Peace Education in an Era of Globalization

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We shall here look at the challenges that face peace educators in this era of globalization. To analyze what the challenges are, and how they can be met, we first must look at the concept of “globalization” itself. What do we think of when we use the terms “globalization” or “global village”? Do we think about the type of market economy that seems to have conquered the world? What type of violence does this market economy lead to? What challenges does it pose for peace educators? Or do we look at the increased communication between people from different cultures through travel in the air, on land, or in cyberspace? What kind of problems and possibilities does this communication mean for a peace educator?

Peace education as an academic field also must be examined. What is peace education? How does it relate to human rights education? What type of violence does the globalized market economy produce? What challenges does it pose for peace educators?

In many ways “globalization” has become the buzzword of the day. In their book Global Village or Global Pillage, Jeremy Brecher and Tim Costello claim that the word “globalization” is “on the lips of politicians, professors and pundits alike.” Corporations, markets, finance, banking, transportation, communication, and production increasingly cut across national boundaries. This globalization of capital is being deliberately accelerated by most national governments, by international institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, and by the global corporations themselves.

Many authors claim that the world has become “a global village.” Economies are interconnected; computers and fax machines connect people across oceans. Millions of people all over the world have become “netizens,” a new word coined to denote internet inhabitants. We surf the internet and, although most of us cannot devote the time our kids do to hanging out online, we nevertheless communicate daily and swiftly around the globe, sending each other articles and whole manuscripts within seconds. The netizens now number about 60 million and are growing at a rate of 20% every year. But they are very unevenly distributed throughout the world.

New diseases ignore national boundaries, and environmental destruction in one part of the world profoundly affects other parts of the world. Many of the world’s medicines come from plants in various rain forests. In their book on the increase of global inequalities, York Bradshaw and Michael Wallace lament the deforestation caused by escalating profit seeking—a destruction that may have eliminated cures for AIDS, cancer, and many other diseases.

Bradshaw and Wallace sum up the most striking feature of the global village...
in one word: “disparity.” The globalization of capital increases the differences between the haves and the have-nots. The share of the poorest 20% of the world’s people in global income was 2.3% in 1960 and it sank further to 1.4% in 1991 and even further to 1.1% in 1997, according to the latest Human Development Report from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). It continues to shrink. And the ratio of the income of the top 20% to that of the poorest 20% rose from 30:1 in 1960 to 61:1 in 1991 and to 78:1 in 1994. Children and women—especially single mothers—suffer the most when disparities grow, in both industrialized and developing countries. It intensifies the “feminization of poverty.” And, according to a study conducted by the American peace researcher Elise Boulding, women receive more beatings in periods of high unemployment.

In their much discussed book, Die Globalisierungsfälle: Der Angriff auf Demokratie und Wohlstand, Hans-Peter Martin and Harold Schumann claim that we are heading towards a 20–80 percent society—one where the great majority, the 80%, live in poverty and with hardly any decision-making power over conditions affecting their lives, while the 20% live in abundance, are always short of time, and make far-reaching decisions affecting everyone.

Ulf Hannertz argues against the idea of the “global village,” which to him suggests interconnectedness, togetherness, and the homogenization of culture. Using a transnational perspective, Hannertz argues instead for “creolization” rather than homogenization or McDonaldization. Individuals may live with multiple cultural and linguistic contexts without losing their identity; instead, they develop transnational identities.

A small group of people enjoy the benefits of a shrinking world. They are the transnationalists, the cultural commuters, “die Ortspolygame Menschen.” They have a responsibility not only to enjoy the benefits but also to analyze its impact on the majority of the population. They are obliged to work against a policy of increasing disparities.

Adopting Talcott Parson’s well-elaborated theory, whereby a social system contains four subsystems (namely the economic, political, social, and cultural), J.N. Piertse has summarized how each academic discipline defines globalization. In economics, globalization is equated with economic internationalization and the spread of capitalist market relations. In international relations, the focus is on the increasing density of interstate relations, the new role of the state, and the development of global politics. In sociology, the concern is with the increasing worldwide densities and the emergence of “world society.” In cultural studies, the focus is on global communication as well as on worldwide cultural standardization as in Cocacolonization, McDonaldization, or postcolonial culture.

