

PEACE EDUCATION AROUND THE WORLD

Learning from the Past for the Future

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Chapter 15

Durable Peace Education towards Sustainable Communities

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Introduction

In conflict situations especially those involving colonialism and anti-colonial struggle, there is invariably a different perception of what 'peace' means. In fact, many wars are fought in the name of bringing peace. To colonial settlers, peace is essentially pacification and quiet (Ishida, 1969). To oppressed people, peace means restitution of justice, removal of oppressive regimes, and living on our lands (Kerr & Mobekk, 2007). Yet, concepts like peace and justice are themselves contentious and lend to different interpretations (Fogarty, 1992; Smith, 1993). People generally accept the notion that some sort of social justice is a prerequisite to calmness and peace. What substantiates this is that wars and civil strife is inexorably linked to some grievance. In many cases, we noted end of conflict or its relative stabilization when some grievances are addressed and resolved, what we might call a compromise as in the case of Aceh (Aspinall, 2008) and Northern Ireland (Hancock, 2008). Peace studies are now in vogue globally to digest information and produce road maps that could end conflicts 'peacefully'.

In the case of the protracted conflict in Palestine that pitted the Zionist movement plans to create a Jewish state in Palestine against the indigenous people of Palestine, the 'peace' negotiations failed for many researched reasons

(Qumsiyeh, 2004; Salinas & Rabia, 2009; Moughrabi et al., 1991). Both sides in this conflict credit 'education' or lack of 'peace education' with a lack of progress towards peace (Peled-Elhanan, 2013; Bar-Tal, 2011; Aweiss, 2011). The concept of peace education though is contentious in defying clear definitions as the concept of peace is becoming prevalent at least in the global north and mainstreamed in international interventions in conflict zones (Stetter, 2021; Harris, 2009; Bajaj & Hantzopoulos, 2016).

Some authors seem to focus on peace education as a form of acceptance of different narratives in conflict situations or even ideas of normalizations under occupation (Bekerman & Zembylas, 2011). The Berghof Foundation uses an expansive definition of peace education which we like: "the process of acquiring the values and knowledge and developing the attitudes, skills and behavior to live in harmony with oneself, with others, and with the natural environment." (Jäger, 2015) Taking this definition we would like to address the tools and mechanisms that bring this kind of education to achieve that kind of sustainability. The goal of this study is to offer a reflective analysis of peace education's role in fostering sustainable communities using Palestine as a model.

Relationship of Peace Education to Sustainability

There are many limitations to the traditional 'peace education' models but after the second world war and now it is proliferating at university campuses with departments and courses that focus on 'conflict resolution'. Limitations include emphases on 'nation states' as actors, ignorance of cultural and societal differences, lack of understanding of socio-political forces that shape people's lives and 'orientalism' (Zembylas, Charalambous & Charalambous, 2016; Said, 1978; Han & Moquino, 2018). Peace education aimed at ensuring safety and quiet for only one side of a conflict cannot achieve sustainable long-term results. In examining the voluminous literature on peace education, one finds some literature referring to sustainability. This belongs in two categories: 1) Sustainability of peace education, and 2) sustainability of societies (including harmony with the environment) and their actual ability to live in peace based on justice (the positive peace not merely lack of conflict). We believe peace education cannot be separated from sustainability of com-

munities (especially indigenous communities). In fact, it is worth having an integrative and holistic approach to peace building that takes all issues into consideration (Yanniris, 2021; Brantmeier, 2013). Peace education that is holistic helps fulfil conditions of harmony between people (based on justice) and harmony with nature (see also the UN Sustainable Development Goals for guidelines). The latter goals can be advanced via systematic education which leads to harmony and ‘sustainability’ (Goi, 2024; Jershey & Kopnina, 2020). We may define a wider scope of peace education as education that leads to reducing and eliminating all violence (to fellow human beings and to nature) and results in a way of life of sustainability where humans and nature both prosper without fear.

Education for Peace: Decolonization Versus Normalization

Colonizers seek to control not only the land and military but also aim to reshape the mindset of the oppressed people (Qumsiyeh & Amro, 2019). There are a myriad of programs that purport to teach peace but are essentially normalization programs that delay peace. Examples of these are “Seeds of Peace” (Biton & Salomon, 2006) and environmental peacebuilding efforts that actually harm the environment (Ide & Tubi, 2020). As both colonizers and oppressed people in Palestine can be considered mentally colonized, (Khali-fah & Qumsiyeh, 2021) peace education can focus on either 1) normalization where the narrative accepts the colonizers or 2) liberating minds leading to justice and sustainability. The former ‘normalization’ can lead to authoritarian tendencies and entrenching colonization (El Kurd, 2023). The impact of peace education in this context is nuanced. While many use language of peace, the outcome over eight decades of these programs in Palestine is the illusion of a ‘peace process’ that actually gives time to the colonizers to further expand their colonization activities (Qumsiyeh, 2009). Such normalizations without addressing root causes of conflict are also by nature short lived and ready to ‘burst’ at any crisis such as the era that started on 7 October 2023 (Mens, 2024). Peaceful education is seen in this process as getting together, altering curricula towards acceptance of the other. However, applying peace while injustice persists is impossible, especially in ongoing, long-standing conflicts that socially, psychologically, and politically affect people. Teachers

and learners are often directly impacted by the colonizers' actions, such as land confiscation, home demolitions, assassinations, killings, or, at best, being restricted from moving freely in their own land.

