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Making Connections: Wholistic Teaching Through Peace Education

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Abstract

Educating for peace at the primary level is more critical now than ever before, as our students struggle to choose and emulate the models of peace education that stand before them. Continuously facing a sensationalized picture of war, students must not learn from the media generated models that stand before them in a time of war. Instead, education must equip students with alternatives to violence. Thus, teachers must provide students with opportunities to explore their feelings about war, and learn about peaceful alternatives to conflict resolution. Further, students must learn to challenge the assumptions that traditions have put into place, to ensure that the tenets of peace education preside over inequity that is structural and has gone unquestioned for too long.

Introduction

> "*… there are no simple answers to how education can contribute towards disarmament and development. But increasing awareness through education seems to be a way towards the kind of mobilisation that is necessary…* "
>
> –Magnus Haavelsrud, Ed., Disarming: Discourse on Violence and Peace, p. 285.

All across Canada, teachers are involved in educating their students about peace education. Under the guise of many names, such as Education for Conflict Resolution, International Understanding, and Human Rights; Global Education; Critical Pedagogy; Education for Liberation and Empowerment; Social Justice Education; Environmental Education; Life Skills Education; Disarmament and Development Education, peace education is not a new phenomenon, nor are the greater issues that accompany its need (United Nations Publications, 2003). Surrounded by such a vast amount of literature, it is clear that there is no direct path to

educating for peace, nor is there a Band-Aid solution to ease the malaise and fears of children regarding the atrocities which they witness either directly or via media. It is difficult to explain the reasons for war, but when working with children, one must always be prepared to help students seek out answers to the tough questions.

The aim of this paper is to help direct educators through some of the research and current documentation of peace education as they attempt to guide their students through the tumultuous tides of the war. Educating for peace at the primary level is more critical now than ever before, as our students struggle to choose and emulate the models of peace education that stand before them. Continuously facing a sensationalized picture of war, students must not learn from the media generated models that stand before them in a time of war. Instead, education must equip students with alternatives to violence. Thus, teachers must provide students with opportunities to explore their feelings about war, and learn about peaceful alternatives to conflict resolution. Further, students must learn to challenge the assumptions that traditions have put into place, to ensure that the tenets of peace education preside over inequity that is structural and has gone unquestioned for too long.

Review of the Readings

As we continually question the objectives and goals of the Social Studies curriculum, it is imperative that the concerns and questions of students be integrated into what is being addressed in the classroom. Meaningful learning requires that students be engaged in thinking that both interests and motivates them to inquire and discover for themselves. In one study, when students were asked to rank their major concerns for the future, they indicated concerns regarding "…unemployment [as it] was the most frequently mentioned, followed closely by nuclear weapons and war, then violence and crime" (Hicks, 1988, p. 3). Even more prudent in terms of present circumstance, it seems only natural that students be concerned about violence and war, as glorified representations of conflicts are continually brought to our attention through various media. Although it is critical to address the controversial events that impact students, it is important to consider all of the factors that accompany the intense nature of like issues.

The pedagogy that teachers employ must consider the developmental stage of the child, as well as the individual understandings and circumstances surrounding each child in the classroom. Thus, "Education for peace, then, is an attempt to respond to the problems of conflict and violence on scales ranging from the global and national to the local and personal" (Hicks, 1988, p.5). As children begin to define their own ideas of war between the ages of six and seven, it is evident that peace education is a requirement at the primary level so as to further develop their personal relationship with and conceptual understanding of peace (Hicks, 1988). Hicks (1988) supports a program that begins with the development of self. Based on the expanding horizons framework, Hicks (1988) asserts that changes for peace must begin with the development of self-respect. By providing students with opportunities to engage in the process of learning, Hicks (1988) encourages teachers to act as facilitators as students develop the critical understandings of self and their individual experiences with peace. As the author notes, beyond the foundation building and exploration of 'self', as it connects and relates to the surrounding world, the aim of peace education is to "…help pupils to understand the world in which they live, and the interdependence of individuals, groups, and nations" (Hicks, 1988, p. 9).

