

# THE DEBATE ABOUT PEACE EDUCATION

by Elizabeth Richards

Dept. of External Affairs  
Min. des Affaires extérieures

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Attitudinal studies in recent years indicate that the threat of nuclear war is a major source of anxiety for young people.<sup>1</sup> Partly as a result of these studies, and more directly as a result of public concern about nuclear weapons, peace education is being introduced into the formal education system. This development is accompanied by considerable controversy.

There is no clear consensus regarding the focus, content, and methodology of peace education. The word 'peace' has a number of possible definitions. For some it is the notion of order — the Latin word 'pax'. For others peace means tranquility as embodied in the Sanskrit word 'shanti'. And then there is the notion that 'peace' is simply the absence of war. Even if a definition of peace is confined to the prevention of war, there is no one accepted means to achieve that end. Some argue that military deterrence has been and remains the best means to prevent war; "if you want peace, you must prepare for war." Others say with equal conviction that if you prepare for war, you will get it, and the way to prevent war is to reduce armaments.

Given this disagreement over basic values and assumptions, peace education is bound to raise more controversy than the teaching of mathematics and grammar. Some parents are suspicious of views advocated in the name of peace education, and

teachers find themselves in a particularly difficult position. Students ask questions about issues that are complex and baffling even to the 'experts'. The fact that over 50,000 nuclear weapons are deployed around the world elicits an astonished reaction from students. Their questions, ranging from 'How did it happen?' to 'How can we get rid of nuclear weapons?' are difficult to answer. Some teachers choose not to broach the subject in the classroom. Others are compelled to address the issues, often without knowing where to begin or where to find educational resources that will assist them in leading an informed discussion.

## THE TERMINOLOGY

Terms such as peace research, peace studies, and peace education can be confusing. 'Peace education' is a general term which refers to teaching and learning about peace however it is defined, both within the formal education system and in society at large, although it is usually associated with education at the secondary and elementary school levels. Peace researchers work at the post-graduate level, creating analytical frameworks for the field of 'peace studies', which in turn refers to programmes and courses at the university level.

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