

## ***Conceptual Perspectives in Peace Education***

Magnus Haavelsrud, Ph.D.

Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim, Norway

### INTRODUCTION

A great variety of theories, definitions and practices are referred to in peace education. Since both "peace" and "education" are abstractions without any concrete and absolute meaning, it is not surprising that it is rather difficult to find widespread agreement about what peace education actually is.

This essay will discuss some important dimensions within which it is believed the major conceptual disagreements are to be found. This will be done in reference to three major components of the educational problematic: the content, method of communication, and organizational structure of the educational program. The choices made about these three components prove to be decisive in defining the substance of any educational program, including education for peace.

Some peace educators seem to judge only one or two of these three components as important. Thus, it is not difficult to find peace education projects that are limited to changing the content of education without questioning existing pedagogic methods or the organization of activities. Some peace educators argue that only the form of learning-teaching interactions must be changed in order for the ideals of peace education to be realized. Still others are more system-oriented in their proposals, suggesting changes in the organizational structure in order to regulate educational interactions. It is contended, therefore, that disagreements about the substance of peace education are related to the importance given to each of the three components and also to the implicit or explicit choices that are made within each component.

### CONTENT

So, what content is to be learned in peace education? No *absolute* answer is to be found in the literature about peace education or anywhere else on this topic. In the initial phase of developing its peace education program, UNESCO (1974) proposed using a macro approach and selecting "the most important problems of mankind" (p. 3):

- (a) the equality of rights of peoples, and the right of peoples to self-determination;
- (b) the maintenance of peace; different types of war and their causes and effects; disarmament; the inadmissibility of using science and technology for warlike purposes and their use for the purposes of peace and progress; the nature and effect of economic, cultural and political relations between countries and the importance of international law for these relations, particularly for the maintenance of peace;
- (c) action to ensure the exercise and observance of human rights, including those of refugees; racialism and its eradication; the fight against discrimination in its various forms;
- (d) economic growth and social development and their relation to social justice; colonialism and decolonization; ways and means of assisting developing countries; the struggle against illiteracy; the campaign against disease and

famine; the fight for a better quality of life and the highest attainable standard of health; population growth and related questions;

(e) the use, management and conservation of natural resources, pollution of the environment;

(f) preservation of the cultural heritage of mankind; and

(g) the role and methods of action of the United Nations system in effort to solve such problems and possibilities for strengthening and furthering its action. (1974, pp. 3-4)\_

This proposal for peace education content is globally oriented, and the major problems of humankind are explicitly macro. How specific circumstances appear at various levels on the micro-macro spectrum is a most difficult and interesting problem involving questions of cause and effect between the levels. What, for instance, are the effects of enemy images propagated by governments for legitimating a war in shaping our consciousness? Or, in another example, what was the impact of the micro-level mobilization of peace demonstrators against the war in Iraq on February 15, 2003? This protest evolved into a macro force in terms of sheer numbers of people mobilized around the world, in spite of being hidden in the micro realities of, for example, the 2 million inhabitants of London and neighboring towns that gathered in Hyde Park. The hidden force of the morning had manifested itself by the evening, turning micro-level phenomena into a global movement. It was not strong enough to stop the war at that time, but these events add to others in a continuous flow of resistance against certain kinds of international behaviors.

It is evident that proposals for peace education content vary in relation to the macro-micro dimension. For instance, some peace educators define the content in terms of international and global problems whereas others define the content in relation to the everyday life and the context of the individual. In both cases, the initial disintegration of micro and macro may be temporary or permanent. If it is permanent, the segregation has an epistemological status, and if it is temporary, it may be grounded in a methodological belief that a complex problem needs to be simplified at the beginning of the educational experience. Thus, the goal may or may not be to understand the micro context in light of the macro context and vice versa, depending upon the duration of the strong segregation of micro-macro phenomena. In all cases, the strength and degree of permanence of any classification of this sort would carry with it a message of power on behalf of those who have made the decision to keep the categories apart.

