FINDING PEACE WITH QUALITY EDUCATION

India has a population of about 1.3 billion people, but nearly 92 million children, 20% of all eligible kids in India, struggle to receive education. With 21.2% of India's population living in poverty, 7.8 million children work while attending school and another 84 million children don't even attend school. Lack of access to education is inhibiting these children from living in peace. Even with the Right to Education Act that makes school compulsory for children ages 6-14, 29 out of 100 girls and boys are forced to drop out by their parents to help at home before completing elementary school (UNICEF).

Students going to school still struggle to get a proper learning experience. 1 in 40 primary schools in India are held in inadequate tents or open spaces with unqualified teachers and little resources like pencils and chalkboards (Borgen Project). Poor quality teaching and learning practices result in lower school attendance while making it harder for students to succeed. Lack of quality education is inhibiting these children from living in peace. They aren't provided with relevant textbooks, dedicated and experienced teachers, or STEAM opportunities given in other countries.

Education is rare for students, but STEAM education is even rarer. As STEAM careers become more significant, teaching these skills to students is crucial for their fundamental learning. With this, they can create the tools necessary to improve their home conditions while changing the world. A study recently conducted by IBM STEM for Girls and Quest Alliance found that most educated girls in India have goals to pursue STEAM jobs in medicine, engineering, agriculture, and scientific research. However, they are faced with challenges that inhibit them from reaching these goals. 23% of these obstacles are from societal stereotypes and family pressure, 19% are from lack of organization support, and 10% are caused by the difference in their abilities (Market Watch). Preventing them from reaching their dreams is inhibiting these children from living in peace. This is not only a challenge found in India, but across the globe. In countries such as China, Costa Rica, Indonesia, Mexico, and South Africa, 64%, 51%, 53%, 53%, and 51% of young adults respectively have not reached upper secondary education in 2017 (World Economic Form).

Why does lack of education result in poverty and inhibit peace? According to the University of the People, "[t]hose who get an education have higher incomes, have more opportunities in their lives, and tend to be healthier. Societies benefit as well. Societies with high rates of education completion have lower crime, better overall health, and civic involvement." The article continues, "Lack of access to education is considered the root of poverty. Not getting an education can lead to a cycle of poverty. However, access to education can mean getting out of that cycle." These statements are further supported by Michigan State University. When students are provided with quality education, they can think critically and solve challenges that arise in their daily lives. When provided with resources such as money, they spend it in the right place to help them and those around them thrive. It builds confidence in students and can help them find a better life for generations that come after. They can build strong connections with the world around them and bring peace throughout society because they were able given the opportunity. Instead of giving them tools, we need to teach students how to use those tools, so they learn to operate in the world of STEAM that is built today.

Students who are provided with quality education will be able to utilize their newly gained skills and information to bring themselves out of poverty and into a standard living condition. George Mendel. Rosa Parks. These are just a few of the many influential people that originated from families of poverty and distress but were able to overcome these challenges. George Mendel, motivated by curiosity, was named the father of genetics after explaining the phenomenon behind traits in pea plants though financial struggles made it extremely difficult to fund his studies. Rosa Parks, being an African American woman, advocated for civil rights and an end to racial segregation though she lost her job and was placed in a difficult financial position. These influential people were

able to use their educational skills to spark forever lasting changes in our world's economy, and we should continue to promote their stories in the students who are not as unfortunate. We need to develop this mindset in students who are put through struggles day after day. We need to lead them on a path where they never give up and continue moving towards their bright future, one step at a time. That's how we bring peace to students.

As students who are lucky to have quality education, we can begin changing the equation. We can bring peace to these students by giving them the education they deserve. In doing so, we can also bring peace to ourselves as we help our community.

To accomplish this, I propose an effective 4-step plan. First, awareness of STEAM and its impact needs to be spread. Students will find solutions to daily challenges they face, preparing them for entrepreneurship, innovation, and the critical thinking necessary to bring themselves out of poverty. Next, resources and funding will be provided to underprivileged communities, and school fees will be paid for those who cannot afford it. More students will be able to attend school while helping their families and getting a sophisticated educational experience. Afterward, a rigorous teacher training system will be implemented to prepare teachers so they can be entrusted to improve educational standards. Lastly, remote outreaches and events that challenge the next generation of young thinkers in India will continue to improve. These interdependent steps lay the foundation to bringing peace globally like never before.

I have already begun an effort by co-founding a non-profit organization called *Robotics for All (https://www.roboticsforall.us/)* which strives to spread STEAM education to all communities. We have impacted around 500 people through over 150 hours of outreach, and we continue to do more every week. We are promoting peace by giving quality STEAM education, and I encourage my peers to stand by me and other STEAM efforts to continue this. We can bring peace to the world by sharing our educational opportunities, so let's spark the change. Let's spark peace.

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