

**International House NY**

**Yuxi (Jocelyn) Liu**

*Bridging Divides Through Peace Education and Art Integration*

**Wuhan, China**

## **1. Background**

COVID-19 two years on. 5.54 million lives lost. 328 million people have been infected across the world as of Jan 16, 2022 (Data source: WHO report). As the United Nations chief said: "This pandemic is the gravest disaster for humanity since World War II". Yes, the Covid-19 is one of the most dangerous challenges the world had faced in our lifetime. The coronavirus was first detected in the city of Wuhan, Hubei, China, in December 2019. Wuhan was then infamous the world over as it referred to as the "virus origins". "China Virus", "Wuhan Virus" has been proliferated on news sites and in political commentaries, which led to a tremendous increase in acts and displays of prejudice, xenophobia, discrimination, stigmatization, and violence against people of Wuhan, and broadly to a tsunami of Asian hate crimes and racism around the world.

I was born in a city close to Wuhan, and I witnessed firsthand stories from my relatives living in Wuhan about their sufferings, frustrations, and sorrows. One day, I was on a phone call with my nephew, a 5-year-old boy who came back from a summer boot camp. He told me he had a physical fight with his classmates, and I wondered what happened. He uttered that his classmates called him "Wuhan Bastard", and "People from Wuhan are not welcome here". I was shocked. While the whole world is trying to combat the pandemic's upheaval, the struggles and challenges of children's social life and emotional wellbeing have been disregarded. How did the pandemic affect the children? Where did the kids learn those words? How will kids be shaped by the coronavirus crisis? These questions drew my attention. As the world continues to experience the turmoil and unrest of the pandemic, I realized that now more than ever we need to teach and learn peacebuilding and conflict resolution. My project is to initiate a peace education project for children in the city of Wuhan, China, the original outbreak of the pandemic.

Mahatma Gandhi once said, "If we are to teach real peace in this world, we shall have to begin with the children." I believe that early years of peace education is critically important because it lays the foundation of how children view the world. Art is a miracle remedy for peace as it can be a great tool to heal, inspire and influence people and bring people together through its capacity to tell a community's shared story and form connections that transcend differences.

## **2. Description of the project**

This proposed Davis Project for peace, in partnership with Yu Miao School located in Wuhan, China, aims to provide peace education with art integration to children in the city of Wuhan, and empower them with the conflict resolution skills and peaceful values that will lead them to a constructive process of peacebuilding in their own communities, and to a sustainable society of resilience, empathy, and positive transformation in these unprecedented times.

Yu Miao School is a pioneer elementary school in China integrating “Positive Education” into the classroom, which is very different from the traditional “Force-feeding Duck Style” teaching method which only focuses on the students’ grades. Yu Miao means “carefully planting and nurturing young sprouts” in Chinese. This Davis Project for Peace has been approved by the school principal and will be conducted on one of its campuses. A program coordinator for this project from the school has been assigned. The program will lead by Yuxi Liu, a graduate from Columbia University who majored in Negotiation and Conflict Resolution with extensive experience in the field, and a teaching certificate in China. Four volunteer educators from the Association of Conflict Resolution agreed to help design the program and contents. 15 teachers from Yu Miao School will be trained. The program is estimated to serve 200 participants aged from 5 to 12 years old.

The project will be implemented from June 27 to Aug 19<sup>th</sup>, 2022 (8 weeks) with two 4-week components: *Peace Education* (June 27 to July 22, 2022) and *Art Integration* (July 25 to Aug 19, 2022). The first is conflict resolution instruction and training delivered through workshops, speaker series, documentaries, and book discussions. Themes covered: “Conflict Resolution”, “Social-Emotional Competency”, “Non-Violence Communication”, “Peer Mediation”, “Bullying Prevention”, “Prejudice Reduction”, “Reconciliation” and “Character and Values”. The second component of the project will be art integration through a variety of forms, such as *writing, poetry, drawing, painting, singing, acting, storytelling, and filmmaking*. Through creativity, imagination, and fun learning activities, students will learn values like cooperation, respect, fairness, kindness, honesty, and ethics that build character.

### **3. Proposed Activities**

#### **Phase 1: Preparation (May 23 to June 24, 2022)**

- Design curriculums, select and purchase books and other teaching materials.
- Reach out to volunteers and educators via virtual meetings and topic discussions.
- Design educational brochures, worksheets, questions, handouts, and toolkits.

#### **Phase 2: Implementation (June 27 to Aug 19, 2022)**

- Weekly educational workshops, and art activities and performances.
- Project showcase at the end of the project and a completion ceremony.

#### **Phase 3: Evaluation (Aug 22 to Aug 31, 2022)**

- Qualitative analysis throughout data collection, survey, focus group, and interviews.
- Quantitative analysis throughout participants numbers, satisfaction rate, etc.

### **4. Sustainability and Impact**

This project is the first of its kind of peace education in China to increase conflict resolution awareness among young children in this unprecedented time. We hope at the end of the project, peace will become a possibility that transcends mere promises. The project will keep running going forward with the team members in the pilot group, and the peacebuilding curricula will become an integral part of peace education in the future classroom. Future sustainable ideas: build a mini library to share books in the peacebuilding and conflict resolution field; open an art gallery to exhibit students’ peace artworks on the school bulletin board.