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## Towards a Holistic Approach to Peace Education: a Philippine Perspective

### Abstract:

The article asserts that educating people towards becoming peace agents is central to the task of peacebuilding. Peace education is viewed as both a significant peacebuilding strategy in the case of post-conflict situations and an effective way of preventing violent conflict. The article seeks to provide a holistic view of what the field is about and to explain a schema that has been developed through many years of practice. It ends with ideas on the peace educator's role as well as the need for a whole school approach and for a vision for the future.

### Zusammenfassung:

Der Artikel stellt heraus, dass die Erziehung von Menschen zu Friedensakteuren eine zentrale Bedeutung für Friedensprozesse hat. Friedenspädagogik ist in diesem Kontext sowohl eine bedeutende Strategie zur Friedenssicherung in Postkonfliktsituationen als auch eine effektive Art der Prävention vor dem Ausbruch gewaltvoller Konflikte. Dabei wird ein ganzheitlicher Ansatz der Friedenspädagogik vertreten und ein diesbezügliches Schema vorgestellt, das über viele Jahre friedenspädagogischer Praxis entwickelt wurde. Der Beitrag schließt mit Anregungen zur Rolle von Friedenspädagogen mit der Begründung für einen friedenspädagogischen Ansatz, der die ganze Schule in allen ihren Facetten einschließt und mit einer Vision für die Zukunft.

### Preliminary remarks

Educating for a culture of peace is a huge challenge, but it is also a cause that is very important and one that needs to be pursued with commitment. This writer is convinced that peace education is a crucial key towards opening up possibilities for a positively transformed future, for both humanity and our planet.

The greatest resource for building a culture of peace are the people themselves, for it is through them that peaceful relationships and structures are created. Hence, educating people toward becoming peace agents is central to the task of peacebuilding. Peacebuilding refers generally to the long-term project of building peaceful communities. One can readily see how peace education is therefore both a significant peacebuilding strategy (as in the case of a post-conflict situation) and an effective way of preventing violent conflict.

In a peacebuilding framework developed in the Philippines, peace constituency-building is indicated as an important element (cf. Ferrer 2005, p. 15). The latter includes education aimed at promoting a peace culture and agenda.

### What Is Peace Education?

Peace education is essentially transformative. It cultivates the knowledge base, skills, attitudes and values that seek to transform people's mindsets, attitudes and behaviors that, in the first place, have either created or exacerbated violent conflicts. It seeks this transformation by building awareness and understanding, developing concern and challenging personal and social action that will enable people to create conditions and systems that actualize nonviolence, justice, environmental care and other peace values.

Sadly, social injustice, war and other forms of violence have long been features of our human condition. They have caused death, destruction and horrific suffering but humanity has not yet been able to wage a successful collective effort to transform this condition. With universal peace education there is some hope that we may be able to move toward having a critical mass that will demand and work for the needed changes. As Cora Weiss, president and initiator of the Hague Appeal for Peace, has aptly said:

There are many campaigns that are working on a variety of issues which must be addressed if this new century is not to carry forward the legacy of the twentieth century, the most violent and war-filled in history. All these campaigns are needed if we are to sow seeds for peace and the abolition of war, but none can succeed without education... The Hague Appeal for Peace has decided that to sustain a long-term change in the thought and action of future generations... our best contribution would be to work on peace education (cf. Weiss, in Cabezudo and Reardon 2002, p. 4).

In the Philippines, the Center for Peace Education in Miriam College and other groups have expressed that educating for peace is both a practical alternative and an ethical imperative.

### Peace Education as Practical Alternative

Educating for peace will give us in the long run the practical benefits that we seek. As stated earlier it is expected to build a critical mass of people who will demand for and address the needed personal and structural changes that will transform the many problems that relate to peace into nonviolent, humane and ecological alternatives and solutions.