For Hicks (1988), a curriculum based on inquiry, respect, and understanding, will encourage students to look for structural inequities in their personal surroundings. It is thus hoped that

students who are uncomfortable with the assumed understandings and accepted 'Truths' will hunger for answers to the difficult questions regarding structural inequities or power distributions (Hicks, 1988). This form of questioning will inevitably lead them to live out the global responsibility that lies before each individual demanding that they reach beyond themselves to the greater community and employ their critical thinking skills and empathetic, cooperative attitudes to resolve conflict peacefully and seek answers in the interest of developing a culture for peace. With expectations as great as these, we must move beyond socialization in the primary classroom as a means to peace education. Instead, we must program and implement strategies that will engage students in the process of developing attitudes to meet learning goals that promote care, concern, and commitment (Reardon, 1988).

Carson and Lange (1997) highlight two different approaches to peace education. The first offers students the opportunity to critically reflect and act upon the elements of peace such as cultural diversity, environmental issues, social responsibility, and global solidarity. Integral to the curriculum, students are faced with the challenges of facing the inequities that impede the development of a culture of peace. The second, or additive approach, sidelines peace education and devalues it to a simple and separate study of topics such as non-government organizations, and remains separate from the existing curriculum. Carson and Lange (1997) support the integrated approach and suggest that the key to effective peace education relies on instruction that is embedded throughout a child's program. The intent of addressing peace in every subject is that children will learn through the lived interconnectedness of the program; that to demonstrating peacefully conscious decision-making requires thought, foresight, and awareness of the vast web of relationships that exist beyond that which we bear witness. Reardon (1988) also addresses the dual approaches to peace education, but is less committed to either approach. With greater emphasis on introducing the tenets of peace education to students and involving them in the process, Reardon (1988) posits that implementing both the additive and 'infusion' approaches has the potential to offer a more balanced program.

Carson and Lange (1997) identify seven interconnected dimensions of a peace education program including human rights, non-violence, social justice, world mindedness, ecological balance, and meaningful participation. Mirroring Hicks (1988) and Toh Swee-Hin & Floresca-Cawagas (1987), the authors emphasize the seventh dimension, personal peace, as a critical aspect in the early developmental understandings of peace education that is often overlooked. In plural societies, where students struggle to weave the delicate fibers of their multiple identities into a manageable thread, students are faced with conflicting sets of core values from which they must create their individual belief systems. Advocating for the inclusion of cultural diversity as one of the core values underlying peace education, Reardon (1999) supports the promotion of cultural sensitivity so that individual differences are integrated into the vision and practice of peace education that embraces the dynamic nature of plural societies.

The linear progression of the peace education movement has seen a second duality with regards to the framing and defining of peace itself. In early years, peace was negatively stigmatized as it was defined in the absence of war. Many peace educators based their programs on this framework, focusing on anti-military, anti-war, and non-violence. Alternately, most peace educators now incorporate multi-faceted peace education programs that allow for more prescriptive and proactive approaches toward developing a culture of peace through education. This positive approach aims at promoting peaceful alternatives to conflict resolution and encourages educators to offer students an alternative lens from which to view peace. Human dignity resides as the central tenet in positive peace education, as it

promotes and encourages students to consider the greater capacity of humanity and the collective good. Helping students form global thinking skills based on the tenets of promoting the dignity of all people and stewardship of the planet, is the goal of this approach to peace education. The aim of this type of peace education program is to change the attitudes of future generations by guiding them to experience the impact of our choices in a world community in which we are all interconnected (Reardon, 1999). UNESCO provides an example of this transformation, as their stance on education for peace, as of the new millennium, has realigned itself with the more contemporary approach. Promoting the development of peaceful cultures in place of the previously existing program that promoted peace by advocating non-violence, UNESCO has recently reframed their peace education program and to endorse a more holistic approach.

