

**Title of Project:** PeacefulPuppets

**Location of Project:** Maira Aku, Islamabad, Pakistan.

**Partner Organizations:** Saya Trust, Gogi Studios, CGN, and Global Shapers Islamabad.

**College:** School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University.

**Website:** [www.peacefulpuppets.org](http://www.peacefulpuppets.org) **Twitter:** @peacefulpuppets **Facebook:** fb.com/peacefulpuppets

**I believe that peace is a conscious choice and teaching children about peace at an early age can lead to a peaceful world!**

PeacefulPuppets piloted its first summer camp in partnership with Saya Trust and Gogi studios at the Saya School in Maira Aku, Islamabad, Pakistan. We developed an early childhood peace-building curriculum in collaboration with Ms. Nida Zafar at the Teacher's College, Columbia University for this project. This curriculum used cognitive reframing techniques which used puppets, activities and storytelling as tools to build understanding of the core concepts of peace, diversity, inclusion and compassion. The summer camp impacted more than 150 underprivileged students between the ages of 8-12 years that came from diverse religious, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The PeacefulPuppets camp also included an educational trip to Pakistan Monument, where the children had the opportunity to learn about cultural and religious diversity and tolerance through Pakistan's history. To have a sustainable and longterm impact PeacefulPuppets project arranged a week long 'interactive teaching and learning methodology' training for the staff of Saya school. The training was conducted in collaboration with Children Global Network Pakistan. The trainings included early childhood care and development training, primary teaching training and subject based training. We were extremely grateful to CGN for their kind support.

Initially, the project plan was developed here in New York. To make the program more robust an active communication and feedback network was set up between the curriculum team and, colleagues and peers in the education sector of Pakistan. Furthermore, as the curriculum developed, it was actively shared with peers from education, pedagogy and curriculum development background for so that review and feedback, to gauge the sensitivity and applicability of the material in Pakistan. The next step was selecting a collaborating organization where this project could be implemented, thus I released a request for proposal for a partner school interested in implementing the pilot summer camp. With my requirements for diversity, very few schools qualified, in the end Saya School was selected from the short list because it was a particularly unique school that catered to a huge number of underprivileged students from a multitude of religious and ethnically diverse backgrounds. In my due diligence, I found Saya School to be a distinctive institution that actively engaged with the Maira Aku community and passionately delivered good quality education at low/no cost for underprivileged students. After developing the curriculum and selecting a school fulfilling all requirements now the project required a partner who had experience of puppets so that the curriculum can be implemented in the most effective manner.

After careful market analysis, I shortlisted Gogi Studios to be our Puppet's Partner; Gogi Studios is a famous name in Pakistan and their primary work is women's rights and right to information act. In Pakistan the Puppetry landscape is scarce and thus very expensive. Gogi Studios team kept on reminding me that my proposed budget is extremely less; however, after my persuasion and their goodwill, I were able to negotiate a contract with them, whereby they took responsibility of organizing puppet shows, as long as my team wrote scripts for them. My Project Implementation Partner, Ms. Amna Yamin was instrumental in writing quality scripts in Urdu, which were in line with the curriculum guidelines. These scripts were later recorded and developed in full plays in the Gogi Studio's production studio.

This gave me legitimacy and leverage with our partner organizations. We started our work right after Eid Celebrations in Pakistan. I decided this date, because I wanted to tie in the timing of the summer camp

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with the Eid celebrations. This decision was advantageous for the children and they thoroughly enjoyed it, however, it was challenging for the partner organizations and their staff, because most organizations are resource constrained during Eid holidays.

Our volunteers were from diverse backgrounds and from the age group of 18 to 21. The volunteers initially were provided training of the curriculum. The summer camp proved to be not only to be educational but fun. Students were exposed to puppets in their learning environment for the first time in their lives and their participation was commendable. We had lessons on 'what is peace?', 'breaking stereotypes', 'celebrating diversity' etc. The stories were contextual, for instance in one story we highlighted how a chicken puppet didn't know the crow puppet because they didn't pray in the same 'mosque'. This was contextual as some students were Christians and the others were Muslim. The puppets in their story found the 'common thread' of cricket to connect and be friends, which is what children understood and appreciated. Activities involved concepts of negotiation, conflict management etc. tailored to children, for instance in one activity we gave four yellow candies to one group, four red to the other and so on and so forth. Then we allowed them to negotiate, until every child had each colored candy. Such activities encouraged children to use words instead of force. We also arranged a funfair where we distributed 'happy packets', i.e. a school bag and some stationery to each child, and had ice cream, face painting, puppets show and a lot more. Since, the families were poor, so we also made ration packets for students to carry back home.

This project is the first step towards understanding the nexus between early childhood education and peace building. This intervention was specifically designed to experiment and pilot the applicability of a curriculum that attempts to teach about peace building to a very young audience. We feel that this is a first step towards a series of experiments and research that build a case for introducing peace building education within early child-education curriculum in the long run.

Personally this project empowered me and gave me the means to champion an idea from conception to implementation. It allowed me to discover my own leadership potential and build confidence that I can achieve something as serious and important as this. Spending time with the children changed me in a very unique way. Till now, I cared about my dream to set this up, to prove it can be done etc. but somewhere down the lane I realized, it was not my dream that was important, it was their dream and their imagination that really mattered. Equality of human beings is an elusive concept, I am lucky to have had the education I do, but I wanted better for the children I was working with. Was it possible? What is realistic? Those were the questions that started to continue to plague my mind. So yes, the project changed me, it changed my way of thinking, and it allowed me re-discover and re-align my priorities.

*PeacefulPuppets is not a project, it's a movement. It is a movement to enable children to question conflict, and be exposed to the tools of peace building from a very early age. I believe that peace is a conscious choice and teaching children about peace at an early age can lead to a peaceful world. My experience in this project has re-affirmed my belief that there is a need to experiment and develop concrete scalable and interactive curriculum (using props like low-cost puppets) that can be incorporated within early childhood education to train children to settle disputes using their words and not their hands at a very early age. (Muhammad Affan Javed)*

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Meet the Wise Baba: Baba was a favorite character amongst children. He doesn't like to fight, therefore he always resolves his conflicts by talking.



Meethi the puppet was very popular amongst children. She loved to fight, but would also listen to Baba's advice and resolve her fights through lessons learned in her classes.



The Teaching Team at SAYA School