To illustrate, we know that war has been a core institution of the global security system then and now. It has adversely affected countless generations, considering its human costs as well as its material and environmental costs. It has also led to the rationalization of violence in so many aspects of life. It has given birth to horrendous phenomena such as war-time rape and sex-slavery, ethnic cleansing and genocide. And yet,

there is widespread belief that war is inevitable. War is accepted as a legitimate means to pursue the so-called national interests. War carries with it a host of other elements: amassing armaments, increasing military forces, inventing more and more sophisticated and destructive weapons, developing espionage skills and technology, and subordinating human rights and the use of torture on enemies, etc.

Peace education challenges the long-held belief that wars cannot be avoided. Often this belief is based on an underlying view that violence is inherent in human nature. Peace education challenges this view and encourages people to seek alternatives to violence and seek ways by which violent conflict can be prevented. Political advocacy of nonviolent resolution of conflict is a key element of peace education and you can just imagine the benefits that will be reaped when this becomes the dominant mindset and value in our country and in the world! The Philippines still suffer from armed conflicts and this makes peace all the more important in our context.

On the micro-level, education on nonviolent conflict resolution approaches (an important aspect of peace education), such as collaborative problem solving and mediation, can improve the quality of human relationships and bring about solutions that are constructive, fair and helpful to all parties concerned.

### Peace Education is an Ethical Imperative

Educating for peace is an ethical imperative considering the negation of life and well-being caused by all forms of violence. The ethical systems of the major world faith traditions, humanitarian ethics and even primal and indigenous spirituality have articulated principles that inspire the striving for peace. These ethical principles include the unity and value of life, not only of human life but also of other life forms in nature; respect for human dignity; nonviolence; justice; and love as a social ethic. They are principles that are highly encouraged for actualization because they are expected to bring us to the common good.

It is for this reason that peace education includes the study of the shared values of diverse faiths and spiritual traditions, to show that despite our diversity, we share the same humanity and the same fundamental aspirations for respect and acceptance, and for fair treatment.

### Schema of Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes/Values

The following schema is an attempt to list the key knowledge areas, skills, attitudes and values that are integral to peace education. The list is based on a survey of peace education literature and of key informants/peace educators that was done by the Center for Peace Education of Miriam College. The list is not