Using human rights as the central tenet to her peace studies program, Reardon (1997) is a pioneer of the peace education movement. Although grounded in tertiary education, Reardon offers a number of curricular resources to guide both the primary and secondary classroom teachers through the various aspects of peace education. Acknowledging that peace education is a daunting and contentious area, Reardon's (1997) approach is proactive and supports the positive peace model as her focus on human rights is directed towards the creation of peaceful conditions rather than the elimination of violence and the causes of war (Andrepoulos & Claude (Eds), 1997). Although her research categorizes violence into three succinct domains, physical, political, and structural, Reardon (1997), like many of her contemporaries, uses the lens of human rights in order to observe the concrete experiences of violence. Using the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) as the framework for peace education, Reardon (1997) addresses the critiques that attempt to mislabel peace studies as indoctrination, laden with the values of the dominant culture. Reardon (1997) argues that peace education and human rights are both conceptually based on the principles of non-violence and thus human rights provide the foundation for peace education, as they establish the groundwork for social, political, and economic understandings that will inevitably lead to the creation of social cohesion and non-violent conflict resolution (Andrepoulos & Claude, 1997).

While Reardon accesses peace education through the framework of human rights, Jardine (1997) contends that there must first be an earth, before we concern ourselves with the continued existence of humanity, and thus we must tend to the immediate needs and issues pertaining to the earth. Using an ecological framework in the place of Reardon's socio-economic lens, Jardine (1997) highlights the advantages to implementing an integrated and "truly lived curriculum" in the context of peace education as he asserts that "Ignoring the ecological and spiritual consequences and character of the integrated curriculum plunges education into a peculiar paradox, and impossibility" (1997, p.216). In an effort to outline that it is truly a time to pose the question of how to educate to protect the environment and promote the principles of sustainability, we are warned against the "…strangulated approach to education [that] forgets that it is not accumulated curricular knowledge that we most deeply offer our children in education them… but literally their ability to live, their ability to be on an Earth that will sustain their lives" (Jardine, 1997, p.217).

Likewise, in his efforts to place ecological concerns at the "root of the cultural crisis", Selby introduces and endorses the ecological foundations to peace education (2000, p.88). Taking root in the industrial revolution when the human relationship with nature morphed from one of codependence and sustenance to one of "…unfettered license to exploit", Selby (2000) posits that the road to peace education must evolve and take on a "darker shade of green" should we truly wish to address the core issues facing our global community (2000, p.88).

Calling for a reconceptualization of the worldview, Selby (2000) alludes that both rebuilding and reconnecting to the earth are integral to the peace education process, however, educators must also recognize and address the obstacle imposed by the fragmentation inherent in our current practices. In their efforts to reestablish and redefine 'connectedness', Selby (2000) criticizes other peace education programs as "…reflect[ing] a higher order of reductionism (i.e., an intricate relationship between still separate parts)", as they are not founded in holistic frameworks (2000, p. 89). Selby (2000) identifies this separation as an obstacle to the process of education as it allows students to continue to perceive themselves as separate from the issues and concerns that do not directly affect their daily experiences.

Contradictory to Hicks (1988) and Carson & Lange (1997), Selby (2000) asserts that peace education must begin with a global focus, as we cannot separate ourselves from our "biotic community". Instead, Selby (2000) suggests that we must shift our idea of local from proximal to a "locality" that refers to the earth in its entirety (p.89). In shifting their focus from the more traditional pedagogy, in order to implement a greater variety of disciplines that provide students with varied opportunities to "…cultivate their attunement to their senses and body rhythms", primary educators will ultimately help students to develop a deeper, more connected understanding of both their role and relationship with the natural world (Selby, 2000, p.90). Drawing from the early traditions of indigenous teaching, Selby (2000) encourages peace educators to draw from a myriad of voices so as to allow for multiple ways of knowing and interpreting. "The question of how life on "this precious earth" can go on is a question of how the conversation between different voices can go on" (Jardine, 1997, p.218). Selby (2000) posits that developing ecological awareness requires a commitment to restructure many of the systematic inequities in an effort to deepen our understanding of that which stands in the way of peace.

In its early beginnings, peace educators sought a program that would unite students through the "…shared vision of the world without war and violence" (Johnson, 1998, p. 3). However, during the time of both World Wars, when involvement seemed the only means to resolve, "…peace education was vilified as being subversive" and those who spoke for it were deemed "un-American" (Johnson, 1998, p.3). The teachings from this research have resurfaced, and the adage plays true that history does indeed repeat itself. Once again, in the face of conflict where public perception plays an integral role, a dichotomous division has resurfaced and peace education has been sidelined in favor of education that promotes patriotism and nationalism under the guise of democratic principles and ironically, the preservation of human rights. As participants in peace protests have been identified as 'supporters of tyranny and terrorism' by the media, the current conflict has been reduced to a case of 'black and white'. Once again, at a time when education for peace is most essential, peace educators face obstacles and are required to refocus and shift their attention to a more positive approach to peace.

