

Educating for peace: recent initiatives in the UK

Pat Gaffney reflects on the changing global context in the six years since this Journal last looked at issues of peace and reconciliation and describes some recent initiatives of the UK Peace Education Network and its members.

The global context for peace education

There are days when encounters with others remind us of why we are in the business of educating for peace. Recently I experienced just such a day. Two sets of unexpected visitors came to our office: three men from Iraq and a young Croatian woman. They wanted to speak with us about their vision of peace in their respective countries and share some of their frustrations. Our Iraqi friends were here to establish people-to-people links with those involved in education and work for nonviolent change. They wanted to talk about developing skills that help the ‘occupied’ speak with the ‘occupier’ in a challenging but nonviolent way. Our Croatian peacemaker wanted to discuss ways in which young people can be helped to critique the media stereotyping of the minority ‘other’ as enemy or scapegoat for all the ills within the community, a feature of her society which contributes to on-going sectarian violence. Both wanted to talk about ways of working with a generation of young people who have known nothing but war and unrest, who feel that creative change for the good is beyond them. How can young people be helped to see that violence and war are not inevitable?

What my colleagues are seeking in their own contexts rang bells with me. In recent years I have heard similar pleas from parents, teachers and youth workers here in the UK and was reminded of the common concerns we share in our search to create a culture of peace and nonviolence. In a small way I was able to share some of the approaches and initiatives that are being taken here, including those of the Peace Education Network (PEN). This year the Network has produced Education for Peace: A Guide (PEN, 2006), in which are set out the reasons to educate for peace and non-violence:

To show people that violence and war are learned and not an intrinsic part of human nature. Conflict can be resolved peacefully.

To create a more peaceful world where all of us may become agents for change. Education for Peace gives us the skills that will assist in achieving peaceful societies.

To correct the limited understanding of peace held by many people that is the absence, however contrived, of direct violence of wounding and killing.

To create a better learning environment where conflict and relationships may be explored.

It is six years since the DE Journal looked at issues of peace and reconciliation and much has happened in this time which has impacted on the context within which education takes place. Since 2001 a US-led coalition which includes the UK, has been leading a ‘war on terror’. This continues to create a culture of fear, undermines human rights and civil liberties both domestically and internationally and challenges the integrity of international institutions and of obligations within international law. While the ‘security’ focus for this so-called war on terror has been on Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, North Korea and Palestine, other areas of conflict, Darfur, Sri Lanka, the DRC, Colombia to name just a few, are all but forgotten. In support of this ‘war on terror’, the US and UK have spent over half of their military spending. The UK is now the second largest military spender. The 2005-6 UK budget allocated £4.4 billion to overseas development and £33.3 billion to defence. This is also reflected at international level with the world currently spending 12 times more on the military than on overseas aid. During the year when so many were involved in the Make Poverty History campaign, it seemed strange to me that nowhere did this campaign make the links with war and conflict.

Clearly, much Government understanding of ‘security’ is based on solving problems by military might, through fear and the misuse of power and resources. This is a very long way from a model of security that aims to meet human needs first: a model that encourages problem solving through cooperation and partnership in addressing environmental constraints, development needs and long-term approaches to conflict prevention and resolution. The connections between security, politics, geography and education were very well described by geography teacher Maurice Hopper in the Autumn 2005 edition of Teaching Geography. Following his three months as a human rights observer with the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Israel and Palestine, he reflected on the experiences and realities of occupation and separation, highlighting the paradox of security, where one country’s security becomes another country’s restriction. He suggests that ‘as political and security situations change, classroom geography needs to address the impact of these factors on the landscape and lives of people living there’ (Hopper, 2005). I would suggest that other subject areas – history, citizenship, politics – can also address such factors and the context could be Israel-
Palestine, Croatia-Serbia, Northern Ireland, Bradford or Tower Hamlets.

Young people are only too aware of what is going on around them – and in some situations are more vulnerable and exposed to shifting models of security. It may be as a result of their own experiences of fear in the face of terror attacks and the counter violence which often follows or through the almost daily diet of war and conflict in the media. It could be through the experiences of school colleagues who are seeking refuge from conflict here in the UK, or of those in their community who are treated unjustly or who are made scapegoats on the basis of faith or ethnic origin. In a society in which new ‘enemies’ are being created and new conflict flashpoints emerging, it is all the more urgent that educators work to provide frameworks that will not only help young people to express their fears and frustrations but also help them to make sense of what is going on, to understand the nature and source of conflict and violence. Such frameworks may be created through the content of the curriculum and the ethos of the whole school and will also reclaim values that are based on common good and social justice and offer inspiration and hope that ordinary people can be involved in nonviolent work for change.