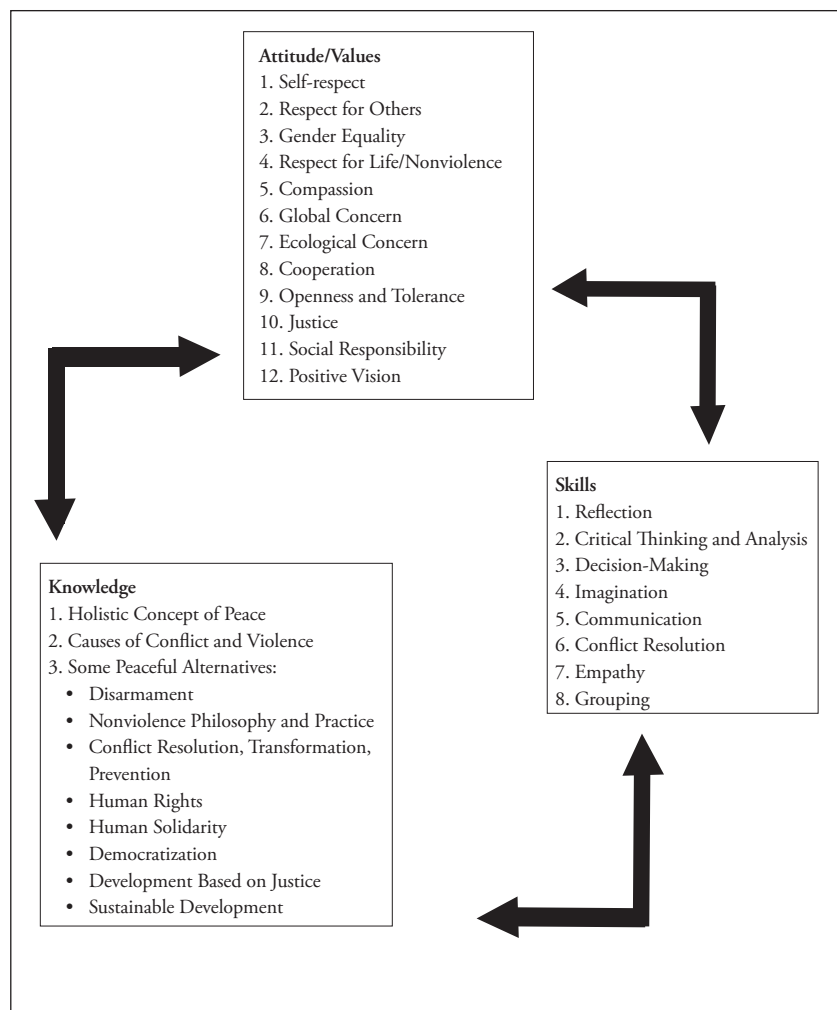


Fig. 1: Scheme of Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes/Values

exhaustive and is expected to evolve, as peace education practice and experiences as well as corresponding reflections and insights on these experiences increase. The diagram is followed by a brief explanation of each item found in the schema.

### Education for Peace: List of Knowledge Areas, Skills and Attitudes/Values

#### Knowledge/Content Areas in the Peace Education Scheme

Some of the knowledge or content areas that are integral to peace education are:

1. A Holistic Concept of Peace: It is important that students understand that peace is not just the absence of direct/physical violence but also the presence of conditions of well-being, cooperation and just relationships in the human and ecological spheres. This perspective will help them analyze peace issues in an integrated way.
2. Conflict and Violence: Conflicts are a natural part of person's social life, but they become problems of violence depending on the methods of conflict resolution used. Students can study the problems of violence in various levels from the personal to the global and including direct, structural, socio-cultural and ecological violence. They can also examine the roots and consequences of violence.

3. Some Peaceful Alternatives:
  - a. Disarmament – Learners can be introduced to the goal of abolishing war and reducing global armed forces and armaments. It is good for them to see the folly of excessive arms and military expenditures and the logic of re-allocating resources toward the fulfillment of people's basic needs (e.g. food, housing, health care and education). This a springboard for the exploration of the meaning of true human security which springs from the fulfillment of both basic needs and higher needs of humans (e.g., the exercise of fundamental freedoms).
  - b. Nonviolence – Learners can study the philosophical and spiritual underpinnings of nonviolence as well as its efficacy as a method to effect change. Cases of individuals and groups who have advocated nonviolence as a philosophy and method can be examined. Some of these are Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Aung San Suu Kyi, Thich Nhat Hanh, Desmond Tutu and Wangari Maathai.
  - c. Conflict Resolution, Transformation and Prevention – Students can study effective ways of resolving conflicts nonviolently (e.g., collaborative problem-solving) and how these can be applied into their lives. They can move on to examine how a conflict that has been resolved can be transformed into a situation that is more desirable. Ways to prevent conflict can also be explored because as Johan Galtung has said, like in the medical field it is better to prevent than “remedy a situation that has gone wrong.”
  - d. Human Rights – It is important for learners to have an integral understanding of human rights and to reject all forms of repression and discrimination based on beliefs, race, ethnicity, gender and social class. They should be encouraged to respect the dignity of all especially the weak and powerless.
  - e. Human Solidarity – Many commonalities bind together divergent religious, cultural, local and national groups. All humans have common basic needs and aspirations and a shared membership in an interdependent human/ global community. We have only one home (planet earth) and a common future. The major world religions also have shared values and principles. Students can look at how to increase inter-religious, inter-cultural and inter-group trust, empathy, respect and cooperation, as well as discourage stereotyping and prejudice.
  - f. Development Based on Justice – Learners can be made critically aware of the realities and tragic consequences of structural violence and how a philosophy of development based on justice is a preferred alternative. They need to understand that development is not economic growth alone but also the equitable sharing of its fruits.
  - g. Democratization – It is important for learners to understand that democracy provides the environment in which people's fundamental rights and interests are respected.
  - h. Sustainable Development – Learners need to understand the interdependent relationship between humans and the natural environment and understand the changes that are necessary to ensure the well-being of the earth's ecosystems such that it can continue to meet future and present needs. They need to rediscover the wisdom of our indigenous peoples who have always respected nature.