An Analysis

> "*The development of learning that will enable humankind to renounce the institution of war and replace it with institutions more consistent with the visions and values being articulated in the body of international standards ... remains the core of the peace education task*."
>
> - Betty Reardon, Peace Education: A Review and Projection, 1999, p. 31-32.

Exploration into the plight of humanity in an attempt to resolve and reconstruct by means of peace education is a daunting and courageous endeavor. As I read through the literature, I find myself grappling with my own teaching philosophy and the pedagogy that I employ. Ultimately, there are many brilliant academics connected to this area, and yet, their individual approaches speak to the ultimate weakness of this domain. Lacking an overall sense of accord, peace educators who share a common goal rely on diverse principles and seem unable to agree upon any one approach to reach their utopia, their culture of peace. The fact that both Hicks (1988) and Reardon (1997) address the importance of initiating a peace education program that begins at the primary level is a strength, as many educators often bypass this critical learning stage when considering controversial and sensitive issues. The knowledge and abilities of students at this level is often devalued, but we must consider that these students are equally exposed to the inequities and struggles that their elders face. The reality is that exposure to images of violence in uncontrolled settings that lack either guidance or support may result in the desensitization of children as they are forced to understand grim realities by their own definitions. Teaching students to respect themselves is a critical step in assuring that these students feel empowered to alter their surroundings, and as they learn to perceive their actions as they relate to others. Primary students who are introduced to the web of connections that tie us together and binds us into one collective humanity are better equipped to face the continued challenges that they will inevitably face as they grow.

Like Jardine (1997) who uses the concept of 'centre' to draw his students' attention to the abstract nature of connectedness to the earth, primary educators can employ the "centre" approach to help students understand the action-reaction pulse of each choice that they make. Providing students with understandings that begin with 'self' will empower them to relate to global issues. As they learn about their potential as agents for change, they will ultimately learn to consider the greater consequences imposed on others as a result of both their individual actions and choices.

Although they do not commit to integrating peace education at the primary level, the emphasis that Carson and Lange (1997) place on promoting personal peace leaves room for the inclusion of students of all ages. The multidimensional approach offers a variety of entrance points for educators who wish to implement peace education into their classrooms. By emphasizing the process, rather than the content of peace education, Carson and Lange (1997) have met the holistic needs of contemporary classrooms and have provided a framework that suits the diverse demands of plural educational settings. With continued reference to actual classroom practices, it is apparent (and necessary) that the process of peace education looks different in every setting.

Framing her work using the UDHR makes Reardon's approach to peace education is tough to contend with. Promoting the development of a culture of peace, her positive approach does not impose a specific methodology to assure that an effective program be implemented. Reardon (1997) takes a realistic stance, contending that teachers must implement peace education, but that they must also choose an approach that suits the situation and reflects the needs of the students.

Holistic by design, Selby (2000) purports a strong peace education program and offers curriculum guides that employ a sequential approach to rethinking the structure of relationships that are built in the classroom. By encouraging educators to link their efforts in peace education to environmental consciousness, Selby (2000) considers the implications of fragmentation and rejects other approaches that separate concerns into local, national, and

global levels. The strength in Selby's (2000) interpretation is that the global picture is central to all of the lessons in peace education and thus connections are implied, not forced.

An overall critique to the peace education program takes root in a sad generalization about our society. Peace education will only come to fruition in its most true sense by creating equity for all; those who serve to lose the most are also those who must initiate the questioning and dismantling of the structural inequities that have allowed them to advance and maintain both economic and political power and wealth. In a movement to decrease the gap between rich and poor, we cannot be sure that the oppressor will peacefully relinquish their power over the oppressed. When history has taught us that given the opportunity 'the oppressed often become the oppressor', it is difficult to believe that the tides of power may eventually level out. Even amongst those who strive to initiate peace education there is doubt that challenging existing power structures will end in resolve.

