Although the focus differs from one institution to another and often from one educator to another, the unifying theme in peace research, peace studies and peace education is an explicit set of assumptions: that the study of peace is broader than the study of war; that the study of 'peace-making' is as important as the study of 'peace-keeping'; and that arming ourselves is not the preferred method of preventing war. Peace studies are often inter-disciplinary, sometimes combined with other fields to create hybrids such as 'peace and conflict studies', 'peace and development studies', and 'feminism and peace studies'.

Some educators and peace researchers include traditional courses on arms control, international diplomacy, and negotiations, within the broad category of peace studies. Many scholars who teach such courses disagree with the assumptions held generally by peace researchers, and eschew any direct connection between their subjects and the field of 'peace studies'. Because the field is inter-disciplinary and value-laden, a number of controversies have arisen within the field which have resulted in the criticism that peace studies lack clarity. Although the critics claim that this warrants the exclusion of peace studies as a credible academic discipline, others claim that disagreements over definitions and boundaries are characteristic of any new field of study.

EVOLUTION OF PEACE EDUCATION

As a subject for study and contemplation, peace is as old as human history. But in the modern context, it was the catastrophes of World Wars I and II, and especially the appearance of nuclear weapons, which prompted various academics to focus on the development of analytical frameworks, methodologies, and theories that culminated in a field of study. Following World War II attention concentrated on the critique of war and violence between states. However, peace research was criticized for its preoccupation with war studies — studying the 'symptoms' of the disease and not possible 'causes' and 'prevention'. Johan Galtung, a Norwegian peace researcher, attempted to address this shortcoming by introducing the notion of 'structural violence'.[2] Galtung maintained that it is the various political and socio-economic structures which perpetuate injustices within and between states. While hunger, poverty, sexism and racism, are often not manifested in open, direct conflict, Galtung defined them as forms of institutionalized violence that may be root causes of warfare.

Some peace researchers warned that shifting the central focus from the study of war to the study of structural violence may have expanded the field to the point that it lacked a coherent definition. According to Nigel Young, who holds the Chair of Peace Studies at Colgate University in New York, "peace studies became an open-ended free-for-all — anything could be pursued under the label . . . If peace studies were really social change studies, or revolutionary studies, or social justice studies, was the label 'peace' not now redundant — even an embarrassment? Some indeed thought so, and abandoned the term."[3] Young does not advocate abandoning the term, but he does insist that the study of war and alternatives to war should again be central to peace studies.

Debates among researchers, however, do not influence the direction of peace studies and education as much as world events and their effect on public opinion. Peace education in the 1960's was decidedly activist and 'teach-ins' became a popular form of protest aimed at ending US involvement in Vietnam, but the popularity of the 'radical' approach to peace research waned with a de-escalation of the war in Vietnam and the ensuing period of East-West détente.

In the middle 1970's fewer than ten North American colleges granted degrees in peace-related studies. Once again the pressure of world events made itself felt and by 1986 this figure had risen to over 100 with an additional 70-80 colleges offering courses.[4] Much of this renewed interest in peace studies is a result of the current international climate, particularly the increased tension between the US and USSR. Although the focus varies from one college to another, Robert Elias, Chairman of the Peace and Justice Studies Program at Tufts University in Massachusetts, claims that peace studies have evolved into two basic schools of thought.

"The first deals with the geopolitics of nuclear weapons and war, explores nuclear weapons systems and the history of arms control, analyzes regional and national conflict, and seeks alternative security means. The second focuses on a far broader range of issues in the social justice area: economic equality, roots of conflict, racism, sexism, nonviolence, mediation, and citizens' movements."[5]

A broad, multi-faceted approach may not pose insurmountable problems for post-secondary educators, and as the field continues to evolve it is possible that an integrating sensibility will become evident. But for educators in secondary and elementary schools, the situation is quite different. If peace education attempts to address a multitude of issues and has no clearly defined focus, infusing such material into existing curricula can be a diffi-