sup> Secondly, schools can access external funding through local and international organisations under a regulated system which includes consistent approval and monitoring mechanisms.

According to the field research, bureaucratic red tape can make such fund seeking extremely difficult. On the other hand, there is an inherent problem with short term non-governmental funding as ‘many programmes are started but few survive and flourish’.<sup>315</sup> An experienced programme evaluator stated that ‘the number one problem is sustainability’. Sinclair adds: ‘to have a significant and transformative impact on students’ behaviour in the short, medium and longer term as citizens [...] it is essential to plan for a decade not a year.’<sup>316</sup> Lack of sustainability in programmes may be partially addressed by facilitating communication and coordination between the stakeholders including the donors and government authorities through the Taskforce, so that multiple agencies can jointly plan,

implement and monitor programmes in general education sector through an integrated approach with a longer term vision. However, it is also important to note that it is only a longer term equitable government funding mechanism backed up by policy commitment and a strong evidence-base that can ensure the sustainability of any initiative in the school system. Other than allocating new funds, we should note the importance of utilising the available funds effectively. For example, every year MoE and other Ministries end up returning a large sum of underspent funds to the Treasury, and in 2016 a staggering LKR 138,372 million was unutilised out of a LKR 203,372 million allocation (or 68%).<sup>317</sup>

### School-based management and improvement

School-based management and improvement system appear to have much potential to build synergy with social cohesion initiatives in schools through a number of avenues by embedding meaningful mechanisms to engage the school community. School-based management systems seek to promote a ‘less bureaucratic environment’ and to provide local solutions to local problems, increasing the amount of resources generated by the schools, and increasing efficiency in resource use.<sup>318</sup> By empowering schools, school-based management systems create a ‘sense of ownership’ among the school community and thereby facilitate improvement through school-based planning, collaborative decision making and promoting school-based teacher development.<sup>319</sup> Such systems can also offer a greater degree of autonomy to schools as well as opportunities for the school community to participate in decision making.<sup>320</sup>

In Sri Lanka, school-based management initiatives largely revolve around SDCs which are run by the school community including teachers, parents and school alumni. School-based management is heavily supported by the NCFNEA which submits that the existing centralised bureaucratic governing structure ‘does not permit schools to grow with their own uniqueness and identity’ and the local community does not have an opportunity to get ‘organically connected’ to the school.<sup>321</sup>



<sup>312</sup> MoE 2008.

<sup>313</sup> While there have been several attempts such as the introduction of equitable funding formula and ‘the nearest school is the best school program’ to narrow the gap between well-resourced schools and under resourced schools, alarming disparities between rich and poor schools can be seen every parts of the country.

<sup>314</sup> Pooling of resources have been previously introduced and up to a certain extent the system appears to be continuing in some areas through the cluster school model. See Samaranyake 1985. A former MoE officer commented that in 2005 a system was introduced to pool the government and external funds to be allocated in a systemic manner based on the development plans prepared in the grassroots level; however, the officer conceded that due to ‘failures in implementation, some gaps still exist’.

<sup>315</sup> Sinclair adds: ‘most donors cannot promise money for a decade but they—in conjunction with national actors—can draw up strategies based on perspective planning at least to the medium term’. See Sinclair 2013, p. 46.

<sup>316</sup> Sinclair 2013, p. 46.

<sup>317</sup> Ministry of Finance 2016, p. 15. Note however that in other years the unutilised amount is lower. For example, in 2017 the total allocation was LKR 112,913 million of which LKR 31,886 million (or 28%) was unutilised.

<sup>318</sup> Wehella 2014, p. 10.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid., pp. v,4,5.

<sup>320</sup> See the discussion under the fifth domain of whole school culture in the last segment of this chapter.

<sup>321</sup> Gunawardena GB et al., 2009, p. 138.

However, it is important to note that such school-based management and improvement systems need to be carefully conceptualised to maximise the benefits because the evidence does not quite demonstrate overall success. According to doctoral research conducted by Wehella, Sri Lanka 'has not gone that far' in adopting school-based management systems, and their application also does not seem to be consistent amongst schools.<sup>322</sup> The author adds that international experiences of school-based management initiatives also show mixed results, 'some showing no direct correlation with the performance of the students'.<sup>323</sup> According to the author, there is indeed scepticism as to whether the programme would be able to address the issues of a heterogeneous school system, and some have opined that the school management programme might widen the gaps between schools and pupils of different socio-economic backgrounds.<sup>324</sup> Nonetheless, the model of school improvement seemed to have at least some merits which can be adopted in school social cohesion initiatives to enhance democratic decision making by the school community.

Wehella identifies the UNICEF led Child Friendly School initiative in primary schools as a school improvement mechanism which took a rights-based approach to education while adopting teacher capacity building methods and a 'student-centred teaching' approach.<sup>325</sup> The programme aimed to ensure children's right to education by securing a 'proactively inclusive, gender-responsive, healthy, safe and protective learning environment' and to improve their learning outcomes by collaboration between schools, families and community.<sup>326</sup> Some schools of this initiative reported improvements in daily-attendance, parent-teacher links and contributions from parents towards physical infrastructure development; however,

the success of the pilot project appeared to be 'sporadic' and some schools were lagging behind.<sup>327</sup> Although other organisations like Save the Children got involved at later stages of the initiative, the 'fragmented project-based approach' was said to be 'no longer sustainable'.<sup>328</sup> Nonetheless, future social cohesion initiatives in schools can consider incorporating some of the effective features of the Child Friendly School Initiative such as facilitating children's participation in decision making, improvement of school infrastructure through non-governmental funding, and ensuring gender equity through various measures.

#### Planning and monitoring

To make individual schools more accountable, the MoE has taken two approaches: the quality assurance mechanism and the school-based management system.<sup>329</sup> The quality assurance mechanism comprises monitoring activities conducted by external education officers and internal evaluation activities conducted by the principal, teachers and the school management committee.<sup>330</sup> A total of 220 indicators reflecting the 12 national educational standards are applied in the quality assurance process, and they cover a number of domains of assessment.<sup>331</sup> With some adjustments, the quality assurance framework of the school system could integrate monitoring and assessing social cohesion initiatives, particularly if such initiatives are integrated into the school's core business. For example, schools can monitor the impact of peace initiatives such as peer mediation by analysing data on school disciplinary or grievance matters, and such data can be sought through the quality assurance self-assessment questionnaire.

One of the major barriers to conduct periodic, comprehensive monitoring activities in school is a lack of availability of good data for planning or reform purposes, although an important set of data has been collected

<sup>322</sup> Wehella 2014, p. 8.

<sup>323</sup> Wehella 2014, pp. 16-17.

<sup>324</sup> Wehella 2014, pp. v, 72.

<sup>325</sup> This initiative was studied as a school improvement mechanism, perhaps because it included certain aspects of school-based management such as democratic decision making through school committees, self-assessment of school's performance, conducting annual planning and fund raising. See Wehella 2014, p. v.

<sup>326</sup> The programme was initially piloted in selected areas and was expanded to 17 districts covering 1,400 schools during 2005. Its impact was reportedly restricted to primary education areas. The governing structure of the programme included two school-based committees of various stakeholders with one committee including student representatives. As a result of this initiative, the physical environments of the participating schools were reportedly improved with flower beds, vegetable plots, play-parks and sanitary facilities being built. See Wehella 2014, pp. 5, 73.

<sup>327</sup> Wehella 2014, pp. 73-74.

<sup>328</sup> In 2007, the MoE launched the Child Friendly School initiative as a national strategy through two main actions: (a) the NIE incorporated Child Friendly School dimensions, child rights perspectives and related teaching methodologies in its training programmes and (b) by developing a framework of appropriate criteria and indicators. The effectiveness of this national initiative needs to be further explored in conjunction with the proposed model of school-based management presented by Wehella so that social cohesion initiatives in schools can incorporate some of the effective features of the Child Friendly School initiative. See Wehella 2014, p. 74.

<sup>329</sup> Dundar et. Al. 2017, p. 107.

<sup>330</sup> The quality assurance mechanism includes a mutually reinforcing internal and external auditing/monitoring activities. See Dundar et. Al. 2017, p. 18. Also see NEC 2016, p. 78.

<sup>331</sup> These domains are: general management; physical and human resource management; systematic curriculum management; co-curricular activities; student achievements; student welfare; school and community, and student development for knowledge based society. According to the NEC, although the scope of the eight domains is comprehensive and multi-dimensional, 'the framework is too broad and has too many indicators'. See NEC 2016, pp. 78-79.

through the new national Education Management Information System (EMIS).<sup>332</sup> The planning of schools' annual activities and programmes are conducted mainly through the SDCs. Schools' participation in annual planning cycles does not appear to be consistent, as some schools have very little to no resources including expertise to contribute to such planning exercises.<sup>333</sup>

Throughout this study, it was consistently emphasised that by taking a holistic approach, social cohesion initiatives should be integrated into the core business of education in order to ensure sustainability. This can only be achieved by introducing mandatory social cohesion related criteria or items into data collection mechanisms, planning instruments; performance indicators; monitoring tools, and reporting instruments. It is also important to note that traditional monitoring, quality assurance and evaluation tools may inherently lack the capacity to look into the complexities of social cohesion indicators, particularly in the whole school culture setting. Commenting on development programmes, McMaster notes that the programmes must have 'inbuilt processes of reviewing, collective reflection, collective planning and joint action and, they must be identified in the teacher professional development frameworks'.<sup>334</sup> Thus, future strategies aiming to foster social cohesion in education need to explore innovative ways of collective actions in planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluation activities.

Proposals to improve systems and implementation  
The Taskforce can be provided with the following proposals under the first domain of whole school culture:

**1. Legislation and Policies:** Pending legislation proposed by the NEC and NCFNEA, the Taskforce can consider facilitating the adoption of a set of policies and procedures to foster social cohesion by whole school culture, bearing in mind that without legislative backing these policies may lack persuasive capacity. The policy development can occur under two streams: policies affecting employees and policies related to the other parties of the school community such as students and parents:

- **Code of Conduct:** The Code of Conduct which is presently in force.<sup>335</sup> provides guidance for teachers to shape their attitudes and behaviour, and the document can be further refined to ensure clarity and include additional provisions such as respectful behaviour towards colleagues and parents.
- **Grievance resolution:**<sup>336</sup> The proposed policies and procedures should include options and simple steps to guide employees to resolve the disputes. These options may include informal discussions between disputing parties, lodging written grievances and mediation, with options to escalate unresolved matters upwards in the hierarchy.
- **Work health and safety:** Pending legislation, a policy framework should be introduced aiming to remove the risks of both physical and psychological injuries from learning and working environments. The policies can be presented with procedures to set up workplace health and safety committees to periodically conduct safety audits and implement risk mitigation actions. The policies should also ensure systems to prevent workplace violence, bullying and harassment because these types of conduct account for serious employee injuries, including mental trauma.<sup>337</sup>
- **Performance planning, development and management:**<sup>338</sup> Employees including teachers and principals can be provided with clear guidance on how to help employees plan their career; identify career development opportunities including training; seek opportunities to work in senior positions in an acting capacity; and assist them to improve their performance if they are performing poorly. These performance planning and development mechanisms can be linked to the employee promotion system, so that the job satisfaction and motivation of the workforce can be enhanced by rewarding employees who perform to a satisfactory level.<sup>339</sup>



<sup>332</sup> According to the NEC, the host of data collected through the annual school census is not meaningfully processed to inform the sector. See Gunawardena GB et al., 2009, pp. 143-145. EMIS was established in 2019, and according to a former MoE officer, the Ministry said to have already processed 100% of teacher data and more than 75% of student data by 2020. Most teachers, principals and education officers don't seem not have been familiarised with this new source of data. See also the field study findings presented in the previous chapter.

<sup>333</sup> See field study findings presented in the previous chapter.

<sup>334</sup> McMaster, Christopher 2013, 'Building Inclusion from the Ground Up: A Review of Whole School Re-culturing Programmes for Sustaining Inclusive Change', *International journal of whole schooling*, Vol 9, No 2, p. 8.

<sup>335</sup> MoE 2012.

<sup>336</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, no adequate policies or procedures seemed to be available to guide individual employees of schools or the education system in general to resolve interpersonal disputes or conflicts, and such disputes can escalate to a harmful level, if the employees are not provided with a framework to resolve them in-house.

<sup>337</sup> See Lopez et al. 2009, pp. 7-8 and Rhodes et al. 2010, p. 97.

<sup>338</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, there is no clarity in the existing policy or procedure framework on performance planning, development or management.

<sup>339</sup> This means, instead of promotion based on the duration of the service, employees will be able to climb up in the career ladder based on their performance.

- **Respectful behaviour:**<sup>340</sup> A code of conduct or a similar statement like a charter which outlines respectful behavioural requirements for students and parents can be adopted. It is important to maintain some uniformity in behavioural thresholds across all the schools, so it is desirable that a central authority like the MoE outlines the lower bounds of accepted behaviour by a central policy document which can be adopted or modified by schools.
- **Disciplinary matters and investigation:**<sup>341</sup> Investigation procedures are usually applied to respond to serious issues or complaints such as sexual harassment or corruption which are not suitable to be resolved by grievance handling mechanisms. The existing policies and procedures in this regard should be revised providing clear guidance.<sup>342</sup>

**2. Planning and monitoring:** Planning, monitoring, quality assurance, evaluation and reporting work best when they all are connected to one system, and this also helps improve the efficiency and overall performance of the school. With emphasis on social cohesion, the following can be proposed:

- **Data:** It is important that social cohesion-related data sets are identified to be considered for inclusion in the national Education Management Information System (EMIS),<sup>343</sup> and schools should particularly be guided to use such data for planning and monitoring purposes. Annual census data can also be made available to stakeholders at all levels.
- **Planning:** Schools, particularly those which are under-resourced, should be assisted with preparing school development plans, offering expert advice and the opportunity to pool resources with other schools.
- **Quality assurance:** As discussed earlier, social cohesion indicators need to be incorporated into the quality assurance systems.<sup>344</sup>
- **Performance indicators:** As discussed earlier, further research needs to be conducted to identify performance indicators to measure the outcomes of social cohesion initiatives focused on whole school culture. Relevant data systems, planning instruments and quality assurance mechanisms need to be linked to these performance indicators.

**3. Programmes:** The following existing social cohesion initiatives need to be assessed by exploring methods to modify and make them more effective. Based on evidence, partners of the proposed Taskforce can engage in implementing one or more initiatives, through a coordinated approach.

- **Integrated schools:** Further research needs to be conducted to understand cultural sensitivities and other issues including practical problems in setting up and operating integrated schools. Building new schools and upgrading or expanding existing schools can be considered as options to increase the number of students attending integrated schools.
- **Peace education/experience programmes:** The effectiveness of the existing and past peace programmes (e.g. student camps conducted by ONUR or psychosocial support programmes delivered by GIZ) can be further studied in order to share good practices. Based on evidence, especially as presented in this document, new initiatives can be introduced. For example, student peer support initiatives; peer mediation initiatives; bullying prevention educational programmes; and arts and cultural programmes on social cohesion.

