

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.¹ 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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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-

cult task. Most of those who favour the introduction of peace education materials into school curricula prefer the 'infusion model'. They maintain that creating a special subject called 'peace' is not appropriate; rather, they suggest that information about nuclear issues and conflict resolution be infused into existing curricula. A course in English literature, for example, might include the study of Bertrand Russell's writings; a course on science and technology might include the study of nuclear weapons; a course on religion and society might examine the concept of the 'just war'.

Inherent in this approach is the risk that topics which are highly complex, such as the study of nuclear weapons or arms control, cannot be covered adequately if they fill a relatively minor portion of a full curriculum. Those who favour the 'infusion model' of peace education suggest that this dilemma can be overcome by providing adequate in-service programmes for teachers, as well as teaching aids such as audio-visual materials, background papers, and bibliographies.

Peace education usually involves more than teaching facts and figures relating to the arms race. It also involves the teaching of skills, such as conflict resolution and critical reading; attitudes, such as cultural tolerance; and values, such as a commitment to world citizenship and non-violence. On the surface, the tenets of peace education do not appear to contradict Canadian provincial government statements regarding the objectives of education in general. The Ministry of Education in Ontario (1984) cites "a sense of personal responsibility in society at the local, national, and international level, of the development of esteem for the customs, cultures, and beliefs of a wide variety of societal groups and the development of values related to personal, ethical or religious groups and to the common welfare of society."⁶

The Ministry of Education in Alberta (1983) urges "the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes at the appropriate local, national and international level; understanding of an active citizenship capable of informed decision making, and the development of a sense of purpose in life as a Canadian citizen and as an integral member of human society."⁷

Such statements imply that the inclusion of educational materials pertaining to war and peace, cultural understanding, and world citizenship is a non-controversial issue. That is not the case however. Dozens of school boards across Canada have set up task forces and committees to examine the issues raised by peace education, soliciting the advice of parents and specialists.⁸ When controversy results, it turns on two central issues. The first is the question of balance and political bias, centring on

the content of peace education material. The second issue concerns methodology and the underlying goals of peace education.

PEACE EDUCATION/PEACE POLITICS

In a paper entitled 'Peace Studies: A Critical Survey', British authors Caroline Cox and Roger Scruton argue that peace education curriculum materials are not 'balanced' and that they advocate political views that are "damaging to the national interests . . . and favourable to the Soviets".⁹ In reviewing peace studies in British schools, for example, they state that most of the material criticizes the British government and rarely mentions anything about the Soviet Union except to state that Soviet people want peace as much as anybody else. Cox and Scruton suggest that education be restricted to subjects in which there is "a communicable body of knowledge," such as mathematics, science, or geography, because young people do not possess the experience or cognitive ability to distinguish education from indoctrination.

Peace educators say in reply that the present educational system is not 'balanced' because textbooks tend to promote nationalism. In a 1981 review of peace research over a twenty year period, Hakan Wiberg cited studies suggesting that the discipline of history as taught in the US, for example, is far from neutral.¹⁰ The studies indicated that history texts glamorize war and the national leaders who participate in them, and rarely make any reference to the human, social, and cultural costs of war, or to the possibility of non-violent alternatives for resolving conflict.

Peace education advocates say that, by referring to credible sources and soliciting the advice of experts, ministry officials responsible for curricula can ensure that peace education materials present a *variety* of viewpoints and do not make unsubstantiated claims. Thus, the issue of balance should not pose insurmountable problems.

John Mack, a psychiatrist at Harvard University, suggests that it is a 'balanced treatment' which those who resist peace education fear.¹¹ With regard to teaching students about the Soviet Union, "such instruction might include, together with available facts about the Soviet political system, some account of how the Soviet leadership and people see the nuclear danger, *their* view of security, and *their* fears of US and Chinese military power." Mack concludes that opposition to peace education stems from the desire to "resist educational materials that stimulate questions about the basic assumptions of the society as a whole."

Mack may be exaggerating however. Arguments over 'balance' tend to obscure a more central dilemma concerning the content of peace education. Although Cox and Scruton would like to see any reference to the arms race removed from school curricula, most critics do not resist the *questioning* of basic assumptions about authority and national security. What they do fear is that opening the door to peace education invites the temptation to advocate particular *solutions* to world conflict.