A second challenge to peace education done without the context of space and time is the idea that you can educate oppressed people about peace while the boot of the occupier is on their neck. Many schools in Palestine are subjected to attacks by Israelis or settlers. How can children be taught to live in peace while their lived experience is anything but peaceful and their basic rights (even to education) are being violated? Younger generations instinctively understand that justice is the foundation of peace, and this can be achieved by advancing justice-oriented education.

Peace education that is lasting and important for human well-being needs to be reinforced and developed over long periods of time (Salomon 2013). In fact peace education is part and parcel of struggling for justice and hence is a form of resistance (Qumsiyeh, 2010; Qumsiyeh, 2015).

There is a tendency to foster peace education that connects people globally to become "better global citizens" (Reardon, 1988). However, the latter may have different interpretations which may differ from the interpretation of Reardon and say Fanon and is better reshaped as a decolonized global citizenship (Fanon & Sartre, 2003). Peace education disconnected from de-colonization only prolongs colonization (Andreotti, 2011; Hajir & Kester, 2020). In Palestine, we may adapt the Gandhian method of education that leads to self-reliance away from Western models of subservience (Dey, 2021).

Implementing Peace Education for Sustainability in Context of Palestine

Everyone claims they want peace. As noted above though the form of peace and goals of peace education can be dramatically different depending on the position of the person within the conflict (from a privileged colonizer or from the oppressed community). In examining aspects of promotion of peace in Israeli schools for example, we notice emphases on peace as a form of 'getting along' between the remaining Palestinians (having become a minority in the Israeli system after the ethnic cleansing) and the majority colonizers. Hence, even the lofty goals of 'coexistence' are not met in practice (Vered,

2015). Implementing peace education in Palestine involves navigating a myriad of challenges, from political sensitivities to cultural differences. Programs must be tailored to respect and incorporate local values and traditions while promoting the key prerequisite to peace which is decolonization. These programs can be conducted across various educational settings. Schools can incorporate liberating peace education into their curricula through subjects like civic education, history, and social studies. Teachers are trained to use interactive pedagogies that encourage critical thinking and dialogue among students (Tandon, 2014). It can focus on giving hope for examples based on the only positive possible outcome of colonial/anti-colonial struggle: the one democratic state for all its citizens. Using example of actions that led to dismantling apartheid while accepting whites in South Africa can be a model (though this is still a work in progress).

Non-governmental organizations and community groups play a crucial role in delivering peace education through workshops, art programs, and sports activities. These settings provide flexible and responsive environments where participants can explore peace concepts in a more personal and impactful manner. Initiatives such as peace camps and leadership training sessions help bridge the gap between formal and informal education, providing structured yet adaptable learning opportunities that are crucial in volatile environments.

How We Became Involved in Peace Education *Sensu Lato*

Beyond the concept of education for ‘conflict transformation’ (Ozerdem, Thiessen & Qassoum, 2016), we believe peace education that focuses solely on human to human interactions is not sustainable (Esteves, 2020). Peace should focus also on human-nature interactions. That is a sustainable peace important for sustainable human and natural communities. It is indeed a major part of the reason a group of volunteers founded the Palestine Institute for Biodiversity and Sustainability at Bethlehem University (PIBS-BU, <http://palestinature.org>). Our vision was to help foster sustainable human and natural communities. This is an imperative thing for us Palestinians as for all human beings but our situation of colonization and oppression that is one of the longest that lasted in the 20th and 21st century, made this work more

urgent. The first author taught courses and published research in conflict resolution, peace, justice, and sustainability. All our team is motivated by these lofty principles of justice and sustainability. The institute evolved with four main lines of work: research, education, conservation, and community service. But in all these our motto and guiding principle remains RESPECT (for ourselves, for other human beings, for nature) and we consider this critical for peace making at all these levels (Qumsiyeh, 2023). To achieve education for children for example, we structured programs that ensure children learn to enjoy each other's company, to relate to adults and other children with mutual respect, and through practice respect animals and plants and soil and all elements of earth around them. This generates first an inner peace (we have thus become an oasis of peace and hope) but it also generates outer peace in components of our earth (Brantmeier, 2007). Peace education structured along these principles can help in decolonization in a colonial context, equality in case of discriminatory societies (like civil rights), and environmental justice where there is injustice. Not only does this kind of peace education lead to sustainability of the communities and harmony with nature but also can itself become sustainable and integrated education within a flourishing society.

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