Such integration or non-integration of "here and now" with "there and then" is a major choice to make concerning the content. Further, it is important if one chooses to depart from the "here and now" context or the "there and then" context because this choice may influence the understanding of the totality, especially in regard to the question of causal relationships between micro and macro phenomena. Starting with "here and now," situations may give the impression that these are important in the explanation of the global totality, whereas starting with "there are then" may imply more emphasis upon seeing the global reality as a cause of micro phenomena.

### *The Spatial Dimension*

The bridge built between the extreme micro level (the individual) and the extreme macro level (the world), may utilize various support points. Thus, relevant content in a peace education project may involve actors/parties at "in-between" levels such as the family, peer groups, neighbors, social class, ethnic, gender or age groups, town or local community, political parties, region, nation, or region of the world. The bridges may be built as two-way channels in which the

situations at both ends are seen to be interrelated, or they may be one-way bridges that hinder the understanding of two-way causality.

Poverty is seen as a major problem to be solved. If the content is limited to the macro level, the problem of poverty may become a study of global statistics and trends. The problem of poverty may then become a global phenomenon without reference to the reality of the learner. A macro analysis will yield macro solutions to the problem. If, on the other hand, the problem of poverty is also seen in the specific contexts of the learners, they will be able to analyze the problem in light of the realities in their own contexts and also be able to suggest actions in that context to help solve the problem. The inclusion or exclusion of such cause-effect relationships between the micro and the macro levels is decisive for the content of peace education.

### *The Temporal Dimension*

Apart from the problem of inclusion or exclusion on the spatial dimension, there is the problem of inclusion or exclusion of the temporal dimension. Reflection about an issue and its solution involves understanding the problem at various points in its development. The dispersion of the content of peace education over the following categories is therefore an important choice to make:

1. Historic knowledge: what was;
2. Diagnostic knowledge: what is;
3. Predictive knowledge: what will be;
4. Prescriptive knowledge: what ought to be; and
5. Knowledge about tactics and strategy: what can be done to change the situation from what it is to what it ought to be.

### *Action*

So far, I have only discussed peace education in terms of reflection. A major choice to make concerning the content of peace education is whether it should include or exclude action for the solution of the problem. If action is included, the timing of it in relation to the reflection process is also important, i.e. is it possible to develop a reflection process about a problem on the basis of some action already undertaken, or is action as part of the peace education content seen as desirable only as a result of a reflection and study process?

### FORM

In some peace education projects, more emphasis is placed on teaching methods and learning than on the content as such. This is often grounded upon the principle that the educational interaction should be in harmony with the idea of peace. This could mean that teacher and students should be equal partners in the educational process. The teacher would be in dialogue with the students about a problem that interests both parties. The teacher does not necessarily have to be an expert who knows all about the problem. It should be apparent that any human, including a teacher, cannot be expected to possess all knowledge about the solution of societal problems. Only historic and diagnostic knowledge can be reproduced. Knowledge in the other categories has to be produced by all the participants in the educational situation. This reproduction and production of knowledge cannot be done only by the teacher if propaganda for and/or indoctrination of specific views are to be avoided.

This means that some knowledge about solving a social, political, economic or cultural problem can only be given through the active participation of those who are suffering the consequences of the problem and whose interest in solving the problem is not purely academic, but also

emotional and practical. Thus, problem solving in this sense involves knowledge already produced in science about objective realities as well as knowledge to be produced in the educational setting. It is to be expected that the latter most often would apply to knowledge about the future (what will be, what ought to be) as well as to tactical and strategic knowledge. These three, as well as the realization of the action, may be seen as more dependent upon subjective viewpoints than upon "academic" knowledge about historical and present circumstances. Peace education forms are in contradiction to anti-dialogical methods, resulting in the reproduction of prescribed "old" knowledge and the lack of production of "new" knowledge. This might, in the long run, be an example of cultural violence if learner participation in developing the content (including action itself) is denied. It would mean that autonomy and creativity are not rewarded (or are directly or indirectly punished). This again might result in inactive learners without the possibility of engaging themselves in problem solving.

