Read Aloud with Kashmir

Azad Kashmir, Pakistan
Georgetown University
Janeeta Shaukat | Georgetown University| USA

Background:

The education system is often the first form of structural violence that children face, and it is a key factor that perpetuates social and economic inequalities in Azad Kashmir, Pakistan. This is a region in turmoil as it is the battleground between India and Pakistan, two countries that want to claim Kashmir as their own. Meanwhile, the majority of Kashmiris who desire self-determination find their voices silenced. Amidst this chaos, Kashmiris find very few ways to take charge of their future—a lack of quality education in Kashmir fuels a never-ending cycle of poverty over generations. The funding from this project will work with the most vulnerable parts of this community and provide them with the educational opportunities and tools to create a better future for themselves. This capacity building project will build positive peace in a region shattered by ongoing violence and instability. The three parts of this project include teacher training, student training, and providing essential resources to schools in need.

Community Partnership:

Kashmir is a place that I call home and where most of my family resides. For the past five summers, I have volunteered in the schools in this community as a teacher's helper. During this time, I also conducted a comparative study of nine different Government, Independent, and Private Schools in Rawalakot, Azad Kashmir. Using questionnaires, interviews, and quizzes, I found lack of teacher training, language barriers, limited material, and unaffordable fees to be statistically significant variables correlated with decreased student academic success. To mitigate these barriers, my community partners and I have developed a multifaceted approach that will work with teachers, students, and resources to implement change.

I will be partnering with many schools in Rawalakot, Azad Kashmir, my leading community partner being Miri Roshini Academy. Miri Roshni Academy (MRA) is an organization that was established in 2006 to provide shelter, food, protection, and education to orphan children. Currently, there are 60 children residing in MRA in six different homes under the supervision of one foster mother and other supporting staff. The institute provides them with shelter, food, clothing, education, and other necessities. Additionally, there are 400 students enrolled in Miri Roshni School, including MRA children and other low-income students from the community. I have worked in this school for several years and have collaborated with the principal and trustees of this organization to develop this project. Miri Roshni School will serve as my pilot school for the training workshops, and I will branch out to other schools in need with the help of Mr. Khursheed, an administator who oversees private schools and colleges in Rawalakot.

Execution:

The purpose of this project is to empower those in and working for the Kashmiri Education System to provide them with the skills and resources to become a catalyst for change in their communities. Rather than solely injecting tangible resources, this project works to develop the capacity and skills of local community members to make them effective leaders. By centering the project around the read-aloud literacy curriculum, I aim to build a welcoming environment that encourages young students to come to school regularly. Through consistent read-aloud practices, students will develop critical thinking and communication skills that will build their effectiveness as leaders. Lastly, these read-aloud activities will instill a love of learning in students that will stimulate their imagination. By targeting different parts of the education system, this project aims to create a long-lasting and sustainable impact on the Kashmiri community.

The first part of the project will consist of teacher training workshops. I will first lead these workshops at Miri Roshini School. Teachers will be required to attend about five training sessions on topics that I will finalize in March and April after feedback from professors and faculty in the following departments at Georgetown University: Justice and Peace; Education, Inquiry and Justice; Disabilities Studies; the Community Scholars Program; and the Center for Social Justice. Some tentative training topics include technology training, social-emotional learning, read-aloud training and educating the whole child.

The second part of this project will provide similar training for upper-level students with our partnering schools. The sessions will provide students with skills to help them with their own academic and professional journey. Some tentative topics include cura personalis, reflecting on the intersectionality of identity, technology training, and résumé building. The students will also be given a session on the importance of read-aloud for young children and how to conduct read-aloud effectively. This training will allow students to practice their English skills, create a mentor/mentee bond with younger students, and inspire a love of reading in younger students.

As an incentive, I hope to offer both teachers and students a certificate through the Center for Social Justice at Georgetown University. Teachers will be required to help me facilitate at least one training at other schools to get their certification. Students will be required to conduct a read-aloud for students in younger grades for a set amount of hours in their respective schools as a part of the certification. Thus, this training not only provides teachers and students with a toolset but empowers them to spread their knowledge.

The last part of this project will consist of providing schools in need with resources. A portion of the grant will sponsor students in the community whose family income serves as a barrier to obtaining an education. The funding will also buy books, setting the foundation for a community library in each school. Another portion of the budget seeks to increase access to literacy through technology like kindles and headphones in school community libraries. I will also be connecting with partners to see if any students require glasses or hearing aids, and those will be provided as needed.

Sustainability:

One of the goals of this project is not only to provide resources but skills to the members of the education sector in Kashmir. While this project will set the foundations for community libraries for children, it will also provide teachers and students with skills that will allow them to take these resources and amplify their impact. Upper-classmen will be given the opportunity to become leaders and role models of read aloud in their respective schools. Academically, this will help younger children learn to read and build their vocabulary. Additionally, it also empowers the tutors and shows them that they can impact future generations. These read-aloud practices will also foster a supportive community and will encourage students to come to school. To help implement a system to continue to teacher trainings, teachers will be asked to help me facilitate training in other schools. This will empower teachers and show them their impact on the larger community. Furthermore, this practice will allow teachers from different schools to meet each other, share resources, and build a stronger network. The impact of the teacher training will trickle down to the students, the training for upper-level students will trickle down to younger students, and in this way, the project will have a sustainable and long-lasting effect. More importantly, it will empower individials to use their skills and roles to help their community.

Conclusion:

While I cannot protect children in Kashmir from the violence or poverty that surrounds them, through my Davis Peace Project, I can equip them with the tools to take charge of their education. This project will target students' socio-emotional well-being through read-aloud and empower older students and teachers to become better leaders while also providing essential resources to the community. By investing in the skills and resources of this community, we are investing in positive peace for the future of this region.

						TOTAL FUNDS REMAINING:		
Name: Janeeta Shaukat								
Project Name: Read Aloud with Kashmir								
School: Georgetown University								
						TOTAL FUNDS REMAINING:		
							0	
Total Additional Funding:		TBD based on fundraising				**TOTAL EXPENDITURES:**		
							10000	

Student Expenses						Project Expenses						
Travel (Including Airfare)		**Lodging**	**Communications**	**Food (Biweekly)**	**Miscellaneous**	**Non-Student Travel and Lodging**	**Direct Equipment and Supplies**		**Marketing and Event Support**		**Staffing Costs**	**Miscellaneous**
Ticket to Pakistan	700	*Will be staying with family		*Covered by family			Portable Powerpoint Projector (to give trainings)	150	Student Training Event	250		Student tuition	2650
Travel to Schools, Meetings, Shopping for Supplies etc.	400						Poster Paper, Markers, Masks and Hand Sanitizer etc for Trainings	400	Teacher Training Support	250		
							Uniforms, School Supplies for Students in Need	1200				
							Books	2000				
							Technology to Increase Literacy Access (Kindles, Headphones, other based on need)	2000				
	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total	Total		Total		Total	Total	Total
	1100	0	0	0	0	0		**5750**		500	0	2650

Total Student Expenses:			**Total Project Expenses:**	
1100			8900	