Theoretically, peace education is an obvious choice for educators. Teaching students to approach conflict with peaceful resolve in mind, will serve the greater interests of both global and school communities. Unfortunately, what has yet to be addressed is the practicality of any such program in the face of pressure that educators face with regards to meeting the demands of present curriculum standards and high stakes testing. In a system that relies on cohort results and numbers, the pressures incurred by provincial testing leave educators with little time to devote toward programs such as peace education in which progress is not easily graded. Inevitably, one of the many structural inefficiencies and obstacles that must be addressed is the rigidity of current school practices and provincial mandates that direct the attention of educators away from essential programming needs such as peace education.

The most obvious weakness in the pursuit of peace educators is expressed through my own inability to choose any one particular peace educator as a guide for my own teaching, and so instead I choose to draw from each of them. In essence, this speaks to the difficult nature of spearheading a universal education program for peace that serves each individual equally. Perhaps, our goal in peace education must focus on providing a curriculum that shares common aims while embodying flexibility in order to allow for the individuality that transpires in each of our classrooms to be realized as well. As an educator, one must do everything in their power to give students opportunities to view conflict from varying vantage points. Alternately, as students bring a variety of experiences with them to the classroom, their prior knowledge must be addressed in order to guide instruction practices and approaches. In a plural society where many students feel alienated due to any number of factors, it is imperative that these students be encouraged to express their feelings and negotiate their understandings so that they do not feel torn between the teachings at home and those in the classroom.

Using the positive peace framework, students must learn and experience the power of prevention and tolerance. Beyond the absence of war, we must reinforce that our choices determine the future and impact the actions of others. These belief systems must be put to the test in the classroom, as students must learn to live by this knowledge. Students will only be prepared to deal with the complicated decisions in life when their values have been strengthened under fire. We are building a strong foundation that will inevitably be put to the test and this must be supported throughout their schooling, adding to their understanding bit by bit each year, while challenging their preconceptions and assumptions along the way.

Implications for Teachers in the Social Studies Classroom

"*When we live our lives with the authenticity demanded by the practice of teaching that is also learning and learning that is also teaching, we are participating in a total experience…. In this experience the beautiful, the decent, and the serious form a circle with hands joined*."

- Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of Freedom, p. 31-32.

For many, peace education is a natural extension of the elementary classroom, but I would challenge all teachers to take a closer look at what they have deemed education to develop a culture of peace and tolerance. For too long, we have assumed that peace education is something that kids "do", and what we have forgotten is that it is not what they "do", but what we model and teach through example. The generation that will lead us into the future must be equipped with tools that offer alternatives to violence and military action. For this to occur, peace education must create the foundation for social studies instruction. Educators must find a place in every lesson where students are faced with the challenge of questioning and deconstructing learned 'truths' in an effort to make equitable decisions. There is a place in every activity and lesson where critical thinking can be integrated so as to provide students with settings that require conflict resolution. Peace education should not be a sidebar issue, nor should it simply supplement the existing curriculum. We must be committed to recreating curriculum where peace education lays the foundation, so that it is constantly reinforced as students develop each set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. In addition to increasing the time spent on critical reflection and questioning, as suggested by Carson and Lange (1997), I agree with Selby (2000) who feels that student must also engage in active listening. They must learn to actively listen to the voices around them, to the voices of the past, and to the voices with which many of us are no longer attuned to hearing (Jardine, 1997). In using this non-traditional and complex approach, many educators will have to learn to exchange knowledge with students and accept their roles as learners in this complex domain. Educators must learn to model tolerance by accepting and promoting that there are many ways of knowing, all equally valid and recognized in the classroom.