Peace education projects introduced in such situations might place special emphasis upon changing the educational form. Important goals might be to encourage the participation of the students in decision-making about both form and content. In this sense, education for peace is more a question of method or forms of communication than of content, i.e. it would center on the solution of problems in which participants are engaged. Which problems are selected is highly dependent upon the subjective viewpoints of the participants themselves, and this would mean that the content of peace education would vary greatly depending on the group's social, political, economic and cultural situation.

#### ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The formal educational system in most countries is characterized by the following: the division of knowledge into specific subjects; teachers with specific competencies in these subjects; the grouping of students into classes; and the division of time into periods and breaks. These basic characteristics (others could be added) are important structural components, which allow for only certain types of initiatives for introducing peace education into the curriculum. Thus, it is possible to change the content of a specific subject in such a way that it would deal more with the subject of peace. Such change in the content might not have any significance for the other components such as the methods employed, the division of knowledge into subjects and the division of time into periods and breaks.

If, however, the form of education is regarded as a problem, as well as the way knowledge has been divided into subjects, the peace educator runs into other problems of a structural nature, i.e. the peace education project might contradict the basic characteristics of the structure in which it is introduced. If, for instance, a peace education project is based on the principles of problem orientation and participatory decision-making, it could not, without problems, be introduced into a school system which rigidly practices the division into subjects, classes, and periods.

It would be extremely difficult to realize problem-oriented and participatory education through a prescribed plan for a subject, carried out by a teacher in a rigidly-structured classroom situation with thirty students, in periods of 45 minutes each. Apart from the rigidity imposed by these three components (subject, class, time), the greatest barrier for peace education projects might be the rules laid down in educational systems concerning evaluation of the students, through which students are sorted into categories according to their achievement in terms of grades (this is not the place to discuss the sorting function of the school and its role in the reproduction of inequalities in society).

Through this discussion about organizational structure, it should be clear that a peace education project might be in harmony or disharmony with it. Therefore, it is possible that so many

disharmonies exist that the structure itself must be changed before peace education can be introduced. The question then arises whether the organizational structure can be changed through changes in form and content, or whether this is impossible until changes are brought about in the society which has produced an educational structure antagonistic to problem orientation and dialogue.

## CONCLUSION

This essay has discussed peace education in terms of content, form, and organizational structure. It has been argued that peace education involves the principles of problem orientation (content) and participatory decision-making (dialogical form). These two principles need to be implemented at the same time because one implies the other. Therefore, projects focusing on only one of the two will necessarily have an unintended effect on the other as well. If such projects are feasible, it means that the rules laid down in the structure are such that a possibility exists for dialogue. If such projects are met with repression, however, the structural rules regulating education are anti-dialogical in nature, and therefore may not be changed from within the system. Then the question arises as to how the educational system can be altered through a change in society as such.

Some peace educators claim that societal change in the direction of more justice cannot come from within the school itself. This would mean that education for peace would mainly have to occur outside of school, through the action of the adult population. Such conscientization efforts would create political forces, which would be instrumental in the struggle for social justice on the global as well as local levels, including changes in the formal educational system. Whether or not education for peace is attempted within or outside the school, however, it seems that unless it becomes part of the overall process of non-violent social change, it will not succeed in contributing to the creation of peace and social justice.

Finally, I would like the reader to note that I have discussed the three components separately in this essay. This strong classification is made for purpose of analysis only. It is very important to analyze the mutual relationships between the three components by posing the following questions: How would the selected content influence the communication forms? How could the selected communication form influence the development of content? What is the impact of the organizational structure (including curriculum plans) upon content selection and the choice of communication form? What may be the impact of educational activities upon future structural and organizational patterns?

## REFERENCES

UNESCO. (1974). *Recommendation concerning education for international understanding, co-operation and peace and education relating to human rights and fundamental freedoms*. Paris, France: UNESCO. Recommendation adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO at the 18<sup>th</sup> Session, on 19 November, 1974.