**4. Resources:** Pending the adoption of a consistent government funding mechanism backed up by policy commitment, options to improve resources of schools should be explored:

- **Streamlining external resources flow:** the MoE can facilitate the flow of external funding to schools or donor/NGO partnership initiatives with schools by streamlining resourcing systems. For example, this can be achieved by setting policy and procedure frameworks to ensure consistency in the approval process and to expedite approvals, and proactively identifying gaps to be filled through external funding and engaging with donors through a consistent donor relation strategy.
- **Resource pooling:** Government or NGO funding mechanisms can encourage resource sharing amongst schools, not only to maximise access to resources but also to facilitate collaboration. The Taskforce can also investigate the useful features of the school cluster system to be adopted if appropriate in its strategies.



<sup>340</sup> Although the teachers are guided by their Code of Ethics on the behavioural standards expected from them, there seem to be no singular point of reference on behavioural standards anticipated from students and parents. Some schools have reportedly adopted certain codes, charters or policy documents to fill this gap but such ad hoc approaches certainly would not match a systemic method to communicate to the school community their expected behavioural standards.

<sup>341</sup> There is a lack of understanding amongst teachers and education officers on investigation procedures including complaint handling mechanisms.

<sup>342</sup> Guidance should be provided to follow mandatory procedures such as principles of natural justice.

<sup>343</sup> Through the National Education Management Information System, the NEC proposes to link all the tiers in education administration, from the national, provincial, zonal and divisional to the school level. See also the discussion on measuring peace in the early part of this chapter, where we discussed indicators to measure school culture, and these with other similar indicators can be incorporated into the data management system, if practical. See Scheerens 2011, pp. 2018-222. Also note that EMIS was established in 2019, and MoE said to have already processed 100% of teacher data and more than 75% of student data by 2020.

<sup>344</sup> See the discussion on measuring social cohesion outcomes in the early part of this chapter.

- **Infrastructure and human resources:** All stakeholders of social cohesion in the education sector need to advocate for equitable government funding for schools. Based on the evidence, including the lessons learnt from the Child Friendly School initiative of UNICEF, benchmarks should be established with standards for indoor and outdoor facilities, and planning guidelines to implement school infrastructure development initiatives, so that every student can enjoy optimal learning environments in which they can experience peace and harmony.

## 3.2 Learning and Teaching

While several curricula or co-curricular based initiatives aiming to build social cohesion have been introduced by the Government<sup>345</sup> a bleak picture of a failed education system looms in the background. According to the NEC, the curricula of most of the programmes do not match current needs,<sup>346</sup> and the NCFNEA asserts that new curricula should be developed on the basis of the national education goals and basic competencies.<sup>347</sup> The Commission presents its vision for future curricula entailing radical overhaul:

Every lesson in the Primary stage should contribute to wholesome human relations. Students would be facilitated to develop as individuals with their own unique set of potentials and capabilities [with a] holistic view of the self and its relationship with the community. The student should learn largely through activities, and become a self-directed and self-reliant learner. At this stage competition for marks and rewards would not be beneficial. Rather, children should learn to work and play together.<sup>348</sup>

The NCFNEA argues that social, emotional and other competencies related to values should be developed through all the subjects and co-curricular activities.<sup>349</sup>

The Committee also importantly refers to media literacy and asserts that the function and impact of the media should be imparted in schools at all levels, enabling students to 'relate and use the media in a participatory manner as well as to learn how to decode media messages, including those in advertising'.<sup>350</sup>

The NEC's further admission that our schools do not produce the workers required by employers<sup>351</sup> is shared by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) which emphasises that Sri Lanka needs to implement reforms to make its human capital globally competitive in the areas of critical thinking and innovation.<sup>352</sup> The ILO proposes that curricula should offer practical subjects for students to develop skills demanded in the globalised labour market,<sup>353</sup> and that curricula need to foster cognitive skills such as teamwork, communications, and work ethics, in addition to employable skills such as analytical reasoning and critical thinking.<sup>354</sup> Submitting that curricula must contain foundational skills to prepare the future worker to adjust flexibly to changing labour market demands, the ILO proposes several applied subjects to curricula post-grade 10.<sup>355</sup> Such practical skills could perhaps be introduced at a much earlier stage, through modifying subjects such as citizenship education. Some researchers comment that this mismatch between school education and work-life challenges are due to school failures in helping students with changing their behaviour, because the subjects do not relate much to behaviours and because classroom activities help little with changing students' values.<sup>356</sup>

A careful analysis of the priorities presented in aforementioned three streams of literature coming from the general education perspectives of the NEC, the workforce perspectives of the ILO and the social cohesion perspectives of the NPSCPE, do not seem to be in conflict, and in fact, appear very similar. For that reason, these proposed curricula reforms have a strong business case:



<sup>345</sup> For example, Life Competencies and Civics Education course for grade 6-9 students and the Citizenship Education and Governance course for grades 10-11.

<sup>346</sup> NEC 2016, p. 53. See also the field study findings in the previous chapter.

<sup>347</sup> To ensure the success of young people in any walk of life they select for their future, the NCFNEA submits that schools should allow every child to derive joy from arts, music, dance and drama and that they 'should be allowed to develop generic skills from all subjects taught at school rather than through a single subject of life competencies'. See Gunawardena GB et al., 2009, p. 65. A former MoE officer noted that the new curricula development cycle has begun and the new curricula will be rolled out in phases to be completed by 2023.

<sup>348</sup> NEC 2016, p. 2.

<sup>349</sup> Gunawardena GB et al., 2009, p. 115.

<sup>350</sup> Gunawardena GB et al., 2009, p. 127.

<sup>351</sup> See the materials presented in previous sections including the field study.

<sup>352</sup> ILO 2017, p. 29.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid., p. 48. According to a former MoE officer, a new vocational stream has been developed by the NIE which is being piloted in certain areas.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>356</sup> Sinclair notes that 'competencies are more than knowledge or skills. Competencies also include the ability to respond to complex demands by drawing on and mobilising psycho-social resources (including values and attitudes) in a particular context. The author also quotes Baxter who adds that schools need to work simultaneously on the cognitive aspects, social and emotional areas, the values and personal development dimensions of education for citizenship and peace, and argues, 'this cannot happen with a "business as usual" approach. See Sinclair 2013, p. 55.

the reforms would not only help build social cohesion but also improve the future workforce's capabilities, thus ultimately resulting in remarkable improvements in the living conditions of the people of Sri Lanka.

#### **Peace education curricula and co-curricular activities**

Peace education is generally delivered through citizenship, life skills and human rights subjects. Human rights education focuses on imparting knowledge of international human rights instruments and associated principles such as non-discrimination and the universality of rights.<sup>357</sup> The subject is designed to build core skills and values such as critical thinking, empathy, avoiding stereotyping and exclusion. Life skills education also focuses on values such as empathy for other human beings and respect for human dignity. The skills aimed to be built are intra-personal skills such as emotional awareness, and inter-personal skills such as communication, cooperation, problem-solving, conflict resolution and advocacy.<sup>358</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the NPSCPE places curricula as first out of the seven policy areas, and also focuses on co-curricular activities under its seventh area.<sup>359</sup> The NPSCPE identifies the second national language subject as a social cohesion initiative, and in addition to this, the Policy supports two stand-alone peace education subjects: (a) Life Competencies and Civics Education subject, and (b) Citizenship Education and Governance. However, there are many limitations to this approach. The Life Competencies and Civics Education subject is offered in grades 7-9 as a compulsory subject but it becomes an elective subject at the GCE O/L level. The Citizenship Education and Governance subject is not compulsory and a relatively low number of students take this subject. Due to teacher shortages, approximately only 45% of all schools offer second national language learning opportunities to

children.<sup>360</sup> According to the findings of the field study, there seems to be no coordinated approach to impart peace education through 'carrier' subjects.<sup>361</sup>

The Citizenship Foundation urges that instead of teaching citizenship it should be 'demonstrated' through the way the schools operate.<sup>362</sup> This mode of practice arguably places heavy emphasis on the way that the school culture functions, and particularly how its multiple aspects are seen by outsiders.<sup>363</sup> In the field study, we noted contradictions between the values of peace education found in subject content and how such values have been adopted, upheld or demonstrated by the school community in a practical sense, particularly outside the school. Therefore, it is imperative that social cohesion values and competencies developed through curricula-based activities are strategically supplemented by various arms of the other four domains of whole school culture, so the values and competencies are upheld and strengthened by the behaviour of individuals. For example, the value of 'human dignity' taught in the life skills subject is protected by a respectful behaviour policy, and its compliance is ensured by mandatory provisions of grievance handling or investigation procedures. Similarly, professional standards require the teachers and principals to lead by example, which means not only displaying the required behaviour standards but also ensuring justice to those affected by disrespectful behaviour.

History and religious studies are two important subjects which can influence the social cohesion agenda heavily, thus some practitioners advocate for these subjects to be used as 'carrier' subjects. Reforms in history education are essential to move away from a 'narrow sense' of identity or view of past events to a more 'objective vision drawing on multiple perspectives'.<sup>364</sup> Similarly, the opportunity to study different religious faiths helps promote understanding among students of different religious groups.<sup>365</sup> According



<sup>357</sup> Sinclair 2013, p. 14-15. Note also that many other authors and institutions have attempted to define the scope of peace education. LTLT (The umbrella term 'Learning To Live Together' which was used for identifying multiple child centric programmes delivered in conflict affected areas including Sri Lanka by government and non-government agencies) initiatives are presented with two complementary learning processes: the 'discovery of others' which is a process of building mutual understanding among students, and 'experience of shared purposes' which facilitates students working together towards common goals. See UNESCO 2014, p. 1. See also international instruments which refer to peace education: *Recommendation Concerning Education for International Understanding, Cooperation and Peace and Education Relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (UNESCO, 1974)* and the *Declaration and Integrated Framework of Action on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Democracy (UNESCO, 1995)*.

<sup>358</sup> Sinclair 2013, p. 14-15.

<sup>359</sup> MoE 2008, p. 4. This includes links with outside agencies, and using events and dialogues to promote intercultural understanding as well as skills of living in a democratic society. Peace events, cultural shows, activity camps, debates and dramas, competitions, and art exhibitions have been carried out as co-curricular activities to promote social cohesion in schools. Interestingly, English language camps organised by the MoE also have been conducted to increase students' exposure to other children from different ethnic groups, although the camps primarily aimed to improve the students' communication skills in the English language. It appears these types of initiatives which create an environment to learn English language in a multi ethnic/religious setting have huge potential to build social cohesion. See Aturupane and Wikramanayake 2011, pp. 8-9

<sup>360</sup> Aturupane and Wikramanayake 2011, p. 12.

<sup>361</sup> Carrier courses are meant to use curricula in a broader sense to present materials to achieve social cohesion targets, thus peace education can be embedded in other courses such as history, geography, arts, first language or English language studies.

<sup>362</sup> Cremin and Bevington 2017, pp. 107-108.

<sup>363</sup> See the NPSCPE explaining how one would 'see or feel' a 'whole school climate' created by fostering social cohesion; MoE 2008, p.

<sup>364</sup> Sinclair 2013, p. p 14-15.

<sup>365</sup> UNESCO 2014, p. xii.

to the findings of the field study, religion has been a major point of conflict and ground of discrimination, particularly in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. Despite this, religion is also a static feature of the education system around which we need to build our future strategies.

Cremin and Bevington suggest that just because religion is behind some of the world's most intractable conflicts and is used in schools to generate hatred and violence does not mean that it should be rejected outright because religion also can be used to generate love and peace.<sup>366</sup> Although religion has tended to rely on 'hegemonic ideas of peace', some scholars point out that peace education grounded in spirituality 'needs to draw on the global East and South, and not only on Western traditions'.<sup>367</sup> The NCFNEA too asserts that religion should be 'given a prominent place' in the curriculum for developing values, and adds that in addition to learning one's own religion, an introduction to basic principles of other religions should also be given at the secondary level.<sup>368</sup> In particular, 'effort should be made to inculcate values among children as the aim of all religions is to promote an ethical living style'.<sup>369</sup>

Sri Lankan authorities are likely face heavy resistance if they were to act on removing religious education from the general curriculum in the near future, so advocates for peace education might as well explore options of reforming religious education as proposed by some participants in the field study. This may be achieved by focusing on some positive aspects such as introducing comparative religious studies segments, promoting mindfulness through meditation and most importantly by removing segments which are likely to be in conflict with the values of peace education.<sup>370</sup>

Materials presented in this study have shown how peace initiatives which are not embedded in the curriculum could disappear after a short time, thus it is important that every peace initiative positioned within school culture should be tied to specific aspects of the curriculum. Further, other

than 'stand-alone' peace curricula, practitioners propose that the peace agenda needs to be permeated into 'carrier' subjects such as social studies, history, language or religious studies.<sup>371</sup> Both stand-alone and carrier subjects need to be reinforced over years of schooling, adopting the concept of the 'spiral curriculum' by increasing the complexity of current learning while reinforcing previous learning.<sup>372</sup>

### Teaching Materials

Improper textbooks can undermine respect for diversity and tolerance through a number of ways through narrow nationalism, religious biases, omissions, imbalance, historical inaccuracies, justification of militarism and the negative use of persuasive techniques.<sup>373</sup> Therefore, it is important that policy makers and practitioners make a concerted effort to present a positive portrayal of minority and disadvantaged social groups, particularly in the history curriculum.<sup>374</sup> A UN report recommends that textbooks, particularly in subjects like History, could be reviewed and the accuracy of books verified by panels of scholars and researchers from all different ethnic and religious groups in the country.<sup>375</sup> Text books in Sri Lanka do undergo review processes, yet concerns were raised by some participants of the field study about the stereotyped roles portrayed in the materials. Rather than only removing references harmful to ethnic or religious disharmony, textbook authors need to look into all types of stereotyping and references prejudicial to any groups, and proactively develop materials to reflect the fundamental principles of social cohesion.

Themes of citizenship and peace should be systematically woven into the curriculum and articulated in the selection criteria for both textbooks and supplementary reading materials.<sup>376</sup> Researching on education in conflict affected regions, Sinclair submits several recommendations to authorities and agencies to harness the values of textbooks in building social cohesion. Amongst other things, the author suggests that governments should prepare a plan of



<sup>366</sup> Cremin and Bevington 2017, p. 114.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid.

<sup>368</sup> Gunawardena GB et al., 2009, p. 115. Note also that the NPSCPE too has expressed the importance of 'creating an awareness of social cohesion and the concept of Brotherhood of Man through religions amity'. See MoE 2008, pp. 6-7

<sup>369</sup> NEC 2016, p. 23. This idea also has been supported by a significant proportion of the participants in the field study. According to a former MoE officer, a committee including NIE and external experts were appointed by the Minister of Education in 2017. The committee said to have proposed to rename the subject as 'Religion and Value Education', and increase the teaching from 2 to 5 hours per week (for Grade 6 to 11); however, these reforms were not implemented.