Let us concentrate on the first and last of Piertse’s dimensions: the economic and the cultural, and examine how globalization within these two subsystems affects peace education.

Peace education, like the notion of peace itself, is a contested concept. It faces a lot of the same analytical problems as the concept of peace, and also some additional ones. The whole field of peace education is extremely difficult to treat in a scholarly manner because it is open to so many different political interpretations. For political reasons—to reach consensus on a definition of peace
education to be used in the international community or in official school curriculum guidelines—the term “peace education” is intentionally devised to be open to various interpretations and to accommodate various viewpoints.

The division of peace education into various subfields, such as human rights education, disarmament education, and development education, attempts to make the unwieldy peace education field somewhat easier to handle analytically. Roughly speaking, those who emphasize structural violence want development education to be the area most central to peace education. Elsewhere, I have tried to relate the concepts disarmament education, development education, and human rights education to each other and to peace education, which I see as the generic umbrella for all the different disciplines. Here, I also take peace education to include development and human rights education.

Nevertheless, within peace studies, some have questioned whether peace education is the broader category—encompassing human rights education—or whether human rights education is broader—encompassing both peace and development issues. Some also maintain that human rights education can be looked at as an “approach” to be applied to the field of peace education.

Within the peace education field, human rights education is normally viewed as a subfield of peace education. Yet the Declaration adopted at the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in June 1993 views human rights education as an all-embracing concept. Article II.d of the Declaration runs as follows:

> Human Rights Education should include peace, democracy, development and social justice, as set forth in international and regional human rights instruments in order to achieve common understanding and awareness with a view to strengthening universal commitment to human rights… The proclamation of a United Nations decade for human rights education in order to promote, encourage and focus these educational activities should be considered.

This broader way of defining human rights education causes it to overlap with peace education, and thus makes it just as unwieldy.

Betty Reardon, a leading expert on U.S. peace education, has analyzed more than 100 current peace curriculum guides, from kindergarten through high school. She concludes, “There are as yet no clear and precise limits to, nor standards for, what is to be included in peace education.” In her analysis she identified nine topical areas that characterize contemporary U.S. peace education curricula: cooperation, conflict resolution, non-violence, human rights, social justice, world resources, global environment, and multicultural understanding. All these areas have cognitive as well as attitudinal and behavioral components.

Reardon further defines the purpose of peace education this way:

> … to promote the development of authentic planetary consciousness that will enable us to function as global citizens and to transform the present human condition by changing social structures and the patterns of thought that have created it.

Elsewhere, I have defined peace education as
the social process through which peace, as I have defined it, is achieved. This includes the practising of equality of rights and equal power-sharing for every member of a given community. It further includes the learning of skills of non-violent conflict resolution. It also includes respect for human rights.

The essential contribution human rights can make to peace education, according to Reardon, is to provide a prescriptive, holistic, yet particularized approach that “would make peace education not only more comprehensive but also far more comprehensible.” The conceptual core of peace education, Reardon argues, is violence, its control, reduction, and elimination. The conceptual core of human rights education is, as she sees it, human dignity, its recognition, fulfillment, and universalization. Reardon sees the general purpose of peace education as the development of authentic planetary consciousness that will enable us to function as global citizens and to transform the present human condition by changing social structures.

The globalized market economy is changing social structures but in the opposite direction from that sought by peace educators and researchers. As defined by peace researchers, peace is the absence of both structural or indirect and direct violence. Structural violence is built into society, producing a process whereby some people get poorer as a result of others getting richer. A society with growing disparities is becoming a more structurally violent and less peaceful society. This seems to be the effect of the globalized market economy.