Responses from the Peace Education Network in the UK

Within this changing world context, Peace Education Network has over these years attempted to explore and resource educators, using its Annual Conference, website and newly created Education for Peace curriculum document as vehicles.

Aware of the great wealth of experience and expertise around the country and of the contribution of local youth and community projects and academic institutions to education for peace, a number of excellent partnerships have been formed. In 2002 a decision was made to hold the conference in Bradford in partnership with the Department of Peace Studies at the University of Bradford, with the theme ‘Education for Peace in a Divided Society – Bradford and Beyond’. Jenny Pearce, a staff member in the Department, had been involved in the Ouseley Commission on Racial Inequality in Bradford following the Bradford riots. Her presentation encouraged participants to look at the role of civil society and NGOs in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. The conference attracted a large number of students interested in moving beyond a purely academic look at peace studies to the application of good practice in the classroom and community. Among the workshops, one aimed to help teachers explore strategies for supporting young people who hold different values or beliefs from the majority; another, drawing on the work of Hamish Fyfe, lecturer in Drama and English at Stranmillis University, Belfast, looked at strategies and conventions to explore the metaphor of ‘otherness’, stereotyping, cultural isolation and identity; a third drew on the local experiences of the Bradford Interfaith Education Centre and its work in Bradford schools that aims to contribute to peace and social cohesion in the city. Issues of identity were also explored at another conference when George Anang’a, Child Participation Adviser for Plan International, offered a workshop on the internet-based Identity Project co-ordinated between 25 schools in the UK and 25 schools in Africa and the Philippines.

The 2005 conference was held in partnership with the University of Coventry Centre for the Study of Forgiveness and Reconciliation. The theme for this was ‘Culture, Conflict, Creativity and Change’. Again, the conference drew on the experiences of the local community. The citizenship director for Coventry, Sarah Shipton, reminded participants that among other distinctions Coventry is the City of Peace and Reconciliation and this opened many opportunities within the citizenship curriculum to engage local schools. The authority is also involved in the national Healthy Schools Programme, an area which supports the development of many peace-related skills such as peer mediation and conflict resolution, and it organizes Pupil Conferences and an annual Peace Month.

A highlight of this conference was the presentation of the video Edinburgh Youth Against the War (Pilton Video Company, 2005). One of the reactions to the war with Iraq was the response and direct action of many young people around the country who walked out of school on the day the war began in March 2005. These actions paralysed some schools, which reacted by clamping down on the students, trying to keep them locked in. Other schools managed this response more creatively, facilitating student participation in anti-war work. In Scotland, the Pilton Video Company decided to work with young people, engaging them in making their own video of their response to the war. As well as being sharp and entertaining, the young people voice many well thought-out and critical questions about the nature of foreign policy, the limitations of war and violence to solve problems, and their frustration at a political system that offers very little space for ordinary people to voice dissent.

A similar project, encouraging young people to ‘say it for themselves’, was undertaken in the Docklands area of London. A youth worker at the Royal Docklands College worked with students to create a mini-documentary on the bi-annual arms fair that takes place at the Excel Centre opposite their school, revealing links with local issues in the process. (For a full description of this project see ‘Where is the love?’ p 24 in this journal.) Both videos are excellent classroom tools, providing examples of citizenship in action, drawing on local and international experiences of violence and conflict, as well as exploring issues such as the arms trade, freedom of expression and models of change.

The medium of drama, language work and literature has also been the focus of workshops and resources encouraged by the Network. Oxfam have presented much appreciated sessions on their Making Sense of World Conflict publication (Midwinter, 2005). This publication, aimed at teachers of
Children’s writer Julia Jarman participated in a conference in which she told how her book Peace Weavers (Jarman, 2006) was her attempt to convey a message about peace, freedom and the cost of war. Set in an East Anglian US Air Force base that is preparing for war, it traces the journey of a young girl who is trying to make sense of what war is doing to her family and to the people of Iraq. Following her involvement at the conference Julia wrote an afterword in a reprint of her book in which she said: ‘The publication of this book has brought me into contact with hundreds of real-life peace weavers! At the annual conference of PEN I learned that skilled people, trained to resolve and prevent conflicts, are operating all over the world and even more exciting, some of them are succeeding!’ Other writers, Michael Morpurgo, with his Private Peaceful (2003) and Beverly Naidoo with Web of Lies (2006) deal with war and violence, and choices that can be made, in thoughtful and imaginative ways.