<sup>370</sup> For example, research shows that mindfulness programmes in schools have had an impact on students' executive control, emotional regulation, learning and academic attainment. The authors therefore recommend government-funded programmes for such programmes. See Cremin and Bevington 2017, p. 112.

<sup>371</sup> Sinclair 2013, p. 37.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid.

<sup>373</sup> Aturupane and Wikramanayake 2011, p. E7.

<sup>374</sup> Ibid, p. 19.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid, p. 21.

<sup>376</sup> Sinclair 2013, p. 66.

action engaging key stakeholders to build local capacities for developing quality learning materials tied to the official curriculum. Donors meanwhile should support peace and citizenship education through learning materials including textbooks by systematically building the production and use of such materials into funding for the education sector.<sup>377</sup> Since interpersonal skills cannot be taught from books without actual practice, textbooks can be put to use in creative ways for values development and behaviour change. For example, they could include true or fictional stories related to 'pro-social interpersonal behaviours', conflict resolution and respect for diversity, with questions and guidance for class discussions and personal reflection to help students identify with positive role models.<sup>378</sup>

#### Assessment Methods

According to the NCFNEA, our learning-teaching process is 'geared towards passing public examinations' and does not encourage students to seek the opportunity to use the knowledge they gain in school to develop relevant attitudes and skills, [which are what] ultimately leads them towards [building] the much needed competencies'.<sup>379</sup> The Committee adds that this 'heavy examination orientation has created an 'unhealthy out-of-school coaching culture', which 'compels the children to forgo co-curricular and social activities at school and disrupts their overall development'.<sup>380</sup> According to the findings of the field study, this exam orientation in education undoubtedly limits the scope and benefits of social cohesion initiatives positioned in the space of school culture, since exam-focused studies take disproportionate priority over everything else. The NEC's proposal to reform the assessment system by combining exams with school-based assessment would not only allow a balanced opportunity for the child to develop, but such reforms are also likely to release time and resources for non-exam based school activities including social cohesion initiatives. Due to this strong influencing factor of assessment methods, future social cohesion strategies in education must consider best practices of assessment models such as, for example, the globally admired methods applied in Finland.<sup>381</sup>

Although there have reportedly been many efforts in Sri Lanka to simplify the assessment process and relieve the administrative burden upon teachers, the findings of

the field study do not affirm much success. According to a UNESCO study, some teachers in Sri Lanka seem to lack a clear understanding of the processes involved in effective implementation of new assessment methods, and they also seem to perceive school-based assessment negatively as 'yet another' examination process.<sup>382</sup> It is important to note that social cohesion outcomes achieved in whole school culture cannot be assessed by an exam based system and instead require new assessment methods. It is important to ensure that new assessment methods do not replace the stress built up by exams by imposing equally heavy burdens on students as well as teachers.<sup>383</sup>

#### Teaching Methods

The NCFNEA criticises current teaching and learning methods as 'mechanical [...] dull, boring, superficial, irrelevant and stressful' for children with a majority of learners unable to reach learning goals due to inadequate teacher support for learning.<sup>384</sup> It adds that 'inconsistencies across subject areas in instructions issued to teachers, non-alignment of textbooks with the new thinking, and the limited attention paid to make optimum use of the available library resources or develop courseware do not facilitate learning and teaching'.<sup>385</sup> To address these problems and to bring joy and satisfaction to students from schooling, the NCFNEA proposes a range of reforms: student-centred and activity-oriented approaches; providing opportunities for children to construct knowledge and meaning by exploring freely and co-operatively with peers; and allowing the learner to play a variety of roles— 'thinking critically and creatively, observing, listening, reflecting, responding, questioning, reading, making and doing, presenting, elaborating, taking down notes and evaluating'.<sup>386</sup> The Committee also proposes collaborative approaches for learning and teaching allowing children to develop relevant values, attitudes, skills and personality traits, adding that identifying and managing stress caused by personal, family, school and societal problems should be part of such teaching and learning process.<sup>387</sup> Despite these progressive ideas on teaching practices being spelt out by a government body of high authority, the field research showed how outdated and sometimes harmful teaching practices are persistent in rural as well as suburban schools.



<sup>377</sup> Ibid, pp. 74, 77.

<sup>378</sup> The proposed measures also include creating textbook sensitivity committees to review textbooks for bias, and to integrate values associated with social cohesion; conducting teacher training, and conducting workshops for textbook writers and illustrators. See Sinclair 2013, p. 30.

<sup>379</sup> Gunawardena GB et al., 2009, p. 67.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid., pp. 94-95.

<sup>381</sup> Finland considers classroom assessment to be the main source of information on student learning and achievement. See Dundar et. Al. 2017, p. 99.

<sup>382</sup> UNESCO 2014, p. 77.

<sup>383</sup> As noted by NCFNEA, the excessive workload associated with the school based assessment can reduce the validity and the reliability of the school based assessment making the public lose faith in the practice. See Gunawardena GB et al., 2009, p. 79.

<sup>384</sup> Gunawardena GB et al., 2009, p. 75.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>386</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

According to the field research, punishment is not only an instrument for disciplining students breaking rules, but also a teaching method applied by some teachers. Some teachers also use harsh and often disparaging comments to shame underperforming students, perhaps with the hope that they may end up performing better to avoid the embarrassment associated with condemnation. Yet students who have experienced such treatment point out that those who are regularly subject to such harsh treatment soon become immune to the teachers' punitive language.<sup>388</sup> These practices indeed go against the values of the broader social cohesion agenda, as such practices set bad examples of disrespectful behaviour. A majority of teachers, parents and even students seem to have the opinion that discipline, learning and performance in exams are aspects of the same equation, meaning for instance that a lack of obedience to the teacher would inevitably make the student unsuccessful in exams. The worrying aspect of this widely accepted norm is the demand for 'tough' or 'hard' teachers, and the justification of harsh treatment of children. Commenting on this matter from a different point of view, Carter and Osler note that staff and students appear to recognise a hard-soft continuum, implying that softness equates to weak.<sup>389</sup> The perceived necessity of teachers' toughness shared by local adults could also elevate teachers perceived as tough to a status of supreme authority, so that their knowledge and actions cannot be challenged or questioned. This certainly would hinder the critical thinking and questioning that the NEC wants to be fostered by teachers, curtailing the democratic, respectful and question-welcoming environment that advocates of social cohesion strive to develop.

Due to the pressure to complete the syllabus or other reasons, teachers often adopt a lecturing style, disregarding clear guidance which requires them to engage with students through interactive teaching methods.<sup>390</sup> These practices, too, have a significant negative impact on social cohesion initiatives in school culture. For example, social cohesion-related subjects such as citizenship education are developed based on the principles of experiential learning, requiring teachers to engage the students in various activities in and out of the classroom, but teachers' inclination to teach using a lecturing style most certainly defeats the purpose of such subjects.

This dilemma takes us back to the concept recurrent through this study: the need to take a holistic approach and to make drastic changes to the curricula, assessment and resources management. Earlier, it was explained how the exam-based assessment system forces teachers to discard recommended teaching methods, and how the ultimate objective of introducing new curricula could fail. We also saw how teachers' conduct being justified by misconceived social norms like the necessity of physical or psychological punishment could put the entire social cohesion agenda in jeopardy. Therefore, one could argue that no social cohesion initiative could work in schools until major systemic changes are introduced to exam-based assessment systems, teaching methods, workforce reforms and resource allocation to schools.

Pending these reforms, at least the two subjects which are directly associated with the social cohesion agenda.<sup>391</sup> should be taught in schools applying the designated teaching methods, and teachers should be provided with support to do so. Literature and field study findings point us to the inconvenient truth that the majority of our teaching workforce is not equipped to adopt the new teaching techniques required to achieve the goals envisioned by the NEC. As such, education stakeholders should make long term investments on researching current problems associated with teaching methods and assist teachers with adopting new methods by providing new training and ongoing practice support.

In order to secure substantial positive social cohesion outcomes in the space of school culture, students as well as teachers need to be equipped with certain competencies through a process of attitude and behavioural changes. Since some subjects or methods do not really change attitudes or behaviours of the learner, competency-based learning has been emphasised in many countries.<sup>392</sup> Although competencies refer to the ability to 'respond to complex demands by drawing on and mobilising psychosocial resources' including values and attitudes, in reality teachers seem to restrict teaching to demanding messages in the format of 'do not...'. Such messaging is unlikely to ensure sustainable behavioural change resulting in the acquisition of new competencies.<sup>393</sup> For example, a student who acquires competencies regarding peace should be



<sup>388</sup> Field study, 2019. See also NEC 2016, pp. 105-106.

<sup>389</sup> The authors also explain two types of hard or tough teachers: those who enjoy the 'feeling of power' by running their classrooms on exclusively authoritarian lines, demanding unquestioning obedience from students; and those who adopt authoritarian methods simply to survive or to gain 'visibility'. According to Carter and Osler, in either case the teachers are encouraged to invest further in a notion of strong leadership and disciplinarian values. See Carter & Osler 2000, p. 341.

<sup>390</sup> A teacher from the Central Province apparently commented: 'How can we follow the things in the manuals? If we have to do those activities we will not be able to cover the syllabus on time. I think for the O/Ls, the best teaching method is the lecture method, where we can have time to discuss past papers to prepare students for the exam. Then we can obtain good results'. See UNESCO 2014, p. 61.

<sup>391</sup> The Life Competencies and Civics Education course for grades 7-9 and the Citizenship Education and Governance course for grades 10-11.

<sup>392</sup> Sinclair 2013, p. 55.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid.

willing and able to respond positively to the arrival of refugee students of a different nationality while avoiding stereotyping, and developing empathy and concern for the refugee students' human rights. This certainly requires much more than simply a 'do not discriminate' message.<sup>394</sup>

Since peace education seeks to change values and behaviours, it should rely on 'compound learning', and should comprise cognitive components to analyse complex situations, with attached emotional and ethical components because attitudinal and behavioural changes occur through developing values in ethical domains.<sup>395</sup> Peace education programmes also need to demonstrate integrity by reflecting the concepts they promote through a rights-based approach of teaching. Sinclair proposes four principles to follow: respect for and dignity of the learner including their backgrounds; adopting interactive methods so that the learner can internalise the concepts; being 'open and participatory'; and reflecting basic principles of human rights.<sup>396</sup>

Amongst many, one successful case from Afghanistan can be presented as an example here. 'Help the Afghan Children', a psychosocial programme implemented in certain Afghan schools was able to dramatically reduce aggressive behaviour including bullying among students of up to 70% in the first year alone and the affiliated teacher training and coaching contributed to the reduction of corporal punishment practices to almost zero.<sup>397</sup> One of the important components of the curriculum of this programme was built around a series of illustrated storybooks titled 'Journey of Peace' in which peace stories are discussed in classroom and performed by acting out or using puppets. This curriculum was put to practice by giving the mediator's role to generally aggressive students who can then learn the benefits of non-conflict driven problem-solving, and asking shy or withdrawn students play the roles of outspoken characters in order to improve their confidence and self-esteem. The programme was mainly delivered in designated 'peace rooms' which were designed to be welcoming, stimulating, and safe for students, because the traditional classroom environment where teachers were seen as 'authority figures' seem to have prohibited learning and practicing the principles of peace.<sup>398</sup>

Successful outcomes of peace education depend on building students' commitment by engaging them at a personal level, and this can be achieved through various learning activities; reinforcing learning through a supportive learning environment; and providing teacher training with appropriate education materials.<sup>399</sup> In order to build students' skills and values needed to play an active and positive role both inside and outside schools, the personal engagement of students is essential during the learning process. Accordingly, this engagement process must 'intersect with students' personal perceptions and with the internal narrative of their own lives, in order to be transformative'.<sup>400</sup> Some stimulus activities to engage with students can be chosen from a list which Sinclair presents: stories to develop the students' empathy and to introduce concepts, skills, values, and problem-solving; activities based on photographs or pictures depicting a relevant scenarios; games and activities such as role play to help students to develop fundamental concepts, skills and values; expressive activities using visual art, drama, poetry, creative writing, diaries, music, dance and sports; peace events; and reading out sections of a textbook or other learning materials to facilitate an open class discussion of the issues.<sup>401</sup>

#### Proposals to improve learning and teaching

All stakeholders including the MoE and affiliated bodies, NGOs, donor agencies and representatives of teacher and student communities need to come together to conduct a review exercise of the peace education curricula. This must be done in conjunction with a much broader exercise to revise the entire national curricula, particularly taking into consideration the proposals presented by the NEC. The Taskforce can be provided with the following proposals under the second domain to improve learning and teaching within the context of social cohesion in whole school culture:

- 1. Stand-alone subjects:** A panel of experts can come together to revise the existing peace education subjects (Life Competencies and Civics Education, and the Citizenship Education and Governance), looking into the options of making the subjects compulsory for certain grades, improving the subject content, producing teaching and learning materials, adopting new teaching methods and using the most appropriate assessment methods.<sup>402</sup>



<sup>394</sup> Ibid.

<sup>395</sup> Ibid., pp. 56-57.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid., pp. 69-70.

<sup>397</sup> Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid., pp. 25-26.

<sup>401</sup> Ibid., pp. 27-29.

<sup>402</sup> It should be noted that according to a research conducted by UN, the contents of the Citizenship Education and Governance syllabus appear to be 'very appropriate', thus the report recommends the authorities considering making Citizenship Education a compulsory subject for GCE/OL grades. See Aturupane and Wikramanayake 2011, pp. E7, 21.

- Aspects of values education offered through the current stand-alone subjects need to be revised.
- Cognitive skills such as teamwork, communications, and work ethics skills can be incorporated into the subjects.
- Employable skills such as analytical reasoning and critical thinking skills can be incorporated into the subjects.

**2. Carrier subjects:** The panel of experts proposed to review stand-alone peace education curriculum can also look into the options of maximising social cohesion learning outcomes through carrier subjects:

- Review second language subjects to maximise social cohesion outcomes, particularly by helping students to be familiar with the ethnic 'other' through language learning. For examples, stories or poetry published by authors of the other ethnic group can be taught through second language teaching.<sup>403</sup>
- English language learning programmes such as language learning camps, competitions and exchange programmes can be used for bringing Sinhala and Tamil speaking students and teachers together.
- Performance and fine arts subjects and associated extracurricular activities such as theatre performances, visual arts competitions, musical shows or student film projects can be used for reinforcing the values of social cohesion and to build peace competencies.
- History and Geography subjects can be used for imparting social cohesion values and competencies, especially through building empathy towards other people belonging to different ethnic, cultural and religious groups.
- Reading materials from a range of themes associated with social cohesion can be incorporated into the first language subject.
- The scope of religious studies subjects can be broadened to help students to explore their understandings of the notions of spirituality and inner peace, and also helping students find their own pathway to reconcile science and religion, without having to experience a state of confusion. Such efforts can also include components to help students learn comparative aspects of different religions. Activities to introduce mindfulness can be complemented by mediation and arts such as music.
- Develop students' media literacy through carrier subjects, and through other learning channels, so they can apply their analytical skills to make an accurate assessment on the media content they get exposed to.