Peace educators must make their students aware of the impact of market economic policies. In a globalized world, peace education must include the study of the growth of inequities between countries, between some of the so-called developing countries, between these countries and the industrialized countries, and also within countries. Students should be taught how to gather statistics from international sources on conditions such as the distribution of food, calorie intake, and child mortality. They should also study their own societies, and the disparities in the different parts of the cities or countries they live in. How has the growth in disparities emerged? What rules and regulations produce it? Which groups have become poorer and are especially likely to be unemployed and to have a hard time finding a place to live and enough food for an adequate diet?

These kinds of studies, especially if they include the students’ near surroundings, will do much to inform them about the consequences of the changes the globalized economy entails.

The task of the educator would be much easier if a clear correlation existed between the knowledge one confronts and the attitudes that develop. Such correlation is hard to find. But a certain level of knowledge is often a prerequisite for changing attitudes. Some years ago, the UNESCO Institute of Education in Hamburg studied the relationship, among elementary and secondary school students in several UNESCO member states, between their attitudes towards certain social questions and their knowledge about those questions. The study found no relationship. To raise the level of knowledge without making other changes in the classroom situation had no significant effect on the children’s social attitudes and values.

In addition, a Norwegian study has shown that the more positive views about ethnic and other minorities held by highly educated, as compared to poorly
Educated, people cannot be attributed to the content of education itself. Instead, the following explanations have been offered to explain the less racist attitudes of highly educated people. First, tolerance and a concept of rights are among the norms educators try to impart. The longer the education, the greater the chance that students will internalize these norms. Second, education confers knowledge, and thus breaks down stereotypic beliefs about immigrants. Third, long-term education will increase cognitive competence, make people more resistant to hostile propaganda about immigrants, and make them better able to understand conflict situations. Fourth, higher education will lead to jobs with higher social status, protected from direct competition with immigrants on the job and housing markets. Fifth, higher education will strengthen one’s ability to master situations, thus reducing occasions that create conflict and aggression. Sixth, higher education creates both the motivation and capacity to act opportunistically in conflict-laden situations. Highly educated people know they are expected to demonstrate tolerance, and their knowledge and verbal aptitude will make it easier to disguise hostility.

Among these explanations, Anders Todal Jenssen and Heidi Engesbak found, in their study of Norwegians between the ages of 16 and 74, support for the latter three, ambiguity on the first, and no support for the second and third theories. These results suggest that education in itself does not seem to break down stereotypic beliefs about immigrants or make youngsters less racist.

In his research on the effectiveness of contemporary issues curricula (including global education and peace education—which he equates with nuclear war education), James Leming has compared achieved outcomes to desired outcomes for knowledge, attitudes, and behavior. For knowledge goals, the outcomes were achieved in two-thirds of the cases (and in as many as 90% of the cases if global education is removed from the data). But in only about one-third of the cases were desired attitudinal outcomes achieved, and in still fewer (about 28%) were desired behavioral outcomes achieved. When cooperative learning strategies are removed from the data, however, behavioral outcomes are achieved in only 10% of the cases. Leming concludes,

The changing of student attitudes and behaviour associated with the goals of contemporary issues curricula appears to be a much more formidable task for school curricula than the teaching of knowledge regarding those same issues. Given that no clear relationship between increased knowledge and changes in attitudes and behaviour was detected, the overall educational and social significance of the knowledge gains achieved must be questioned.

People who have experienced personal starvation and other suffering, and who know what it means to be deprived, will fight against oppression and for liberation with their whole soul, and far more emotionally than children who live in an affluent society and just read about the growing inequities.

One Swedish text provides a good example of a teaching method that helped students become more emotionally engaged in the issue of the world’s unjust distribution of resources. The book tells a story of secondary students in a Finnish school who came, one day, to the cafeteria for their lunch and were met by the smell of wonderful hamburgers. They lined up as usual to get the delicious
food. The first ones served got plenty of hamburgers, french fries, and salad, even more than they could eat. The next ones got only french fries, no hamburgers. Some few students got only some soup. Most students, when they reached the counter, however, were told there was no more food, not even soup. Those students got angry and terribly annoyed. They felt this was terribly unjust. Why had so much been given to the first ones in line so that nothing was left for those who came a little later?