#### Attitudes/Values in the Peace Education Scheme

It is suggested that the following attitudes and values be cultivated:

1. Self-respect: Having a sense of their own worth and a sense of pride in their own particular social and cultural background as well as a sense of their own power and goodness which will enable them to contribute to positive change.
2. Respect for Others: Having a sense of the worth and inherent dignity of other people, including those with social, religious, cultural and family backgrounds different from their own.
3. Respect for Life/Nonviolence: Valuing of human life and refusal to respond to an adversary or conflict situation with violence; preference for nonviolent processes such as collaborative problem-solving and other positive techniques as against the use of physical force and weapons.
4. Gender Equality: Valuing the rights of women to enjoy equal opportunities with men and to be free from abuse, exploitation and violence.
5. Compassion: Sensitivity to the difficult conditions and suffering of other people and acting with deep empathy and kindness toward those who are marginalized/excluded.
6. Global Concern: Caring for the whole human community transcending or going beyond the concern which they have for their nation or local/ethnic community.
7. Ecological Concern: Caring for the natural environment, preference for sustainable living and a simple lifestyle.
8. Cooperation: Valuing of cooperative processes toward the pursuit of common goals.
9. Openness/Tolerance: Openness to the processes of growth and change as well as willingness to approach and receive other people's ideas, beliefs and experiences with a critical but open mind; respecting the rich diversity of our world's spiritual traditions, cultures and forms of expression.
10. Justice: Acting with a sense of fairness towards others, upholding the principle of equality (in dignity and rights) and rejection of all forms of exploitation and oppression.
11. Social Responsibility: Willingness to take action to contribute to the shaping of a society characterized by justice, nonviolence and well-being; sense of responsibility toward present and future generations.
12. Positive Vision: Imaging the kind of future they prefer with a sense of hope and pursuing its realization.

#### Skills in the Peace Education Scheme

Some of the skills that need to be developed are:

1. Reflection: The use of reflective thinking or reasoning, through which they deepen their understanding of themselves and their connectedness to others and to the living earth.
2. Critical Thinking and Analysis: Ability to approach issues with an open but critical mind; knowing how to research, question, evaluate and interpret evidence; ability to recognize and challenge prejudices and unwarranted claims as well as change opinions in the face of evidence and rational arguments.
3. Decision-making: Ability to analyze problems, develop alternative solutions, analyze alternative solutions considering advantages and disadvantages, and having arrived at the

preferred decision, ability to prepare a plan for implementation of the decision.

4. **Imagination:** Creating and imagining new paradigms and new preferred ways of living and relating.
5. **Communication:** Listening attentively and with empathy, as well as the ability to express ideas and needs clearly and in a non-aggressive way.
6. **Conflict Resolution:** Ability to analyze conflicts in an objective and systematic way and to suggest a range of nonviolent solutions. Conflict resolution skills include appropriate assertiveness, dialogue, active listening and collaborative problem-solving. Communication skills are important foundational skills in conflict resolution.
7. **Empathy:** The ability to see the perspective of another person/group and to feel what that person/group feels. It is a skill that helps broadening the learners' own perspectives especially in searching fair and constructive alternatives.
8. **Grouping:** Working cooperatively with one another in order to achieve common goals. Cooperation and group-building are facilitated by mutual affirmation and encouragement by the members. The assumption is that everyone has something to contribute and is part of the solution.