**3. Learning materials:** As proposed by the NEC and various other stakeholders, the Government should prepare a plan of action engaging key stakeholders to build local capacities for developing quality learning materials tied to the official curriculum. Pending this, stakeholders can work on the following:

- NGOs can build information bridges to close the gap between research and practice, and develop new learning materials by facilitating communities of practice, sponsoring foreign experts, advocating with government and non-governmental agencies.
- Donors can support the production and use of new peace education materials by systematically incorporating such outcomes into their funding strategies.
- Stakeholders can explore options of developing new supplementary learning materials such as storybooks or multimedia resources.

**4. Teaching methods:** Pending the NEC and NCFNEA proposed reforms to teaching methods and major reforms in teacher professional standardisation, stakeholders of peace education can work jointly to achieve improvements to the methods of teaching social cohesion.

- Punitive teaching methods such as ridiculing under-performing students should be completely eliminated through policy measures and other means.
- Resources should be invested to investigate the current problems associated with teaching methods in Sri Lanka.
- Effective teaching methods such as circle learning and role playing can be adopted to teach the stand-alone peace education subjects, and teachers can be assisted with adopting new methods by providing training and ongoing practice support.
- Explore options of using social media to improve students' engagement in peace education.
- Explore options of using innovative methods to use space, for example peace education rooms rather than traditional classrooms to deliver curricula based peace education.

**5. Assessment:** Pending the NEC and NCFNEA recommendation to replace knowledge-based examinations with appropriate evaluation methods, the panel of experts can review the methods which are currently applied to assess students' competencies in social cohesion.



<sup>403</sup> This material could be that generated by students themselves, as a vast array of creative writing, poetry and so on are produced in all language mediums already through subject learning, inter-school competitions and national awards. There are simply no comprehensive sharing mechanisms for them.

### 3.3 Leadership and Professionalism

The second strategic area of the NPSCPE is dedicated to teacher education.<sup>404</sup> According to Aturupane and Wikramanayake, to make teacher contributions meaningful towards peace education goals, they need to first 'believe in' social cohesion values and 'be convinced of' the importance of their role in the social cohesion agenda.<sup>405</sup> Grasping these attributes of a teacher, the NPSCPE submits that 'merely regurgitating the ideas in a textbook without modelling the appropriate behaviour is insufficient' and the teacher should display the 'attitudes and orientations' of non-violent living, justice, truthfulness, a sense of humour and respecting children's rights.<sup>406</sup> The NPSCPE adds that teachers can act as 'models for non-violence, democracy and the promotion of rights', for which they are required to demonstrate that they themselves 'understand the causes of conflict' and have an understanding of human rights, while being prepared to 'tackle controversial issues in order to promote critical thinking in their students'.<sup>407</sup> Although it is unrealistic to expect every teacher to be a perfect role model, any initiative of whole school culture to foster social cohesion must be accompanied by a strategy to empower teachers to take a leading role through teaching and learning activities; adopt a comprehensive framework of professional standards; and introduce programmes to cultivate positive values of social cohesion amongst teachers.

Commenting on Sri Lanka's recruitment of teachers based on their academic credentials, Dundar et al. argue that the qualifications obtained before entering teaching are not good predictors of teacher effectiveness, and criteria associated with cognitive ability and socio-emotional ability such as values, aptitudes, personality traits, and motivation are better predictors.<sup>408</sup> Recruitment, deployment, and promotion of public education employees including teachers are subject to political influence as

seen previously. Low wages and the experience-based promotion system do not provide incentives for better performance.<sup>409</sup> According to the field study, the top three most pressing issues experienced by teachers are low wages, heavy workloads and the pressure to show results in exams. Teaching doesn't seem to be the most attractive occupation for youth looking for a challenging career with a certain degree of freedom and autonomy. As such, without significant changes to the remuneration structure and work culture, Sri Lanka may not be able to fully achieve its education goals, including social cohesion goals.

The drastic reforms proposed by the NEC and NCFNEA in the areas of teacher recruitment, training, career development and professional standards present solutions to some of the aforementioned issues. The NCFNEA proposes a teacher licensure system for the accreditation of teachers, and accordingly, all teaching appointments should be school-based and every teacher should sign an annual work agreement with the principal. This agreement would streamline responsibilities and accountability and can be supplemented by performance appraisals and self-reflected evaluations which are tied to salary increments, promotions, incentives and rewards.<sup>410</sup> The NCFNEA also proposes a school-based internal supervision programme conducted by external professionals 'to support and facilitate curricular transaction and develop the capacity of teachers', and adds that priority should be given to schools located in remote areas.<sup>411</sup> In order to facilitate professional development of staff spread across the country, the NEC proposes decentralising professional development programmes by establishing personnel development centres for continuing professional education for all staff including teachers.<sup>412</sup> In light of these proposed reforms, the upcoming sections will focus on teacher training for peace education; building teacher professional standards to nurture positive values amongst teachers; and the role of leadership in school culture fostering social cohesion.



<sup>404</sup> MoE 2008, pp. iv-v.

<sup>405</sup> Aturupane and Wikramanayake 2011, p. 19.

<sup>406</sup> MoE 2008, p. 11.

<sup>407</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>408</sup> Dundar et al. 2017, pp. 94-95. The authors add that absenteeism amongst teachers seems to be common particularly in disadvantaged schools, and some teachers reportedly take most or all of their leave during the school year.

<sup>409</sup> According to the field study, the low incentives diminish job satisfaction, and teachers are forced to take up additional work such as private tutoring. According to Dundar et al. various aspects of workforce management such as promotion, school inspections, teacher performance appraisal and dismissal are not designed or executed to encourage better teacher performance in Sri Lanka, as annual teacher performance reviews conducted by the principals remain 'basic and perfunctory'. Dismissals, early resignation or career change is rare amongst teachers, and the vast majority of teachers seem to leave the workforce only at their retirement. See Dundar et al. 2017, pp. 95-96.

<sup>410</sup> Gunawardena GB et al., 2009, pp. 187-190. The NCFNEA proposes a professional body named the 'General Education Council' to act as the licensing authority. It adds that units should be established in the Central and Provincial Education Departments to oversee and monitor professional growth, development and performance appraisal of teachers. The Committee also proposes a Teacher Education Board consisting of representatives of the NIE, the University Grants Commission, Education Faculties of Universities and many other bodies. Emphasising the importance of the two main teacher training systems, the initial professional education and continuing professional education, the NEC notes that teacher education is also a 'means' of teachers acquiring professionalism. See Gunawardena GB et al., 2009, pp. 167-174, 187-190.

<sup>411</sup> Gunawardena GB et al., 2009, p. 148.

<sup>412</sup> NEC 2016, p. 6.

### Teacher training for peace education

One of the main challenges to be tackled in any exercise of developing professional standards in Sri Lanka is the autocratic, undemocratic nature of classrooms, which in turn discourages students' engagement, questioning, critical thinking and creativity. A teacher in a traditional classroom of Sri Lanka could loosely be identified with the persona of 'infallible expert' as theorised by Elliot in the context of the client (students).<sup>413</sup> Elliot positions the persona of the 'reflective practitioner' against this infallible expert.<sup>414</sup> Instead of being an infallible source of relevant knowledge, the reflective practitioner participates in a process of collaborative problem solving.<sup>415</sup> This reflective aspect of the profession may be perceived as an unfamiliar attribute to teaching practice for most teachers who are trained and expected to achieve results in exams. However, moving away from an authoritative expert figure is imperative for peace education.

Scholars urge that peace education needs to shift away from traditional 'chalk and talk' teaching methods requiring teachers to adopt innovative and creative teaching practices, which in turn, require greater time for teachers to prepare for their lessons.<sup>416</sup> Teachers who are assigned to the subjects associated with social cohesion in particular must 'master and be able to teach higher cognitive skills of analysis, critical thinking, problem-solving, reflection and weighing different types of evidence and points of view'.<sup>417</sup> According to Sinclair, this requires them to 'recognise and cope creatively with the psychosocial needs of their students and themselves', particularly in post-conflict societies.<sup>418</sup> Thus teacher training programmes for peace education in Sri Lanka need to be designed to build complex teacher competencies which are significantly different from what teachers acquire in the existing training system. According to these materials, there is a strong case to invest in both pre-service and in-service teacher training,

including continuous development programmes which are designed to monitor and ensure that learning outcomes are met.<sup>419</sup>

Teacher training designed to develop values and initiate behavioural change must be provided by experienced trainers who have internalised both the content and the methodology. According to Sinclair, 'cascade training' or similar simple training methods do not work well for behavioural change programmes because short exposure is insufficient to change the values and attitudes of the teacher and to create an effective trainer in the field.<sup>420</sup> Sinclair adds that teacher training should include developing teachers' own commitment and confidence in dealing with the new content and methods, enabling the trainees to practise them in small groups.<sup>421</sup> For example, the 'Help the Afghan Children' peace education programme used an initial one week intensive workshop followed by three vacation sessions of two weeks each.<sup>422</sup> Another example comes from Northern Ireland, where a block of up to five teachers per school participated in intensive trainings to introduce local and global citizenship issues, resource materials and methodologies.<sup>423</sup> It is important that the authors of future teacher training initiatives look into these good practices across the globe in devising training programmes to suit local teachers.

As observed by a UNESCO report,<sup>424</sup> teachers' enthusiasm to participate in training programmes designed to provide them with skills of innovative teaching methods do not always get passed onto their classrooms. According to this report, only two thirds of teachers in Sri Lanka were applying student-centred learning, mainly due to a lack of time in lesson planning and preparation.<sup>425</sup> To maximise the benefits of teacher training programmes, the teachers should not be overburdened by a content-heavy syllabus, and should also be assisted with providing teaching



<sup>413</sup> The 'infallible expert' engages in one-way communication, expecting the clients to listen and obey and 'little reciprocity in communication' can be noticed from the 'expert' who is not concerned with 'developing a holistic view of the client's situation'. Within this expert-client relationship, although clients are allowed to ask questions, the expert wants the clients to defer to the expert's 'superior knowledge and wisdom in identifying, clarifying and resolving their problems'. In this situation, the expert understands and handles their situations 'exclusively in categories of specialist knowledge they have', thus they apply specialist knowledge 'intuitively rather than reflectively'. See Elliott 1991, pp. 311-312.

<sup>414</sup> The reflective practitioner shows empathy with clients by understanding situations from their point of view, and places emphasis on the 'holistic understanding of situations' rather than on understanding them exclusively in terms a particular set of specialist categories. Thus reflective practitioners have the ability to act intelligently in situations which are sufficiently novel and unique, overcoming stereotypical judgements. See Elliott 1991, pp. 311-312.

<sup>415</sup> Quoting Schon (1983) in Elliott 1991, pp. 311-314.

<sup>416</sup> UNESCO 2014, p. xiii

<sup>417</sup> Sinclair 2013, p. 35.

<sup>418</sup> Also see UNESCO 2014, p. xiii

<sup>419</sup> Ibid.

<sup>420</sup> Sinclair 2013, pp. 33-34.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid., pp. 33-35.

<sup>422</sup> Ibid., chapter 9, 12.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid., chapter 6.

<sup>424</sup> UNESCO 2014, p. xiii.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid.

materials. Most importantly, they should be provided with ongoing support through structures similar to communities of practice, which could perhaps be facilitated through hybrid mechanisms such as online and face-to-face peer support methods, in conjunction with periodic in-service training delivered by regional centres as proposed by the NEC.<sup>426</sup> Further, UNESCO proposes in-service training through practical activity-based workshops which enable teachers to experience the activities, which can in turn build their confidence.<sup>427</sup>

#### Teachers' professional conduct

One of the hardest barriers for whole school culture fostering social cohesion could be teachers' ignorance towards the values, attitudes and behaviours associated with social cohesion. The findings of the field study showed that a majority of the teachers had little understanding of democratic decision making, respectful workplace conduct or methods of student engagement suitable for peace education, and in fact, some teachers engage in practices discriminatory against certain types of students.<sup>428</sup>

Teachers also seem to be heavily susceptible to harmful messaging coming from outside, particularly speculative media reports which vilify minority groups within society. The highly volatile sociopolitical situation created by the Easter bombings in April 2019 provides many examples of this. According to the Chairperson of the Sri Lanka Human Rights Commission, a principal of a leading public school in Kandy insisted that Muslim staff and students should no longer be allowed to dress in their traditional attire. She added that the principal publicly asserted that the Muslims 'should be taught a lesson'.<sup>429</sup> The field study demonstrated how some teachers held prejudicial attitudes towards certain minority groups. Science and rational thinking is

not only confronted by religious dogma taught in schools, but also by myths harboured against disadvantaged minorities. Another instance where these dynamics played out was the case of an HIV-positive mother who was forced to file a Fundamental Rights application at the Supreme Court in order to enrol her son at a local school because the school vehemently refused to give admission to the child on the suspicion that the child was also infected by HIV.<sup>430</sup>

Many teachers admitted that they have been subjected to or have witnessed unsafe and disrespectful behaviour. Bullying seems to be not uncommon amongst teachers. There are no vernacular equivalents to the term bullying, neither is it explained properly by any local legislation, thus teachers were not always able to fully articulate the harmful workplace conduct they experienced. Referring to the psychological pressure as a result of bullying in the workplace, one teacher explained that 'I go to work every day with the trepidation of a cow being taken to the slaughterhouse'.<sup>431</sup>

A frequent complaint recorded in the field study was that there is no place for teachers to express their grievances.<sup>432</sup> Occasionally these types of conduct surface in the public domain when one or two daring individuals decide to risk their career by taking the complaints to the higher authorities. The *Manohari Pelaketiya* case was one such notable instance where the Supreme Court held that sexual harassment of a female teacher by a male principal and another teacher amounted to a violation of her fundamental rights.<sup>433</sup> The case left a long lasting impression of disrepute in the public school sector and many similar incidents are likely to remain uncovered.



<sup>426</sup> School based psycho-social support programme delivered by GIZ, which was discussed earlier, included a similar mechanism. Sinclair also suggests that teacher training needs to be complemented by structured teaching materials and mentoring support. See Sinclair 2013, p. 36-37.

<sup>427</sup> UNESCO 2014, p. 61.

<sup>428</sup> For example students participating in focus groups claimed that teachers don't always treat their students equally. Children of affluent or high status parents receive favourable treatment while children of lower socioeconomic status are being mistreated, sometimes with disrespectful language. This norm seems to be more common outside the capital and suburban centres, where the community is closely knitted on the basis of social strata and ranks, thus the social pecking order outside the school is effortlessly replicated in schools and other social institutions.

<sup>429</sup> Public seminar held in Colombo in May 2019. This was despite a senior police officer attending the same meeting not being in favour of such discriminatory treatment. There were other incidents of Muslim teachers being demanded to take off their head cover and wear saris in the aftermath of the bombings. Some teachers were not allowed outright to their schools, so had to seek transfers to Muslim schools.