Young people and militarism

One particularly worrying feature of the past five years – a result of the ‘war on terror’ – that has also been addressed by the Network is the affirmation given to a culture of militarism. It was disturbing, for example, to hear schools inspector David Bell in his lecture of January 2005 talk about his model of active citizenship. Speaking of the lack of interest in politics among young people, and of the need to offer models of service, he chose to highlight the contribution of the armed services as ‘a beacon of excellence in living out the timeless values of duty, honour, courage and sacrifice ... Young people too can benefit from organisations such as the Army Cadet Forces or the Air Cadets’. Surely we can do better than this – or is it the lure of financial and personnel resources that is attractive? According to the 2006 Defence White Paper, MOD sponsored Cadet Forces attract 130,000 young people from 12 to 22 years of age to ‘bring adventure and enjoyment to young people with a view to steering them towards responsible citizenship. In addition the MOD run Skillforce, a national youth initiative that uses recently retired military instructors to provide Key Skill activities to 14-16 years olds who are in danger of becoming disaffected with the formal academic education system’.

As a Network we have written to the Secretary of State for Education expressing our concerns first that that non-trained military personnel have access to young, often vulnerable young people. Secondly, school should be a place in which the values and skills of peaceful conflict resolution are promoted. Children should not be exposed to values based on violence or to insidious military recruitment programmes in schools.

Education and peace are both precious rights that deserve to be fully resourced and carefully nurtured for the children of Iraq, Croatia, the UK and all the world’s children.

References

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PEN (2006) Education for Peace: A Guide can be downloaded from the PEN website www.peaceducation.org.uk. This site also hosts a Peace Education resource catalogue.

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PEACE EDUCATION - Meaning, Definition, Aims, Objectives, Historical Development, Major Institutions, Gandhi's Contribution, Education for Peace, Method. The concept of peace education helps in developing social values, moral values, skills, behavior and most importantly to spread peace in the atmosphere. Peace education declines the evil thinking of conflict, war, and violence. It also realizes us, our fundamental duties, and fundamental rights. Peace education in schools carries the implicit assumption that students are the bearers of peace, individually and in the future, collectively. The discourse of “learning to live together” (L2LT) is very powerful. But this approach posits violence and conflict as primarily occurring because of inter-cultural tensions and ignorance, and predicts that “learning” cohesive behaviours will become a permanent habit. Hence the attributed responsibility for peace becomes a timing issue: long-term initiatives must be accompanied by immediate, coherent interventions. In divided societies, education for peace is often linked to narratives of integration. UNESCO’s Futures of Education initiative also approaches the future as a space for democratic design that is connected to, but not limited by, past and present. It builds on dedicated evidence-based trend analysis that can help shine light on anticipated challenges and opportunities. This is complemented by participatory mechanisms for envisioning new possible futures of education. Among other important UNESCO publications on education in the intervening years is the 2015 report. Rethinking Education: towards a global common good? which proposed a rethinking of education and knowledge as global common goods. All of these initiatives, as well as UNESCO’s work broadly across the Education Sector, inform the global report currently under preparation. EDUCATION FOR INTEGRAL PEACE “MEMORY, INTERCULTURALITY AND DECOLONIALITY Review of the book written by Eduardo Andrés Sandoval Forero (2016). Education for Integral Peace “Memory, Interculturality and Decoloniality. Bogota: ARFO more. EDUCATION FOR INTEGRAL PEACE “MEMORY, INTERCULTURALITY AND DECOLONIALITY Review of the book written by Eduardo Andrés Sandoval Forero (2016). The central idea in this analogy, revolves around the evidence that society reaps what it plants in the minds of children. To enhance the prospects for sustainable peace and development, the paper submits that elementary education curriculum should be designed to contain themes that addresses stereotype and ethnic suspicion. Save to Library.