### **The Peace Educator**

The phrase, "the medium is the message", used in a school setting, suggests to us that teachers have the power to affect the lives of children and youth. Students often remember the informal and "hidden" lessons, not from the overt or stated curriculum, but from the attitudes, values and actions of the teachers themselves within and outside of the classroom. We now know that to be more effective, the medium must match the message.

Indeed, peace educators must serve as models for the qualities and skills they are helping young people to develop in the peaceable classroom and school. This means, first and foremost, that there is a need for teachers to take the challenge of personal transformation so that they can be credible agents of the peace message. Indeed, we have to transform ourselves before we can expect the learners to make those changes. For instance, in order to help young people confront their prejudices, we have to confront our own and commit to changing our negative attitudes.

What attributes, capacities and skills must a teacher of peace develop to enable her/him to be an effective medium of the peace message? The following attributes are culled and summarized from the work of Betty Reardon (2001, pp. 137-148), a globally renowned peace educator:

- The teacher of peace is a responsible global citizen, an intentional agent of a culture of peace, a person of vision, capable of hope and the imaging of positive change. S/he understands that education should be a means toward constructive change.
- S/he is motivated by service and is actively involved in the community. A teacher of peace sees himself/herself as a person responsible to society.
- S/he is a life long learner, one who continues to improve one's own learning abilities and to keep abreast of the field.
- S/he is both a transmitter and transformer of cultures. While transmitting one's traditional culture, the teacher

also has to be critical and reflective so s/he can also be an effective agent of social and cultural transformation.

- S/he is a seeker of mutually enhancing relationships that nurture peace and a sense of community. For example, respect for human dignity and human rights should guide teacher-student relationships and the learning processes.
- S/he is gender sensitive and alert to any possibility of gender bias in self or students. S/he helps both male and female learners to form positive identification for themselves and to develop gender sensitivity and gender responsibility toward others.
- A teacher of peace is constructively critical. S/he offers criticism not to wound or harm, but to elicit constructive change.
- A teacher of peace intentionally develops the capacity to care by knowing the learners in their charge as individuals. This enables the teacher to respond to the differences in students' learning styles as positively as s/he is expected to respond to other human differences. The skill of caring is integral to the peace education process. Caring and supportive behavior from teachers lets the students know they are valued.
- S/he is an inquirer. S/he poses instructive questions into the conditions that impede and those that enhance possibilities for achieving a culture of peace. To be able to conduct an inquiry into the many issues and goals of peace education, a teacher of peace needs the skills of elicitation to draw from the students their own visions and ideas, to make them delve deeper into their own knowledge and imagination, and to seek new knowledge. The teacher then is more a raiser of questions than a giver of answers.
- S/he has the skills of reflective learning through which s/he applies what is learned from teaching to deepen his/her own understanding of the students and the learning processes. This includes reflection on or assessment of one's own abilities by posing some fundamental questions such as: How effective are our teaching-learning interactions in achieving our goals? What indicators do I have that students are finding satisfaction and meaning in their learning?
- A teacher of peace has the skills of communication and conflict resolution. These are essential skills for building community and peace-making. (These skills are explained in an earlier chapter.)
- S/he practices cooperative learning by encouraging cooperative learning tasks and discouraging negative competition or in-group-out-group behavior (exclusion) among students.
- A teacher of peace inspires understanding of alternative possibilities for the future and for a culture of peace. S/he helps students to plan and act to achieve such a culture. The core questions s/he asks are: What kind of world do we want? What changes need to be made to achieve it? What are our special responsibilities to carry out the transformational process?