<sup>430</sup> Despite the fact that HIV was not explicitly identified as a ground of discrimination in the Constitution of Sri Lanka, the Court held that the child's rights had been violated by the school's authorities. See *Manuwel Dura Chandani v. Akila Viraj Kariyawasam* [2016] SC.FR.77/2016. Unverified news reports carrying similar stories of discriminating against children on various grounds such as disability, race, religion, gender identity or sexuality are reported in media, particularly in social media, demonstrating that unfair treatment in schools is systemic.

<sup>431</sup> Field study, 2019.

<sup>432</sup> One teacher mentioned, 'teachers are scared to talk about the injustices. Only someone who is radical would get their issues solved.' Another teacher added, 'everyone talks about the abuses happening to students but the abuses happening to teachers are not discussed at all. There are no organisations for teachers to stand up for them' (Field study, 2019).

<sup>433</sup> In this case, the petitioner was a unmarried female teacher in a leading boys school in Colombo. From the time of the appointment, the teacher experienced unwelcome conduct including sexual advances from the male principal and another male teacher. Despite the fact that the teacher resisted and rejected these advances, the principal continued harassing her by denying salary increments. When the female teacher requested a transfer to free herself from this hostile environment, the principal refused to endorse her transfer applications. Although the teacher had reportedly lodged multiple complaints with the education authorities, she claimed that she received no tangible and meaningful results. Holding that the teacher's fundamental rights have been violated by the actions of the principal and education authorities, the Supreme Court ordered the principal and other male teacher to pay 100,000 Rupees each as compensation to the teacher: *Manohari Pelaketiya v. Gunasekera* [2012] SC/FR/No.76/2012.

Many experts proposing reforms to the education system seem to not notice or purposefully ignore the harsh reality that Sri Lankan society still maintains and even nurtures feudal relationships and power bases, despite normative democratic structures existing in the foreground. As the field study uncovered, individuals receive preferential treatment in society including in schools by being associated with particular status drawn from family, wealth, employment or political influence, especially when centred on powerful politicians.<sup>434</sup> Advocates of social cohesion in education need to carefully consider these inherent norms of Sri Lanka's social fabric before embarking on any initiative which seeks to uphold equality, justice and democratic decision making in schools. Leaders in education who are willing to spearhead a campaign to facilitate whole school culture fostering social cohesion need to consider systematically addressing the aforementioned issues in every level of the five domains of whole school culture. Although it is impossible to bring every individual of the education workforce to the same line of thinking in peace, justice and human rights, a framework is required to ensure adequate standards of teaching practice including the teachers' conduct. Perhaps what is most challenging in this regard could be ensuring that teachers are shielded from multiple forms of external pressure to act against the very values and behavioural standards of social cohesion.

The aforementioned materials should not be seen as an attempt to create a totally negative picture about teachers' attitudes or conduct. In fact, evidence shows that many teachers are very committed to their profession, and seem to take pride in their role of nurturing the future generation. For example, teachers of a Muslim girls' school in the Northern Province conduct extra classes for students getting ready for O/L and A/L exams in the mornings, evenings and weekends without charging fees, and their volunteering hours appear to be equivalent to the hours of paid work.<sup>435</sup> There were multiple occasions of teachers spending personal funds to assist students from lower socio-economic backgrounds by purchasing essential materials so that they do not drop out from schools.

What is important to emphasise here is that values and practices of social cohesion should not solely depend on the commitment, good will or philanthropy of individual teachers. Systems with consistent mechanisms should be introduced because that is what will ensure values of social cohesion and appropriate behavioural standards are upheld more uniformly, and not susceptible to corruption by individual agents. Individuals should not be able to impose their personal beliefs, values or behavioural standards on students or staff of schools without being guided by a centrally agreed framework of policy and standards. Codes of ethics and professional standards can provide this framework. Professional standards can also possibly contribute to maintaining coherence in organisational cultures across all schools because the standards apply equally to every teacher through the authority of a single instrument published and regulated by a central body.

### Ethics and professional standards

According to the NCFNEA, teacher professionalism is characterised by three attributes: competence, performance and conduct.<sup>436</sup> The National Council for Teaching Profession Commission is a professional body that the NEC proposes will be responsible for specifying, maintaining and controlling academic and professional standards, and the ethics and discipline of teachers.<sup>437</sup> According to the NEC, the proposed body should uphold the dignity of the teaching profession; define the standards of teaching and appraisal schemes; and develop a Code of Ethics.<sup>438</sup> The NCFNEA emphasises the importance of engaging teachers, other education professionals and unions in the process of developing these frameworks.<sup>439</sup> and iterates that the Code of Ethics should 'inspire professional excellence and should guide teachers in their conduct, instead of using it as a basis for discipline'.<sup>440</sup>

To identify a set of appropriate standards to be adopted locally, some international examples can be explored. An OECD comparative study has identified that Australia, the United Kingdom, Germany, the United States and New Zealand have national standards for teachers but there are no such standards in Canada, Norway and South Korea.<sup>441</sup> The professional standards adopted in the United Kingdom are mainly organised under two components: teaching



<sup>434</sup> Apart from a plethora of news archives, volumes of cases filed in various courts in Sri Lanka show the magnitude of corruption, nepotism and other types of preferential treatment in areas such as crime management, licensing, construction planning and admission of students to leading schools.

<sup>435</sup> The teachers reported that they start extra classes at 6:30 AM before opening hours and then after school is closed from 1:30 PM onwards.

<sup>436</sup> (a) Competence—preparedness to face effectively all kinds of classroom adversities; (b) performance—a sound knowledge and confidence leads to higher performance, and (c) conduct—appearance, language and behaviour and professional conduct. See Gunawardena GB et al., 2009, pp. 158-159.

<sup>437</sup> NEC 2016, p. 54.

<sup>438</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>439</sup> Gunawardena GB et al., 2009, pp. 175-178.

<sup>440</sup> To make such a framework function, the Commission recommends a range of prohibitions: staff participation in sales promotion or political propaganda; elected representatives in school functions as guests; naming of a school or any part thereof after any person; use of school activities and functions in any venue for sales promotion and propaganda. Gunawardena GB et al., 2009, pp. 8-9, 175-178.

<sup>441</sup> Call 2018, p. 96.

and conduct.<sup>442</sup> Teachers' professional standards adopted by schools in New South Wales in Australia are organised under four levels of escalating capabilities, similar to a typical capability framework: graduate, proficient, highly accomplished and lead.<sup>443</sup> The standards are further organised under three domains: professional knowledge, professional practice and professional engagement.<sup>444</sup>

The necessity of professional standards for teachers is not a settled matter, and some scholars are pointing out that there is a lack of empirical evidence to demonstrate that professional standards in fact raise the quality of teaching.<sup>445</sup> There still seems to be a debate over the content and formats of professional standards, often underpinned by questions of how the standards should be used by those within and outside the profession.<sup>446</sup> Although professional standards have been considered as a way of assuring quality in teaching, some have pointed out that the standards are not a 'magic bullet' to solve issues in education system.<sup>447</sup>

Australia reportedly has found difficulties in engaging teachers with the implementation of professional standards because teachers are already preoccupied with other issues of accountability, compliance and time constraints, and apparently do not have time to familiarise themselves with the standards due to their workload.<sup>448</sup> Taking a more critical stance on professional standards, Call argues that regulatory control in the form of professional standards could 'polarise' teachers 'into those who are good, right and strong and those who are bad, weak and wrong'.<sup>449</sup> Call further submits that the phrase 'professional standards' underscores how the position of a teacher can be undermined and devalued 'in the West',<sup>450</sup> alluding that we in the East perhaps should be cautious in borrowing

rigid professional standards from elsewhere. In this regard, perhaps it is worth exploring how Finland implements its professional standards to achieve its superlative international standards and outcomes in education. Call explains that in Finland, the teacher is 'trusted' and given greater freedom to carry out their job, rather than school inspectors taking 'heavy handed' accountability practices to assure quality.<sup>451</sup>

In order to develop a home-grown framework of professional standards, the authors of future teacher professional standards in Sri Lanka must be mindful of all these dynamics from international examples, while further exploring traditional values of teaching and the norms of respect and trust associated with the local teaching profession. Most importantly, all stakeholders in the education sector, including teachers and student representative bodies, should be genuinely engaged during the process of developing such standards.

#### Leadership

If school leaders are to be groomed to take over the complex initiative of school culture fostering social cohesion, a mammoth task lies ahead to prepare them not only to embrace the values of social cohesion and present themselves as role models, but also to build a positive organisational climate and culture which nurtures professionalism amongst all employees. Good leaders in a school setting must have personal, social and strategic competencies.<sup>452</sup> The field study showed numerous irregularities in appointing and promoting principals, and inconsistencies in their qualifications, training and competencies. While some leaders seem to manage their schools receiving a great deal of cooperation from the



<sup>442</sup> The teaching component is presented in eight standards and the personal and professional conduct component provides that a teacher is expected to demonstrate consistently high standards of personal and professional conduct. This component is presented with several statements defining the behaviour and attitudes which set the required standard for conduct throughout a teacher's career. See UK Department for Education 2011.

<sup>443</sup> NSW Education Standards Authority 2018.

<sup>444</sup> 'Knowledge' is concerned with knowing the students and how they learn, and knowing the content and how to teach it. 'Professional practice' is specified by the capabilities to plan for and implement effective teaching and learning; create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments; and assess, provide feedback and report on student learning. 'Professional engagement' addresses capabilities to engage in professional learning, and engage professionally with stakeholders.

<sup>445</sup> Call 2018, p. 93.

<sup>446</sup> Ibid.

<sup>447</sup> Quoting Darling Hammond (1998) in Call 2018, p. 93. Quoting Hargreaves (2000) Call further argues that 'defining professional standards in high-status, scientific and technical ways as standards of knowledge and skill, can downgrade, neglect or crowd out the equally important emotional dimensions of teachers' work in terms of being passionate about teaching, and caring for students' learning and lives'. See Call 2018, p. 93.

<sup>448</sup> Call 2018, p. 100.

<sup>449</sup> Quoting Hargreaves, (2003) in Call 2018, p. 98.

<sup>450</sup> Call 2018, p. 93.

<sup>451</sup> The quality of Finland's educational outcomes is said to have come from teacher development measures and creativity in teaching. All teachers in Finland must have a teaching qualification at the Masters level, and the degree contains a significant percentage of study that is related to the development of pedagogy. See Call 2018, p. 98.

<sup>452</sup> Personal competences are related to openness, belief in one's potential, courage, ability to motivate others, intrinsic motivation, ability to adapt to changes, confidence, and innovative approach to problems. Social competences are demonstrated in decision making, handling crises and resolving conflicts. Strategic competences are associated with a holistic approach to the operation of an institution. A leader with these competences can motivate employees by forming their thinking patterns and behaviour, and promoting a positive organisational culture. See Klaus Doppler and Christoph Lauterburg, quoted in Lukasik & Norbert 2014, pp. 127-128.

school community, others are largely unsupported. Some principals demonstrated consultative decision making up to a certain degree, while others ruled their schools in almost authoritarian fashion. The positive influence of leadership was noticed in well maintained buildings and furniture, clean classrooms, well organised gardens, volunteering parents, courteous interactions between students and teachers, and most importantly, the students being able to approach the principal without fear. Nearly all participants who commented on leadership were of the opinion that a principal could make or break a school.

According to the NCFNEA, the role of the principal in Sri Lanka is mostly confined to an administrator, although a principal is expected to perform the role of a professional leader.<sup>453</sup> The Committee does make proposals to shift this aspect of school leadership towards a more autonomous, accountable and democratically functioning community leader's role and submits that a principal should perform the role of an 'instructional, transformational and moral leader'.<sup>454</sup> The NCFNEA further proposes to devolve powers and authority of the regional and zonal bureaucracy to school based management mechanisms.<sup>455</sup> According to the NCFNEA, school leaders should obtain qualifications in management and leadership, and those who are currently in the education sector and who aspire to be principals should be professionally developed by pre-service and in-service courses.<sup>456</sup>

Quoting the maxim 'leaders do the right thing; managers do things right',<sup>457</sup> Edwards asserts that successful school leaders should be able to exercise both management and leadership functions properly and adds that school leaders' efficacy comes from immediate problem solving, while 'at heart, school leadership is ethical and humanistic'.<sup>458</sup> It is a leader who has these both types of the attributes who can build the ideal peace school that the NPSCPE aspires to create and sustain.

From the perspective of school culture fostering social cohesion, the concept of leadership should be defined broadly, identifying leaders in multiple tiers above and below the principals by extending the leadership role to any member of the school community who is willing to lead in any particular area. This could be a teacher, parent or even a student, who should then be supported, trained and resourced in a systematic way so they can become champions of peace initiatives.

Proposals to improve leadership and professionalism  
The proposed Taskforce can explore the options of developing strategies in the areas overlapping social cohesion and aspects of the fourth domain of whole school culture, i.e. professionalism and leadership. Leadership development aspects of students, parents and other school community members can be absorbed into other subgroups within the Taskforce.

**1. Teacher training:** Pending the reforms proposed by the NEC and NCFNEA, the Taskforce may consider the following actions to build teacher competencies associated with social cohesion in education:

- Set up a panel of experts to review the existing teacher training programmes and develop new teacher training initiatives to build teacher competencies in social cohesion.
- Pending the introduction of teacher professional standards, the panel of experts can develop a set of capabilities associated with social cohesion in consultation with teacher representatives including unions, so that the draft capability framework can inform all other stakeholders engaged in similar exercises concerning social cohesion in education.
- To build teacher competencies in social cohesion, explore options of adopting a training and supporting model, for example a model comprising an introductory residential workshop, follow up workshops, online and face-to-face peer support and mentoring systems; regional communities of practices; and a central fund earmarked for collaborative regional projects at the grassroots level.
- Pending the introduction of NEC and NCFNEA proposed school based internal supervision programmes conducted by external professionals, explore the options of engaging external resource persons to assist teachers to deliver peace education initiatives.
- In light of the previous discussion which placed emphasis on the importance of giving greater autonomy to teachers to develop their own methods of engaging students in peace education activities, consider the options of altering existing rigid rules or practices imposed on teachers to allow more freedom in delivering peace education related activities.



<sup>453</sup> Gunawardena GB et al., 2009, p. 137-138.

<sup>454</sup> Ibid., p. 138-139.

<sup>455</sup> These mechanisms include school development committees and school management teams. See Gunawardena GB et al., 2009, p. 138-139.

<sup>456</sup> Gunawardena GB et al., 2009, pp. 181-182. Two leadership development programmes are currently delivered by NIE: Basic Principalship Programme (BPP) and Advanced Principalship Programme (APP).

<sup>457</sup> Quoting Fullan (1991) in Edwards 2011, p. 38.

<sup>458</sup> Quoting Morrison's (2010) in Edwards 2011, pp. 39-40.