During my limited teaching experience, there have been many things that I have learned from the children in my care, and my teaching is fueled by the hope that I can continue to work with students with the same boundless faith. I have learned that children do not struggle to find the words to express their inner convictions because their beliefs are, in plain language, unfettered and simple. The children that I have worked with have taught me to believe in the possibility of human solidarity and the potential to preserve and return a dying planet to a healthy state. The children that I respect accept differences without having to be told that it is required of them, and they know that violence serves no end but to exclude and oppress those violated. Contrary to most adults, children believe in peace and it is our place as educators to nourish that belief and give them cause to pursue it with fervor and conviction. Clearly, the road to peace education is littered with obstacles, but we have yet to identify any aspect of social education that is clearly defined and uncontested. The tough questions are always the ones worth pursuing and the pursuit for peace education is no different, as it will require a committed collaborative effort on the part of educators to see that it becomes an integral part of the global classroom. "It may require that we listen to our children or to the voice of the Earth, even if listening is difficult, perhaps painful, perhaps disruptive of the clear and distinct boundaries we have set for ourselves and our children" (Jardine, 1997, p.219).

When speaking of the power of the integrated curriculum, Jardine (1997) expresses the

challenge of reformation. The process of integration necessitates that we face difficulty as an integral part of a truly lived and seamless curriculum. "Disruption of our deeply held beliefs" is what is required if we hope to truly establish a culture of peace, as the inequities run deeply into the foundation upon which we have established our existence. In facing the many obstacles that stand in the path towards attaining a culture of peace, we will be forced to rethink and restructure much of which is ingrained in our collective thinking. Surely, we can learn from the children who deserve nothing but our most dedicated and determined efforts as we attempt to guide them and work with them to create a culture of peace.

Personal Retrospective

> *"Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men*
> *than defences of peace*
> *must be constructed "*
>
> -Constitution of UNESCO, 1945

Faced with the challenge of teaching in a bilingual school has been a very humbling experience for me. I have had to face many of my own prejudices and have had to carefully examine both my actions and the assumptions that I have made along the way. During my first year of teaching, I was very fortunate to work at a school where the Instructional Focus was Character Education. Occupied with the typical concerns of a first year teacher, I had not put a lot of thought into the values that I hoped would be transmitted in my teaching, and thus my critical error was that I relied on 'hope' to transmit the foundation of my working relationship with the students in my charge. Thankfully, my second grade students were 'experts' and were able to supply me with a list of character traits that each student had learned in their previous year at the school, and followed in order to be considered true citizens of the school. It amazed me how as the months went on, students were able to use the language of our character education program, not only in the classroom but also on the playground and in their everyday lives. I was also struck by the number of students who were able to repeat the slogans of our program, but completely lacked a practical use for them, as they were unable to activate their meanings. To many, character education was nothing more than a memorized routine.

Although it shares some of the tenets that serve peace education, character education appeals to educators for two reasons. First, it offers reform from previous programs such as the controversial and contested values education of the 70's. Second, character education tends to come packaged and ready for use and is thus easily and quickly implemented. I had assumed that character education was the answer, but I now feel that I was mistaken. Unfortunately, character education lacks the impact that peace education offers, as the latter requires that students learn to 'walk the walk' as they seek to find answers and equity in the world around them. More global in its focus, peace education promotes a 'process' that students experience as they explore and challenge the wrongs of the past, to promote a more sustainable future. Peace education attempts to alter the vision that students have of their future, helping them to look inside themselves and through a multitude of lenses in order to see how they are connected to the Earth and to her kin. Unlike the character education program, students are integral in the decision making process, and must select and chart their course to peace.

Peace education has presented itself as one aspect of social studies that may ultimately serve to link a fragmented body of knowledge together. By providing a collective goal for students and educators alike, it may also serve to unite the fragmented collection of students in current

classroom settings throughout the nation. It is evident that although there are numerous readings connected to this area of study, there continues to remain room for exploration in this vast domain and my intention is to pursue and further explore this topic as it relates to the primary classroom. Peace education outlines the multiple areas that require further examination including cultural beliefs in relation to gender perspective, as well as perspectives from various economic standings, with an emphasis on those who live below the poverty line. Above all, in-depth research is required to provide the basis for policy-making to help ensure that curricular changes address this critical domain of social education.

My passion for character education has now progressed, as I look to peace education to further my knowledge as a learner, as well as my ability as a facilitator in the classroom. When I look into the eyes of my students and listen to their questions and thoughts regarding our current global issues, I am left with feelings of hope and pride. By nurturing their innate good and modeling the tenets of peace education, I put my complete trust in their ability to repair the wrongs imposed on both the people of this earth and the earth itself.

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