In the teacher-training workshops that the Center for Peace Education has conducted over the last several years in the Philippines, the teacher-participants were asked to identify the attributes of someone they have considered as a teacher of peace. The qualities that were most frequently mentioned are:

- Passionate for peace
- Compassionate, concerned, kind
- Caring, encouraging, understanding
- Respects other people
- Gentle and non-threatening
- Fair, impartial
- Has faith in God, inspired by his/her spirituality
- Facilitators of learning, rather than sources of authority
- Tolerant, open, respectful of the ideas of others
- Sensitive to diversity in the classroom, accepts learners as they are
- Open to sharing relevant personal stories
- Skilled in eliciting thoughts and posing reflective questions
- Motivated, enthusiastic, inspiring
- Joyful, not wanting in humor
- Bearers of hope rather than despair
- Models of behavior and attitudes that they teach

From the foregoing discussion on the attributes of a peace teacher, we can glean many similarities between those that are given by Betty Reardon, an expert and experienced peace educator, and Filipino teachers who are just beginning in their peace education journey. It indicates that although we may have different backgrounds, there are principles and values that we hold in common when conceptualizing the attributes of a peace teacher.

It is notable how Filipino teachers have often referred to someone “who has faith in God” or “who is inspired by her/his spiritual tradition” as an attribute of a peace teacher. There is also a preponderance of personal qualities listed by Filipino teachers. These features are indicative of the culture within which the Filipino teachers live. Despite many difficulties and challenges, Filipinos generally keep a hopeful disposition anchored in their trust in God. They also highly value interpersonal relationships.

The attributes that we have included in this essay are neither exhaustive nor definitive. The list can and will grow as other groups delve deeper into their own concepts of peace, peace education and a peace teacher. The important thing for us to remember is that it is best that we begin our journey as a peace educator with our own personal or inner transformation. As we manifest the attributes, capacities and skills that mark a teacher of peace, we will find that the young people in our care will also learn the skills and behaviors modeled by us. Surely, there are other influences in their lives and there are times when perhaps we feel that teacher-modeling does not work, but the prospect of not doing what we preach is definitely not a better option. Young people are particularly in search of teachers who have integrity and credibility. On this we can only agree with Mahatma Gandhi when he said, “Be the change that you wish to see in the world”.

### A Whole School Approach

To be more effective in infusing peace ideas, perspectives and values into the life of the whole school and even beyond, it is suggested that a whole school approach be adopted. In a whole school approach, we try to engage all the learning areas, all the members of the school community (students, faculty, staff) and

the wider community. The approach also includes other aspects of school life such as teaching practices and methods, student activities, administrative policies, school structures and relationships, as well as social action for and with the larger community.

A whole school approach is important because the consistent peace messages and values found in the various aspects of the school and community will facilitate and reinforce the intended learnings. The social, political and economic context within which the school finds itself may not be conducive and supportive of the school’s vision-mission but it is precisely the challenge that a peaceable school must address. The peaceable school must be prepared to be a “counterculture” to the dominant paradigm and be an initiator and facilitator of needed transformation. Surely this is a long-term and arduous process but it is a challenge that needs to be pursued.

### A Vision for the Future

Our vision is a more peaceful 21st century, a century that is good for all humans, Mother Earth and the whole cosmos. Although the challenges that we face are enormous, we have to learn to read the signs of the times correctly. We cannot read only the negative signs because that might lead us to despair. It is important that we also see the signs of hope such as the growth of social movements that work for the promotion of peace and justice in various ways and levels. This should increase our confidence and resolve to make our own contribution towards our positive vision. We need more purposive focusing on the goals that count, and invest in these goals our renewed energy and commitment.

We submit that building a culture of peace is among the essential goals for today and tomorrow. Human and ecological survival and well-being, now and in the future, depend on this. Therefore, it makes good sense for governments, regional and international institutions, and all people to work together towards this vision. In turn, one of the necessary steps to build a culture of peace is to mobilize education which is at the heart of personal and social development of a people. We need to introduce peace education in a more intentional and systematic way in the formal education system and other learning environments. Let us meet the future with hope, imagination and the willingness to forego our old thinking and ways which hinder the blossoming of a new culture that is more peaceable. Let us educate and act for peace so that our future will hold the promises that we seek.

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