In the effort to achieve a balanced approach to peace and security issues, proponents of peace education say that it is important to include the study of non-governmental approaches to conflict resolution, in addition to the approaches taken by governments and international organizations such as the United Nations. Some critics worry that teaching *about* the peace movement is the same thing as advocating student protest against the arms race. While that is not true, there have been instances when the distinction has been blurred and the resulting controversy has created problems for both school officials and peace education groups.¹²

Another issue that may be contentious is the view held by some peace education advocates, that the study of conflict resolution can be simplified and made accessible to young people by drawing parallels between conflict that takes place at an international level, and conflict at a community or even family level. Although it can be argued that similar patterns of behaviour function at many levels of human relations, people involved in negotiating an international dispute have to deal with many more factors and complications than people negotiating a family dispute. In addition, negotiations at the international level take place between sovereign states, while negotiations *within* a state are subject to laws and norms governing the behaviour of its citizens, and to some extent determining the pattern and results of the negotiations. It is one thing to teach conflict resolution skills on an interpersonal level, and another thing to suggest that the same skills can be applied successfully by negotiators of an arms control agreement, or by parties to a regional war. Some peace education materials fail to make that distinction clear.¹³

'TEACHING FOR PEACE'

Concern about content is only one aspect of the peace education controversy; there is also a debate over methodology. Inherent in the pedagogical approach known as 'educating *for* peace' is the view that the present educational system, with its emphasis on grades, standardized testing, and competi-

tion, reinforces values which are antithetical to this concept of 'peace' and which inhibit the ability of students to learn effectively. Robin Burns of La Trobe University in Australia, suggests that students in Western society are confronted with "a picture of dual morality."¹⁴ "In theory, values like fairness, trustworthiness, truth and solidarity are maintained. In practice, we educate according to the morality of achievement, competition, envy and individualistic assertion. What is thus learned, is hypocrisy." Burns and others, describe the prevailing culture as a 'culture of violence' and argue that the most important role of peace educators is to counteract that culture.¹⁵ They suggest that filling students' minds with content alone is not enough, and that educational structures and methods must be changed to encourage 'peaceful' behaviour. The method of teaching for peace includes encouraging students to discuss openly their fears concerning the prospect of nuclear war, as well as encouraging them to feel they can 'make a difference' by organizing extra-curricular events like forums, conferences, and student exchanges.

Peace education groups in Canada conduct training workshops for teachers which include instruction on mediation and conflict resolution, on 'non-competitive dialogue', and on creating a classroom atmosphere which is conducive to cooperative behaviour.¹⁷ Although peace education is a relatively new phenomenon, the objectives of peace educators, including the move towards a more 'democratic' classroom setting, away from standardized testing and individual competitiveness, sound very much like those of the 'alternative education movement' that reached its zenith in the early 1970's.¹⁸ And one of the reasons for a resurgence of interest in alternative teaching methods can be traced to the evolution of peace research and peace studies. The concept of 'structural violence' and the notion that peace is more than the absence of war leads many educators to conclude that peace is not possible without critically analyzing various social institutions, including the formal education system.

CONCLUSION

As long as there is conflict and war there will be ample justification for researching 'peace', however it is defined and understood. Arguments over definitions and approaches are not unique to the field of peace research. Virtually every social science and inter-disciplinary field is subject to dispute and such dilemmas serve a positive function; that is, they compel researchers to continue to assess and re-define the field, with a view to developing a more clearly delineated focus.

The debate about peace education is qualitatively different from the debate about peace studies, for the simple reason that universities are attended by adults while secondary and elementary schools are attended by children. It is in the latter settings that accusations of political indoctrination are taken most seriously. There is undoubtedly a tension between the necessity to apply academic standards and the sometimes idealistic and changing demands of a popular movement. The danger is that academic standards will be diluted in the attempt to promote a particular political viewpoint: while peace educators acknowledge that risk, they argue that it is worth taking. They say that ignoring the threat of nuclear war is inappropriate because young people are asking questions that should be addressed. And they add that providing facts alone is wrong because such facts tend to horrify students, encouraging them to believe that the situation is hopeless.

For those who are unfamiliar with the issues raised by peace education, it must appear ironic that the issues are so contentious. On the surface 'peace' is an innocuous and universal aspiration. When people attempt to turn aspirations into reality, however, disputes often arise. And if peace education is perceived to be part of a political movement which includes the advocacy of disarmament and social change, controversy is inevitable.

Critics like Cox and Scruton would like to see peace education materials removed from schools entirely, and argue that young people do not possess the cognitive ability to understand issues pertaining to peace and security. Their approach fails to address the central issue: nuclear war. As long as the belief persists that nuclear war is imminent, the peace education movement is here to stay. And as long as there is a shortage of teaching aids and resources pertaining to issues of peace and security, teachers will continue to face questions which they feel ill-equipped to answer. Many school boards and most provincial ministries are aware of the problem and are developing policies and approaches to the issue of peace education.¹⁷ Non-governmental organizations, meanwhile, are developing materials and lobbying school officials to authorize their use in the classroom. The approach of the peace education movement may appear too radical to some, but it is possible that public debate will aid in the development of policies and materials that are acceptable both to school officials and to peace education advocates, with the result that students will be encouraged to discuss the issue of nuclear war in the classroom, and teachers will be prepared to facilitate such discussion in an informed and responsible manner.

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Elizabeth Richards is a staff member in the Public Programmes section of the Institute.

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