**2. Professional standards:** Pending the reforms proposed by the NEC and NCFNEA, including setting up of the General Education Council, the following can be proposed:

- Set up a working group within the Taskforce comprising representatives of all stakeholders including teacher unions to explore the options of developing a national professional standards framework which meets the requirements of international best practices, while considering domestic political, social and cultural norms.
- The aforementioned working group may also review the existing Code of Conduct investigating the way it has been applied in school settings, and present recommendations to the Taskforce in terms of revising, rolling out and promoting a new Code of Conduct.
- To ensure the schools' compliance with anti-discrimination legal and policy requirements, and to ensure compliance with the Codes of Conduct and Ethics, explore options of developing mandatory training sessions using face-to-face or blended delivery methods.

**3. Leadership programmes:** Pending the leadership development initiatives proposed by NEC and NCFNEA, the Taskforce may consider the following:

- Set up a panel of experts within the Taskforce to review the existing leadership development programmes targeted at current and future school principals, focusing in particular on fostering social cohesion by whole school culture.
- The panel of experts can also develop a set of leadership capabilities associated with social cohesion in education in consultation with teacher and principal representatives so that the draft capabilities can inform all other stakeholders engaged in similar exercises.
- Introduce social cohesion capability development components to the existing principal development programmes.
- Introduce a teacher development programme to identify, recruit, develop and support champions of social cohesion to spearhead local social cohesion initiatives in schools, in particular within the space of school culture. Further, link teachers to previously proposed training and peer-support initiatives and communities of practice.

- Explore options to identify, recruit, train and support social cohesion champions from the non-teaching school community (i.e. students, parents, alumni and other members of school development bodies).

### 3.4 Rights and Behaviour

In the previous section, we concentrated on teachers' conduct, professionalism, leadership and development from the perspectives of their role in fostering social cohesion in schools. This section will be dedicated predominantly to a discussion from the perspectives of students, while considering broader aspects of fairness in whole school culture. Most of these topics have been partially covered in the previous sections, particularly under the subtopics of policy reforms, peace education curricula, and teacher professional development. The aspects of violence, systemic inequality, punishment and respectful behaviour affecting the whole school community will be focused on in this section.

The aforementioned themes resonate with some of the principles presented in the NPRC: equality, human rights, diversity, justice and rule of law.<sup>459</sup> Evidence from this study shows that these very principles are constantly violated on a regular basis both within and outside the school environment, and students have become the victims of systemic negative peace in their schools, households and in society at large. Students are directly affected by discrimination based on various grounds, corporal punishment and multiple forms of abuse, including sexual abuse. UNICEF notes that child abuse in the home, at school and in communities is often hidden behind a 'façade of privacy', and although some measures have been taken to protect children both inside and out of the school, the impact of such measures has been minimal.<sup>460</sup> Students are also indirectly affected by the unfair treatment their parents receive from various institutions, individuals or groups in the education system.

The NEC submits that despite the state's obligation and general awareness of the need to protect disadvantaged children, they face greater risk of becoming victims of abuse and violence owing to the loss of one or both parents, neglect by the family or abject poverty.<sup>461</sup> For example, the NCFNEA finds that children who are in the custody of institutions are denied parental care, family ties and on some occasions the right to play, leisure and education, and are also at risk of being abused and harshly treated by their own caretakers.<sup>462</sup> The Committee



<sup>459</sup> Office for National Unity and Reconciliation 2017, pp. 4-9. Although NPRC principles were not exclusively developed to be applied in schools, they are highly relevant to social cohesion in educational institutes. The equality principles of NPRC imposes the obligations on the state to ensure equal access to services and opportunities for all communities in the country; gender equality in all national initiatives; equal access to substantive freedoms and promote non-discrimination, transparency, accountability and fairness in all legal, social, political and administrative mechanisms and proceedings at national, provincial and local levels.

<sup>460</sup> UNICEF 2013, p. 62.

<sup>461</sup> NEC 2016, p. 40.

<sup>462</sup> Gunawardena GB et al., 2009, p. 52.

argues that children with special educational needs and from socio-economically disadvantaged groups should be 'positively discriminated' by ensuring such children are provided with adequate facilities to access and participate in primary and secondary education.<sup>463</sup>

### Equality in education

Despite the fact that the majority of the teaching workforce are women, and the majority of undergraduates in government universities are female, gender disparity can be noticed in the upper levels of workforce hierarchies,<sup>464</sup> as well as lower levels of primary and secondary education.<sup>465</sup> UNICEF points out that although gender does not appear to contribute to dropouts from education, gender seems to be a 'socio-cultural barrier' in certain groups of the population, including some Muslim and plantation sector Tamil communities.<sup>466</sup> In schools, certain roles which are considered typically domestic such as cleaning are allocated to girls, while boys are asked to do 'men's work' such as repairing school furniture. The field study shows the persistence of this dynamic, mainly in regional small schools, however, a few participants did question the continuation of gender-based duty allocations to students. Infrastructure in less resourced schools could also result in girls being put in less favourable situations. For example, not having female changing rooms to participate in certain sports and not having proper toilet facilities suitable for girls could bar girls' full participation in school activities. In some schools, girls were not given opportunity to engage in certain types extracurricular activities such as cadetting.

The first chapter touched on how students with disabilities are struggling in the education system in Sri Lanka, as they are disadvantaged in schools due to a lack of resources; a lack of proper assessment to identify appropriate learning and teaching options; and a lack of awareness on disability in general.<sup>467</sup> The MoE has recently adopted an Inclusive Education Policy, which provides that students with mild impairments should be integrated into mainstream

classrooms, and only those who require special attention are to be placed in special education units.<sup>468</sup> The field study demonstrated that participants had a narrow understanding of disability, with only certain visible conditions such as Down's Syndrome being considered a disability. As a result, students with learning disabilities, mild to moderate intellectual disabilities, certain types of sensory disabilities and psychiatric disabilities are not receiving the special attention they require. Students with a disability are often not provided with adjustments required for them to receive education in an equal footing, and research shows a significant number of them do not attend schools at all or drop out half way.<sup>469</sup>

The National Policy on Disability addresses a range of issues in relation to accessibility to schools, combating negative socio-cultural attitudes, promoting inclusive education, and training teachers.<sup>470</sup> Nevertheless, only around half of students with a disability have transitioned from primary to secondary level, and the enrolment of more students with a disability has not significantly risen.<sup>471</sup> It is important that every teacher is provided with basic awareness on accommodating students with disabilities. It is also important to set up mechanisms to provide expert advice to schools and to parents on providing adjustments. For example, several qualified disability education advisors can be placed at the regional level. Since some adjustments require funds, for example purchasing certain equipment such as Braille machines, a mechanism needs to be set up to adequately fund such adjustments.

The impact of poverty on students could be one of the most pressing social cohesion issues found in the field study. Students of economically disadvantaged families, particularly those who live below the poverty line, miss out of the full benefits of their school education. According to UNICEF, there was a negative relationship between income level and non-schooling rates, which means



<sup>463</sup> Ibid., p. 223.

<sup>464</sup> See Dundar et. al. 2017.

<sup>465</sup> UNICEF 2013, p. 32.

<sup>466</sup> UNICEF adds that in some communities there may be cultural factors that pull girls out of school and into work. For example, girls were more often employed as minor domestic workers than boys and approximately 59 % of child domestic workers come from Tamil-speaking communities. Child marriage, especially girls marrying adult men, seems to continue, despite the end of the armed conflict during which parents were forced to take girls out of school to get them married for safety or to prevent their recruitment by armed groups including the LTTE. See UNICEF 2013, p. 32.

<sup>467</sup> This is despite the fact that the government responded to the demands of disability advocates by enacting of the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act and setting up of the National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities in 1996. According to a survey conducted by UNICEF, disability or illness was noted as the second highest reason given for children for not getting education in schools. 13% of girls and 10.8 % of boys were reporting disability or illness as the reason for non-attendance. See UNICEF 2013, p. 42.

<sup>468</sup> A former MoE officer however noted that in order for the policy to be properly implemented, adequate number of schools in all provinces should be provided with special education facilities and resources.

<sup>469</sup> UNICEF 2013.

<sup>470</sup> Ibid. p. 64.

<sup>471</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

school avoidance declined as income rose.<sup>472</sup> According to the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, the main reason for non-schooling of children was their parent's poverty, and students are withdrawn from schools in order to contribute to household income through engaging child labour.<sup>473</sup> Taking these issues into consideration, the NCFNEA proposes that all students of parents below the poverty line should be provided with subsidies to facilitate their participation in education.<sup>474</sup>

There are other factors which put certain students into the extremely vulnerable and disadvantaged positions. For example, the labour migration of mothers can result in their children dropping out of school for a variety of reasons.<sup>475</sup> There are many other students who are at risk of dropping out of school due to their vulnerable situations, such as not having one or both parents; being children of displaced families or plantation sector workers; living in institutions or correctional facilities; and being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. Making education universal and accessible to every child by removing the barriers they experience should be central to any social cohesion initiative in education.

#### School Violence

Bullying is one of the most common forms of violence experienced by school children, and such behaviour ranges from physical abuse, verbal abuse, emotional abuse and cyber bullying. Sometimes students attribute irregular attendance to harassment and bullying.<sup>476</sup> In the field study, some parents, teachers and sometimes even the victimised students have justified bullying as a way to 'toughen up' students to help them face challenges outside school.<sup>477</sup> The terms 'bullying' and 'harassment' are used interchangeably

to define unfair treatment,<sup>478</sup> and few seem to know that the two types of acts are different from one another.<sup>479</sup> Anti-ragging legislation<sup>480</sup> as well as the Penal Code impose heavy penalties on perpetrators in schools or higher education institutes, but the field research indicates that a large amount of bullying-related violence goes unreported.<sup>481</sup>

Some scholars argue that short-term interventions with a narrow focus on bullying are ineffective because they do not promote positive bonds among students.<sup>482</sup> On the other hand, whole school approaches to prevent bullying seems to be receiving increased attention from scholars and practitioners. Such approaches involve engaging the whole school community through a coordinated approach with policy initiatives, anti-bullying educational materials, empowering student leaders to settle minor issues between students through peer mediation, teacher training to handle school violence, and workshops or seminars for parents.<sup>483</sup> Some authors, however, are sceptical of certain school interventions against bullying, as they point out that teacher behaviours and the student-teacher relationships are more instrumental in controlling bullying rather than school policies against bullying per se.<sup>484</sup> Initiatives concerning whole school culture fostering social cohesion must have a two-fold bullying prevention strategy: one targeting students and the other targeting the staff. The strategy could also be positioned within respectful behaviour campaigns.

#### Discipline and Punishment

The two most punitive methods increasingly coming under severe criticism are suspensions and corporal punishment. Investigating this topic, Cremin and Bevington present evidence to demonstrate that disadvantaged children such as ethnic minorities are disproportionately



<sup>472</sup> The reasons for that could be the significant amount of additional out-of-pocket funds that the parents have to source for their children's education. See UNICEF 2013, p. 33.

<sup>473</sup> Cited in UNICEF 2013, p. 36.

<sup>474</sup> Gunawardena GB et al., 2009, p. 54.

<sup>475</sup> UNICEF 2013, p. 38.

<sup>476</sup> UNICEF 2013, p. 109. Conversely research shows that children who bully tend to be involved in alcohol consumption and smoking, to have comparatively poorer academic records, to display a strong need for dominance, and to show little empathy for their victims. See Richard, et al. 2011, p. 264.

<sup>477</sup> Incidentally, growing public outrage against ragging in educational institutes can be noticed in the media.

<sup>478</sup> Lopez et al. 2009, p. 4.

<sup>479</sup> The definition of bullying can be found in ILO documents as the 'repeated and over time offensive behaviour through vindictive, cruel, or malicious attempts to humiliate or undermine an individual or groups of workers'. On the other hand, the ILO defines harassment as 'any conduct towards somebody based on their age, disability, HIV status, domestic circumstances, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, ethnic background, colour, language, religion, political opinion, trade union affiliation or other opinion or belief, national or social origin, association with a minority, property, birth or other status that is unreciprocated or unwanted and which affects the dignity of women and men at work'. See International Labour Organisation 2013, p. 8. See also the definition for bullying presented in Richard, et al. 2011, p. 264.

<sup>480</sup> Prohibition of Ragging and Other Forms of Violence in Educational Institutions Act 1998.

<sup>481</sup> Note that since there is no vernacular equivalent to the terms 'bullying' or 'harassment', the term 'violence' is being used for describing acts on the spectrum of behaviour from bullying to torture. Due to confusion or a lack of understanding, non-physical forms of violence such as emotional abuse do not seem to be understood as bullying, thus such acts of violence get reported even less.

<sup>482</sup> Richard, et al. 2011, p. 268.

<sup>483</sup> See first chapter under the subheading 'culture of aggression'.

<sup>484</sup> Richard, et al. 2011, pp. 263, 267.

punished through expulsion. The role schools play in the 'reproduction of societal inequalities' result in 'significant and lasting damaging effects on the life opportunities of young people'.<sup>485</sup> In Sri Lanka, punishment against students, particularly suspensions, should be administered by the disciplinary committees of schools. Yet according to the field research, such disciplinary committees are not functioning at all in some schools.

Some principals, teachers and parents seem to believe that through more authoritarian and confrontational styles of discipline they can make students achieve better results. Corporal punishment is applied in most schools, despite such punishment being prohibited by the law. A study cited by UNICEF found that 60% of principals and 71% of teachers said that corporal punishment was administered in their schools, and students often complained of harsh punishments as a reason for dropping out.<sup>486</sup> A study conducted by Save the Children found that approximately 80% of students participating in the research had experienced at least one episode of corporal punishment in the previous school term, and 52% of the incidences of punishment amounted to physical abuse.<sup>487</sup> According to the NEC, students who are 'weak in studies' are at risk of dropping out owing to negative experiences such as harsh punishment and ridicule.<sup>488</sup>

This contradiction between policy and practice in relation to norms of discipline and punishment in schools has created a debate about whether disciplinary policies should emphasise punishment or prevention. According to some research, what is more important in this regard are the role of administrative leadership and teachers' competency in classroom management.<sup>489</sup> Cremin and Bevington submit that if punishment is to be used, some of the 'erroneous assumptions that underpin its over-use' need to be carefully looked into. They present a survey which helps establish whether or not a particular disciplinary action in fact delivers the intended outcome.<sup>490</sup> Conversely,

the NCFNEA urges prohibiting 'any kind of punishment injurious to the physical, mental or emotional wellbeing of the child' and submits that punishments should be 'preventive, not punitive'.<sup>491</sup> The NCFNEA further adds that punishment should accompany corrective measures and should not be publicised.<sup>492</sup>

Heavy handed disciplinary action-based approaches do not seem to help eradicate violence from schools. For example, a UK Department of Education white paper suggested to 'fast-track' ex-soldiers into the teaching profession through a programme titled 'Troops to Teachers' in order to decrease violence in schools.<sup>493</sup> The Sri Lankan Government has similarly appointed military officers to the role of principals in recent years, and no literature is available on the success or failure of these initiatives. On the other hand, according to our field study, some principals without military training were also found to be administering military-style discipline by enforcing strictly regimented order within schools, and a majority of parents seem to be supportive of such styles of strict control over their children.