Their anger led, however, to a constructive dialogue with the ones who served the food. They had, of course, been briefed about the experiment and asked the students, “Do you know how resources are distributed in our world today? Only two out of ten people may eat as much as they want. Many of these people eat more than is good for them. Most people in the world get less to eat than they need, many are starving to death. Since you have become so angry today when you didn’t get hamburgers, why don’t you protest this situation as it affects the world more broadly?” After this experience the students studied structural violence and the other problems of developing countries with much greater emotional commitment.

Peace education attempts to develop critical and analytical minds. It also promotes cooperative ways of working together. To solve life-threatening and global problems we must learn to cooperate better. But how does normal formal schooling help develop this ability? People cooperate better and solve problems more constructively if they have confidence in themselves and a feeling of self-security and self-worth. Again: what are the chances that children will emerge from their schooling experience with a more secure self-concept? How can the school help children learn to cooperate and to gain self-confidence?

It is not easy to work for these goals in the normal competitive school system. Even though these goals are frequently proclaimed by formal schooling, the structures of grading and individual achievement and competition do not promote cooperation and self-worth in practice.

In a setting where children are taught to compete against each other, it is difficult to teach peace. It is difficult to teach about equality between states large and small when there is so little equality between teachers and pupils, and hard to teach about the equality of the sexes when the boys in the class are allowed to dominate the girls. Is it at all possible to teach democracy in an authoritarian school or university?

The Norwegian peace researcher Johan Galtung has long believed that the answer is no. Discussing the dilemma of educating for peace in a competitive school setting, he asks, “Will it not merely sound hypocritical?—or, even worse, remain empty words that are nullified through the much stronger message of verticality and dominance being normal and acceptable, conveyed through the structure itself?”

The Swedish peace educator Åke Bjerstedt discusses this dilemma in his book *Learning for the Future*. He finds that the self-concept, the personal sense of security, and the ability of an individual to cooperate adequately are essential ingredients in peace education and in the development of what he calls the “ego-futurem” (our conceptions about our ability to function in the future). He cites successful and creative men who feel that their own school days were destructive and counterproductive. He acknowledges that teachers are not magicians and that
the unpeaceful structures in schools are difficult for teachers to change. Yet he argues that teachers must nevertheless always pose the following questions:

Do I as a teacher do whatever I can to help my pupils gain a feeling of self-security and self-esteem? Do I do whatever I can in order for my pupils to wish to go on studying and learning? Do I do whatever I can so that they shall feel capable of handling problems and challenges in the future?

Bjerstedt finds that most schools, with their constant comparison of achievements, competitions and, ranking easily make many students lose all self-confidence and feeling of self-worth. They make youngsters in their most formative years feel like failures and good for nothing.

Teachers must strive to counteract the hidden messages of schooling, messages devaluing students and giving them little hope for the future, creating a low ego-futurem. This can be done in three ways. First, teachers can teach students about the competitive structures, such as the relative ranking scales that develop from grading exams. Second, teachers can give students an opportunity to develop their own interests and to have them acknowledged in school. Teachers who teach for peace must find traits in their students to praise and encourage in order to build their self-confidence. Third, teachers can train students to imagine a transformed society, to describe to themselves and others what a better, more humane global order might be like. Betty Reardon has put it this way:

Thinking about how the world might be and envisioning a society characterized by justice are the essence of conceptualizing the conditions that comprise positive peace. If we are to educate for peace, both teachers and students need to have some notion of the transformed world we are educating for.

Reardon believes we must keep the development of this capacity paramount among our learning objectives.

Often teachers claim that if all they do is just praise students, have them do things they like and are good at, and train them in cooperation and sharing, then the students will fail their exams. Somehow teachers working within the normal school system, but wanting to promote peace education, have to double-qualify their students, both in the ability to cope with the normal curriculum—at least enough to get through the exams—and also in peace education—by giving them this other more valuable, but often contrasting instruction. The normal school system functions as a case study of structural violence—violence built into structures in compulsory schooling. It is a violence that peace education must overcome.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

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