Commenting on regimented disciplinary styles, Cremin and Bevington admit that they were 'alarmed by schools which pride themselves on a climate of control and compliance that is more akin to a military context than to a school', and argue that such systems of control are not only 'anti-educational' but also 'risk creating schools in the image of a prison'.<sup>494</sup> According to Cremin and Bevington, regimented style education suppresses critical thinking, innovation or creativity. Lacking critical thinking means that students are no longer able to 'discriminate between fact, opinion and promotion in an increasingly information-rich world'.<sup>495</sup> This is precisely what educationalists should avoid: a regimented style discipline at the expense of a free environment to foster critical thinking, because no social cohesion initiative can be sustained within a regimented school environment.



<sup>485</sup> Cremin and Bevington 2017, pp. 20-21.

<sup>486</sup> UNICEF 2013, p. 63.

<sup>487</sup> De Silva 2017, pp. 29,30.

<sup>488</sup> It has been well established that corporal punishment psychologically harms students as well. See NEC 2016, pp. 105-106. Also note our field study findings that corporal punishment is used as a teaching method, for example, caning is used to ensure students complete homework.

<sup>489</sup> Gunawardena GB et al., 2009, p. 115.

<sup>490</sup> Cremin and Bevington 2017, p. 84.

<sup>491</sup> Gunawardena GB et al., 2009, p. 156.

<sup>492</sup> Gunawardena GB et al., 2009, p. 156.

<sup>493</sup> The white paper urged that adults should 'regain control' and 'replace softly-softly approaches with increased disciplinary measures' to counter school violence. All these heavy handed approaches faced severe criticism, as the programme mainly relied on the exclusion of offender children, rather than addressing root causes of behavioural issues. See Cremin and Bevington 2017, pp. 16-17.

<sup>494</sup> Citing Michel Foucault's ideas on the evolution of the penal process from physical punishment to surveillance, the authors argue how UK state schools have replaced corporal punishment with surveillance through CCTV camera and security measures which make the school 'feel like prisons'. See Cremin and Bevington 2017, p. 22.

<sup>495</sup> The authors cite Christy Kulz, a scholar with teaching experience, in this regard: 'there is little space for critical thinking, innovation or creativity in the neoliberal school; instead there is obedient reproduction'. The authors identify the 'failure to develop critical faculties as a form of cultural violence through omission' and argue that it impedes the flourishing of young people as they grow into adulthood' as their 'development and possibilities for self-actualisation are damaged'. See Cremin and Bevington 2017, p. 23.

Advocates of social cohesion in education need to facilitate a serious debate in the education community on how students' discipline can be maintained without harming the values of social cohesion such as freedom of expression and democratic decision making. The NCFNEA strongly urges adopting preventative methods to maintain school discipline, and proposes a multifaceted approach comprising clearly articulated rules; disciplinary actions focusing on students' self-discipline and self-management; and using teacher-parents relationships to manage discipline related issues. The Committee comments that 'unilateral formulation' of school Codes of Conduct followed by their assertive imposition on students 'fail to internalise discipline' in children. It instead emphasises the importance of engaging students in the process of developing Codes of Conduct.<sup>496</sup> The NCFNEA further submits that the principal should assume a proactive role in the formulation of a realistic Code of Conduct, taking into consideration the socio-economic background of the students, attitudes and values of the community, and expectation of parents.<sup>497</sup> Proposing that the principal should take the initiative to promote inter-personal relations and the cooperation of teachers and parents,<sup>498</sup> the Committee adds that such relationships can be useful to regularly monitor students and inform their disciplinary matters to their parents.<sup>499</sup>

#### Respectful Behaviour

The discourse of discipline and punishment is indeed very much intertwined with the behaviour of students. Most behavioural problems seem to occur between students, and in some cases between students and teachers, parents or other individuals. Instead of totally focusing on responsive and punitive methods, schools can focus on helping students to self-manage their conduct, as proposed by the NCFNEA.<sup>500</sup> What is additionally needed in such preventative approaches is the constant reinforcement of accepted behavioural standards through classroom

activities. Such activities need to be facilitated by curricular reforms and teacher training, supplemented with a range of extracurricular activities and publicity campaigns which cover the entire school community including the parents.<sup>501</sup>

Next comes the question of setting behavioural benchmarks or good practices. Legislative and policy-based prohibitions could certainly form compulsory standards such as refraining from bullying or harassment. What the school community should strive for, however, are good practice standards rather than these compulsory benchmarks. Such good practices can be inspired by norms of justice and human rights, democratic values, and the right to the dignity of learning and working, as well as local cultural practices which do not conflict with the aforementioned values. While these behavioural standards are reinforced through educational activities and publicity campaigns, schools also need to set up mechanisms of early intervention as well as responsive actions to deal with grievances arising from breaches of accepted behavioural standards.

Proposing multiple restorative approaches including restorative justice initiatives for 'peace-making', Cremin and Bevington suggest peer mediation under the supervision of teachers to address conflicts or grievances between students.<sup>502</sup> They also suggest peace-making circles to resolve conflicts between groups by facilitating processes of reflection and dialogue.<sup>503</sup> Restorative justice approaches involve activities around inquiry, reflection and dialogue but focus more on repairing the harm than dispensing punishment.<sup>504</sup> As explained in the field study findings, some of these ideas were put forward to the focus groups, and the respondents have supported adoption of similar methods of conflict or grievance resolution. This is probably an initiative that the NGO sector can intervene in, pending the substantial and long term government-driven reforms suggested previously.



<sup>496</sup> Gunawardena GB et al., 2009, pp. 155-157.

<sup>497</sup> Ibid. Also see the discussion under policy reforms in previous sections.

<sup>498</sup> Gunawardena GB et al., 2009, pp. 156-57.

<sup>499</sup> Ibid.

<sup>500</sup> Supporting this assertion, earlier it was proposed that schools should adopt a localised Code of Conduct based on values of social cohesion and a framework authorised by the MoE. It was further proposed that children and other members of the school community should be engaged in such exercises to ensure a sense of ownership. It was also proposed that teachers also should be bound by the same standards of behaviours and affiliated values so that they can be role models influencing the children to self-manage their behaviour, rather than children being controlled, watched and punished by teachers. The NPSCPE's policy statements also refer to the need for ensuring equitable and respectful relationships between principals and teachers; students and teachers; between students; and between teachers. See MoE 2008, p. 32.

<sup>501</sup> These aspects of community participation will be discussed in the next section.

<sup>502</sup> Cremin and Bevington 2017, p. 90. Also see Sinclair 2013, pp. 31-33.

<sup>503</sup> Peace-making circles can provide a structured format for dealing with an issue that is causing harm, adopting a 'no-blame approach'. See Cremin and Bevington 2017, p. 90.

<sup>504</sup> The authors adds that 'schools employ RA [restorative approach] in the whole spectrum of contexts: staff may engage individual pupils in a "restorative chat" in class, in the corridor or on the playground for low-level incidents of harm; students may be sent to a "reflection room" when they are not able or willing to meet the expectations of the classroom; a "classroom conference" may be. The authors adds that 'schools employ RA [restorative approach] in the whole spectrum of contexts: staff may engage individual pupils in a "restorative chat" in class, in the corridor or on the playground for low-level incidents of harm; students may be sent to a "reflection room" when they are not able or willing to meet the expectations of the classroom; a "classroom conference" may be convened to address harmful behaviours or relationships within the group; a "community conference" may be convened for serious incidents of harm'. See Cremin and Bevington 2017, p. 92.

## Guidance and Counselling

Guidance and counselling services in schools are an essential part of a developed education system. Such services also play an important role in ensuring equity for all children, which is a social cohesion goal in education. Guidance and counselling services in local schools are inadequate.<sup>505</sup> The NCFNEA submits that students should be supported by counsellors in making realistic choices of study; dealing with interpersonal and intra-personal problems or conflicts; and providing career guidance.<sup>506</sup> The Committee proposes to develop courses to train teachers to offer guidance and counselling; establishing counselling units attached to secondary schools; and offering mobile counselling services.<sup>507</sup> Through its social cohesion programme, GIZ implemented a psychosocial care programme involving training teachers, follow up training sessions, peer support groups, orientation for principals, and setting up networks between schools. The programme has been discontinued but according to its evaluation, it can be recommended for all schools.

## Proposals to improve rights and behaviour

The Taskforce may consider the following proposals in conjunction with the reforms presented by the NEC and NCFNEA. The Taskforce may consider setting up a panel of experts and working groups to further investigate and implement the proposals presented below:

1. **Universal access to education:** The Taskforce may consider appointing a panel of experts to investigate all types of measures to ensure universal access to education by eradicating all kinds of barriers experienced by students from various backgrounds including various degrees of abilities or disabilities.
  - The panel of experts can explore all the measures that can be taken to eliminate direct or indirect discrimination of students based on their backgrounds such as socio economic status, gender, race, religion, caste, disability, sexual orientation or similar factors.
  - The panel of experts can propose a mechanism to provide reasonable adjustments to accommodate disabilities or other similar causes preventing students receiving educational opportunities at an equal footing, particularly exploring the effectiveness of special education units.
  - Children coming from families living below the poverty line should be provided with subsidies to ensure the continuation of their education.<sup>508</sup>
2. **Respectful behaviour:** The Taskforce may consider appointing a working group to explore and investigate on policy or programme-based measures to ensure respectful behaviour in the school community, in particular amongst the student community, in line with previously proposed policy measures:
  - The working group can establish a set of behavioural standards and develop guidelines to help schools adopt behavioural standards such as localised Codes of Conduct.
  - Parallel to the rolling out of policy initiatives, teachers should be trained, students should be educated, and parents and other school community members should be informed on accepted standards of behaviour and Codes of Conduct.
  - Parallel to the rolling out of policy initiatives, grievance handling and conflict resolution mechanisms such as peer mediation, peace circles and justice circles can be set up by developing guidelines, conducting training and providing ongoing support and supervision.
  - As proposed by the NEC, guidance and counselling services should be established or existing services should be strengthened by providing adequate resources and teacher trainings.
3. **Discipline:** The Taskforce may consider setting up a working group to investigate the current models of discipline, punishment and security in schools, and present proposals to adopt better models conducive to whole school culture fostering social cohesion.
  - Teachers and principals can be trained and provided with ongoing support to adopt student behavioural management methods including positive disciplining based on the values of social cohesion.
  - Resource and support school disciplinary committees so the committees can function in a more consistent and sustainable manner according to the values of social cohesion.
  - Explore options of less invasive methods of security and discipline by adopting safer by design methods,<sup>509</sup> and other innovative approaches.
  - Explore options of running public advertising campaigns on illegality and the negative impact of corporal punishment.



<sup>505</sup> Gunawardena GB et al., 2009, pp. 107-108. See also the field study findings.

<sup>506</sup> Gunawardena GB et al., 2009, pp. 107-108.

<sup>507</sup> Ibid.

<sup>508</sup> Non-formal Education Branch of the MoE facilitates the reenrolment of out of school children, and this system could be utilised to improve universal access to education.

<sup>509</sup> Safer by Design is a crime prevention practice which focuses on designing the environment, including buildings, gardens and parks, to deter any violent or other unlawful activities. For example, see Department of Sustainability and Environment of Victoria 2005, Safer by Design, Australia.

## 3.5 Communities and Participation

We have so far discussed four out of five domains of whole school culture within the context of social cohesion, and the discourse pivoted around cultural elements affecting students and education staff. The previous sections also included brief discussions on engaging parents, alumni, and the wider communities schools are placed in. We now come to explore further the role of these individuals and agents in the whole school community.

Researching on education within the context of ethnic conflict, Bush and Saltarelli observe that children do not come into the classroom as blank canvasses and instead bring with them learned attitudes, values and behaviour patterns from their homes and social environments.<sup>510</sup>

The authors add that ethnic chauvinism and stereotyping that is rampant in society finds its way into the classroom through textbooks while parental attitudes and behaviour strongly influence children's physical, intellectual, social and emotional development.<sup>511</sup> For these precise reasons, no social cohesion initiative can be sustained in the educational setting without engaging the whole school community.

Defining the school community broadly to include not only parents and alumni but local employers, clergy, services, government agencies and NGOs brings wider benefits because schools can influence society as much as the society outside the school heavily influences its students and teachers. Schools in fact can play a central role in peace-building by disseminating peace messaging through children's activities to the society outside the schools. Schools can also be the hub of community peace-building initiatives if more strategic approaches are taken to build partnerships with NGOs and private sector sponsors committed to social cohesion.<sup>512</sup>

The main benefit of engaging the whole school community in school culture fostering social cohesion is the opportunity to maintain coherence in social cohesion messaging, so that the same values, principles, policies and practices are consistently communicated to everyone creating minimum contradiction, confusion or resistance. Secondly, the whole school culture approach to building

social cohesion can facilitate a process of collaboration and even innovation, resulting in a great degree of synergy from the efforts and ideas injected by multiple parties to the cause. Thirdly, the very idea of engaging the community and the process of their engagement further upholds the value of participatory democracy, thus empowering the community to collectively plan, develop and implement initiatives. Finally, the whole school approach to building social cohesion generates a sense of ownership, ensuring the sustainability of the initiatives developed and nurtured by the community. This whole process is indeed a project of culture change, and if carefully implemented with adequate investment, could transform the entire social fabric of Sri Lanka.

### School-based management

The existing school-based management framework which devolves power to SDCs and School Management Teams (SMTs) already provides a reasonably adequate structure to engage the whole school community in social cohesion initiatives. School-based management mechanisms generate multiple benefits relevant to social cohesion by facilitating participatory decision making; cultivating a sense of ownership in social cohesion initiatives; and providing opportunities to transmit the social cohesion initiatives, including messaging outside school boundaries by engaging external stakeholders.<sup>513</sup>

According to the field study, not all schools have proactive SDCs or SMTs. To guarantee the success of social cohesion initiatives in schools, it is imperative to ensure the smooth running of school-based management mechanisms by equitably supporting all schools, with some modification which can be proposed by experts. Wehella, who extensively researches on local school-based management frameworks, points out the weaknesses and inefficiencies in the current system and argues that in order to strengthen this framework, particular actions need to be taken.<sup>514</sup>

A school-based management body could be one of the best mechanisms to engage the whole school community in social cohesion initiatives. The committees already have the official authority and some representation of the school community, so the school can harness these strengths to implement social cohesion initiatives through

<sup>510</sup> Cited Bush and Saltarelli (2000) in Aturupane and Wikramanayake 2011, p. 15.

<sup>511</sup> Ibid.

<sup>512</sup> Several examples of school based community projects are presented in a publication of the Council for Community-Based Development. One of such example is a not-for-profit recycling business in San Francisco Bay Area working with schools to buy back waste to get young people involved in waste management and to raise funds for school activities. Another example is young people delivering a literacy program for adults in an economically depressed area of Bedford County. These projects were not necessarily social cohesion initiatives, however, the same practice can be applied to social cohesion projects. See Kretzmann JP, pp. 18-20.

<sup>513</sup> As discussed earlier, the UNICEF-led Child Friendly School initiative provides a good example of a social cohesion program which uses the existing school based management mechanism with modifications, such as including representatives of students in the school management bodies.

<sup>514</sup> These actions include harnessing the communities' knowledge in school pedagogical practices; improving student-centred teaching; strengthening the participatory planning approach; enhancing the clarity of strategies, targets and community contributions; promoting the participation of school professionals, parents and students in decision-making; guiding school decisions to ensure the principles of equity and children's right to education; increasing transparency and accountability in school management; and developing the capacities of principals; and promoting school based teacher development thus creating professional communities in schools. See Wehella 2014, pp. 149-151. A former MoE officer pointed out that a new model of Program for School Improvement has been adopted.

committee members. Committees can also mainstream the social cohesion agenda by incorporating it into school plans to ensure the sustainability of the initiatives. Therefore, it is prudent to propose setting up an arm such as a subcommittee within the existing SDC framework instead of developing new community engagement bodies. There are two crucial challenges to overcome in this regard: firstly, to identify the right model for engaging the community, and secondly to identify the right members from the community.

The structure and the functions of the proposed community engagement body or the subcommittee within the SDC need to be determined by a higher authority, such as the MoE in consultation with experts and representatives of all stakeholders including student representative bodies. The terms of reference of the proposed subcommittee need to have a significant level of flexibility to customise or improvise certain features of this community engagement model, depending on the nature and the needs of the school community. In order to ensure the participation of community representatives who are motivated and resourceful, training programmes or residential workshops can be organised. In order to continue the momentum and provide ongoing support to representatives, they may be required to attend follow up training events, and support groups or communities of practice, where they can debrief, learn and share their experiences. This means long term funding needs to be allocated to facilitate the training and support programmes as well as new school based social cohesion initiatives. A certain amount of funds need to be allocated to schools on an equitable basis to undertake the programmes sustainably. The MoE in conjunction with NGO partners may consider establishing a central fund. A pool of experts can be trained and deployed to regional centres to advise and build the capacities of school communities.

While we see much merit in the devolution of school-based development and the implementation of social cohesion initiatives, it is important to note the risk associated with having the wrong kinds of representatives on board, and this was further iterated in the field study findings. For example, clergy who demonstrate biases towards women or persons from other religions or members of particular political parties attempting to canvas for elections, could derail the programmes from their original cause. Therefore, it is important to have some vetting system before and after the initial training of community members. Further, any system of engaging the whole school community needs to be subject to ongoing and close monitoring, particularly paying attention to sensitive issues such as gender equality, discriminatory treatment of minority ethnic or religious groups, and respectful behaviour.

Schools need to look for supporters outside the parent and alumni communities when engaging the whole school community. Some schools may be located in areas with one or several prominent employers such as manufacturing plants or tourist resorts who may be able to provide internships or employment opportunities to the students. Employers may also be able to offer sponsorships to schools and even engage in social cohesion promotion activities themselves, so teachers running social cohesion programmes can extend the target audience to a larger adult population who may have some connection to the students being their relatives or neighbours. Similarly local places of religious worship, health services, artists and professionals can also get involved in social cohesion activities through the school development bodies.

### Participation of Children

From the very inception of this study, we have kept reinforcing the importance of engaging children during the entire process of conceptualising ideas to roll out social cohesion policies and programmes. However, according to the findings of the field study, the input of children is rarely considered in decision making due to a lack understanding amongst adults, regimented school management structures, cultural conceptions about the social position of children or impracticalities on some occasions. Although several examples of children's participation, such as School Parliaments, were uncovered in the field study, there was no evidence to demonstrate that children were given genuine opportunities to meaningfully engage in decision making on matters that have a significant impact on them.

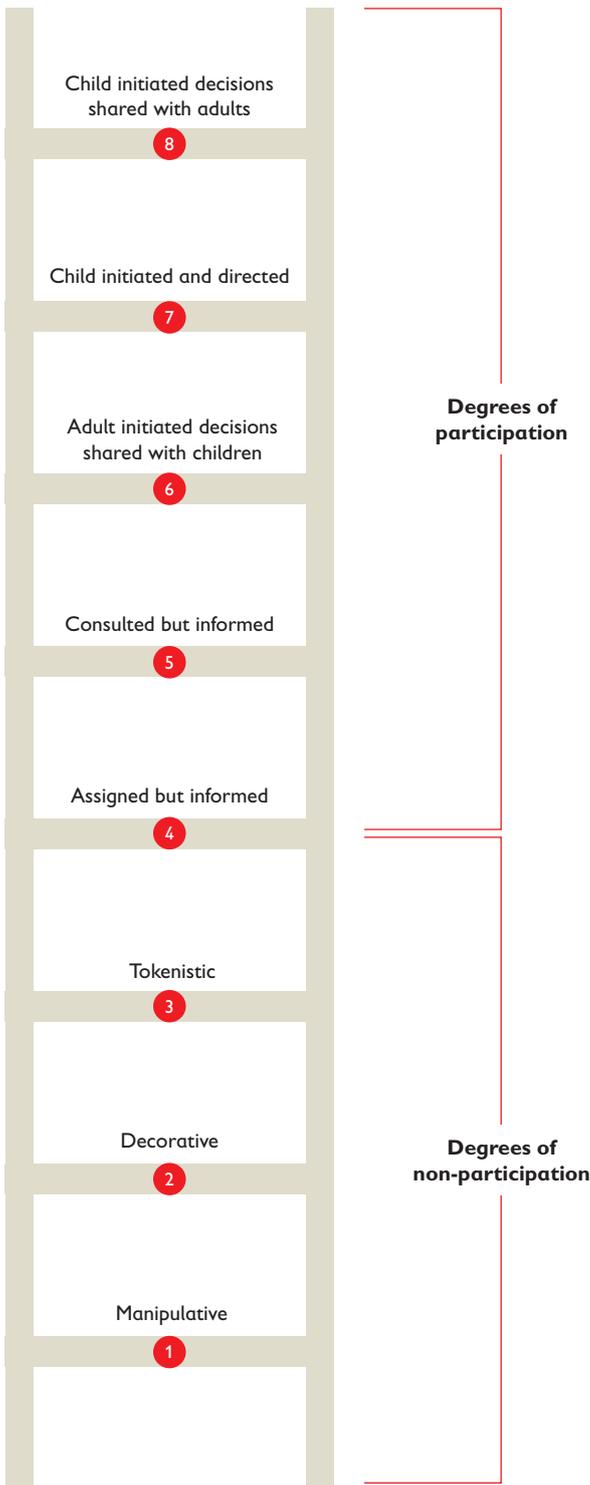
Looking into the idea of meaningful participation, the Government's Child Participation Guidelines provide reference to Roger Hart's 'ladder of participation'<sup>515</sup> which explains various degrees of participation and non-participation of children on an eight-level scale. Manipulated, tokenistic and decorative types of activities which are designed to engage children are considered 'non-participation' according to Hart and are placed in the lower rungs of the ladder. At these levels, children are supposedly given a voice but in fact 'have little or no choice about the subject or the style of communicating their ideas, and little or no opportunity to formulate their own opinions'.<sup>516</sup>

On the fourth rung, where children's participation really begins, the children are 'volunteering' to play a 'meaningful role', knowing the intentions of their engagement. At the fifth rung, the specific project is designed and run by adults, but children understand the process and their opinions are treated seriously. On the next rung, the decision making is shared between adults and children. Child-initiated community projects which are very rare come under the seventh rung of participation. The best practice of child participation is placed on the top rung of the ladder where the actions are initiated by children with some assistance accepted from adults.



<sup>515</sup> Hart 1992, pp. 9-14.

<sup>516</sup> Ibid., p. 9.



Applying these good practices, local Child Participation Guidelines<sup>517</sup> instruct that children’s participation should be completely voluntary and they should be provided with a safe and non-discriminatory environment to freely express their views. The guidelines add that there should be clear objectives and plans to engage children, and children should be engaged at all stages including in planning, method development, evaluation and follow up processes. The document guides that children of all ages should be given the opportunity to participate, and they also should be given the opportunity to choose their representatives if any. The document specifies the adults’ accountabilities to fulfil their promises given to the children, and most importantly requires adults to be trained in facilitating children’s participation.

Other guidelines and tools are also available to assist adults in facilitating children’s participation.<sup>518</sup> For example, the Inter-Agency Working Group on Children’s Participation submits a set of standards to be adopted to consult children.<sup>519</sup> Presenting these standards, the authors argue that they are required because children have a right to be consulted when issues that concern them are being discussed, and involving children in formal consultations is one way of fulfilling their rights.<sup>520</sup> The authors set out five principles to base their minimum standards: participation, transparency, honesty and accountability; a child-friendly environment; equality of opportunity; safety and protection of children; and the commitment and competency of adults.<sup>521</sup>

### Participation of Teachers

A culture that promotes democratic aims for its students must also extend to teachers by allowing them to exercise meaningful control over their own work and participate in decisions that affect their lives. As Wilbur points out, this will require a shift in power from top-down decision making to teacher-driven, collaborative decision making.<sup>522</sup> According to Wilbur, such a cultural shift that supports teacher inquiry and deliberation also requires the ‘barriers be dissolved among disciplines, grade levels, and roles so that a variety of perspectives may inform the best choice of action’.<sup>523</sup>

This means that schools and leaders should choose democratic means of working over bureaucratic methods, and such a cultural shift needs to be bolstered



<sup>517</sup> Department of Probation and Child Care Services 2015, pp. 17-23.

<sup>518</sup> See the consultation tool kit developed by Scottish Executive’s Action Programme for Youth (2009) and Save the Children UK (2003).

<sup>519</sup> Inter-Agency Working Group on Children’s Participation 2007, p. 10.

<sup>520</sup> The authors cite the specific articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child to stress the importance of the children having their say in any issue which affecting them. According to the Convention, the children have the *freedoms* of expression, thought and association, and of access to information; and the *rights* to be listened to; to freely express their views on all matters that affect them; to participation without discrimination; and to be protected from manipulation, violence, abuse and exploitation. See Inter-Agency Working Group on Children’s Participation 2007, pp. 10-12.

<sup>521</sup> Inter-Agency Working Group on Children’s Participation 2007, pp. 18-19.

<sup>522</sup> This means teachers must be able to criticise the ‘repetitive experiences of specialized practice’ and change the structure in which they work. See Wilbur 1998, pp. 124, 135.

<sup>523</sup> Wilbur 1998, p. 125.

by substantial alterations introduced to organisational structures, policies and practices. In a practical sense such a cultural shift will be demonstrated by teacher consultative committees; policy directives requiring principals to consult and engage teaching staff in decision making; and greater autonomy granted to teachers to apply innovative methods for teaching and engage in various co-curricular or extra-curricular activities. Many of these aspects of teachers' participation in decision making were extensively discussed in previous sections and the essence of these discussions have been considered to form the proposals presented in the following segment.

### Participation of Parents

Engagement of parents and guardians is crucial to make a lasting impact through any social cohesion initiative targeting children. According to Sinclair, without parents' participation in peace initiatives in schools, there may be a disconnect between what students learn in school and what they are told at home, and parents may be ill-equipped to offer guidance. Social cohesion programmes of schools would require parents to collectively and proactively engage in activities, and for this new engagement methods need to be adopted beyond traditional parent and teacher meetings. One good practice example for parents' engagement in a social cohesion initiative comes from Colombia where a research team from the Andes University worked with teachers, students and parents to deliver a programme on conflict reduction. This involved developing and testing a curriculum for grade 2-5 students and conducting workshops for parents and children.

Parents' engagement in social cohesion efforts cannot be symbolic or tokenistic, because all parents should be inculcated with the values and behavioural standards associated with social cohesion themes. Demands for parents to attend seminars or workshops could impose heavy strains on working parents, particularly those who are in jobs with little leave entitlements. On the other hand, parents are likely to be annoyed at having to attend workshops or seminars if the benefits of social cohesion programmes are not clearly communicated to them. In fact, the activities targeted at parents need to be somehow linked to the goals they have set for their children, providing a convincing response to the hypothetical question of 'what's in it for me?'

The teachers who are assigned with the duty of educating or engaging parents through workshops or other means have to be extremely capable of engaging parents and for this the teachers need to be well trained. The teachers may have to look for alternative methods of meeting as such as virtual online meetings to engage busy urban parents, use of video recordings, training older children if possible to engage their parents, or home visits in rural communities. These initiatives will certainly require funding, and the teachers assigned with such tasks need to be rewarded. The rigorous requirements of parental engagement methods need to be well thought out and ideal engagement models need to be tested carefully before being rolled out.

### Proposals to improve participation of the school community

The proposed Taskforce may consider the following proposals to engage the whole school community in social cohesion initiatives:

1. **School based management:** A working group can be appointed to identify the best model to engage the whole school community within the existing school based management framework, with appropriate modification.
  - Identify a working model to engage the whole school community.
  - Explore options of resourcing the proposed model of community engagement through expert advice, training and support.
  - Explore the options of creating a central fund to equitably distribute funds amongst schools to engage the whole school community in delivering social cohesion initiatives.
2. **Participation of parents:**
  - Identify working models to engage parents in social cohesion initiatives, particularly to ensure that children and parents receive the same communication on social cohesion.
  - Identify innovative methods to communicate with parents.



<sup>524</sup> Sinclair 2013, pp. 31-33.

<sup>525</sup> Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>526</sup> The curriculum comprised two main components aimed to build 'universal' competencies and 'targeted' competencies. The universal competencies covered topics such as anger management, empathy, bullying, and the role that bystanders can play in defusing or mediating conflicts while defending victims. The other component targeted a cohort of 10% of students with the highest aggression scores according to teacher or peer surveys. Both these components were delivered for students as well as parents by conducting four workshops a year and other follow up activities to build the same competencies in children and parents. The programme also used multiple channels including radio, television, print and web-based media such as social media, and these media channels were supposedly used to bring about 'changes in attitudes, values and behaviours, and build a new "life script" for students, incorporating conflict resolution processes, constructive citizenship, human rights and humanitarian norms'. See Sinclair 2013, p. 108.

<sup>527</sup> See the field study findings in the previous chapter.

**3. Participation of children:**

- Adopt standards and guidelines on good practices discussed earlier to promote participation of children and roll out standards and guidelines in conjunction with a promotional campaign.
- Train teachers to facilitate children’s participation and raise awareness amongst adults including parents on the importance of adopting good practices in child participation.
- Educate children on participation methods and encourage them to initiate, develop and implement social cohesion initiatives by presenting international examples, sharing success stories of other local initiatives, and facilitating children’s networks to support each other by face to face meetings or social media networks.
- Consider establishing formal mechanisms to facilitate students’ participation in national and regional level decision making.
- Consider establishing school-based systems to facilitate children’s participation including student councils with significant autonomy.

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