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An argument for peace education

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ABSTRACT
One of the newest and potentially most controversial developments in New Zealand education is the introduction of Peace Studies into schools. Probably the most fundamental question that is raised when such a proposal is put up is "What is Peace Education?" This question must be answered, as any proponents of a new curriculum development or approach to education must be prepared to define and justify what it is they wish to introduce. This paper attempts such a definition, outlining some of the approaches that are being taken to peace education and discussing some of the criticisms that are levelled at it.

One of the newest and potentially most controversial developments in New Zealand education is the introduction of Peace Studies into schools. The basis for this commitment, however, goes back to 1959 when as the Department of Education Draft Guideline points out, New Zealand joined a decision to adopt the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, which in Principle 10 stated:

> "The child shall be brought up in a spirit of understanding, tolerance, friendship among peoples, peace and universal brotherhood".[1]

More specifically, in 1978, at the First Special Session of the United Nations on Disarmament, an undertaking was given "to take steps to develop programmes of peace studies at all levels".[2]

To say the least, the introduction of peace studies in New Zealand schools, and particularly the wider notion peace education is controversial, as potentially divisive as religious or sex education. No subject or approach to education could have more savage opponents or attract more wide-ranging criticisms, some of which will be examined later in this paper. Probably though the most fundamental question that is raised when such a proposal is put up is "What is Peace Education?"[3] Often, no doubt, the questioners are being deliberately ingenuous, suggesting a wishy-washy, timewasting subject, of little or no academic value, in an already overcrowded curriculum, taught by starry-eyed romantics. Sometimes, of course, there is genuine puzzlement. Nevertheless, whatever the motive, this question must be answered, as any proponents of a new curriculum development or approach to education must be prepared to define and justify what it is they wish to introduce. This paper attempts such a definition, outlining some of the approaches that are being taken to peace education and discussing some of the criticisms that are levelled at it.

At the outset it must be noted, however, that there is, as yet, a lack of hard empirical evidence on what actually happens in peace education in schools, although there is no shortage of opinion on both sides. There are numerous descriptions of individual programmes[4] but these are almost always writ ten by the teachers of the classes themselves, and are usually approached from an enthusiastic rather than critical standpoint. Most of the literature is concerned with aims and ideals for peace education and it is these which will be discussed here. Where empirical evidence exists, as

in the question of young people's attitudes towards nuclear weapons, it will be course, be used. But crucial questions, such as whether political indoctrination actually occurs in peace education in schools, remain to be thoroughly investigated.

The most obvious way to begin is to say that peace education is a term used to describe education both for and about peace. This distinction is an important one, often drawn by the use of two separate terms. Peace studies, the term which seems to be favoured in New Zealand at the moment, implies education about peace. The emphasis here is on the curriculum and is concerned with units of study and courses on peace topics. This does not necessarily mean a separate place in the school timetable. Peace studies has links with many other subjects and in schools is seldom seen as a subject in its own right. But it does not imply any change to the organization of the institution or to the process of education. It would be possible, for example, for peace studies to be taught in an extremely authoritarian school, although it is highly unlikely to be effective if relationships in the school were such that constant recourse to punishment, particularly corporal punishment, was employed. Peace education, which is the principal concern of this paper, is a much broader term, concerned with the process as well as the content of education. It does include, of course, specific courses, or parts of courses, in peace studies of various kinds, but more than just a curriculum development, at its heart lies a concern for equity and social justice, for human fulfilment and democratic participation within the institution, and for peaceful human relationships and resolution of conflict at the individual, group, or national level. It is concerned with action and attitudes as much as with academic learning. Hicks has identified peace education as being the latest in a line of educational responses to contemporary issues arising in the late 1960s and the 1970s which saw various fields of study emerging such as environmental education, development education, world studies and peace studies, all fields which, while having a distinctive emphasis, show a certain family likeness in that they reflect some of the major social, economic and political trends occurring on a global scale.[5] Many educators would maintain that there is, for example, a definite link between peace education and bicultural or multicultural education, or new developments in antiracist education.

The literature on peace education has in recent years been concerned with four principal elements. First, there is an awareness of good interpersonal relationships and the peaceful resolution of conflict, an aim that is given considerable priority in New Zealand thinking on the subject. Second there is a strong link between peace education and what has become known as development education with its concern for the political and cultural aspirations of individuals and groups who might otherwise be submerged by the dominant and powerful elements in society. The work of Paulo Freire is particularly influential here.[6] Third is education specifically on nuclear matters, designed to help young people understand and cope with the stresses of living in the nuclear age. Finally there is a branch of peace education which is frankly aimed at creating a climate favourable to disarmament, usually known simply as "disarmament education". This expanded definition of peace education has arisen to some extent from recent peace research which has developed a wider concept of peace than the usual one of the absence of violent conflict, negative peace as it is sometimes called. In its place has been put a notion of positive peace, which includes a move towards a non-violent type of egalitarian, non-exploitative and non-suppressive cooperation between individuals, groups and nations.[7] One of the key people here is peace researcher Johann Galtung who has coined the term structural violence for inequalities and injustices which are built into the very structure of societies and institutions, which deprive individuals of their potential for fulfilment and self-expression, but which need not necessarily lead to actual or direct violence.[8] Thus peace education would not only include in its curriculum an understanding of positive peace, it would also have to be conducted in as democratic and open a way as possible, with the inequalities between teachers and students minimised. The institution must have a concern for social justice, for democratic participation and for the students' responsibility for their own learning. Curle, writing on peace education in the university regards this last element as being of crucial importance,

although extremely difficult to achieve given the nature of the institution and the expectation of the students.

> Unlike students of, for example, a natural science, they come to it (peace education) with much of the basic knowledge and experience out of which an understanding of peace and conflict is built. They usually doubted this, because students are persuaded that knowledge only comes out of the mouths of teachers or the pages of books.[9]

Galtung's notion of structural violence, influential as it has been in peace research and education, has not been without its critics. Maley, reviewing such criticism, has accused Galtung of expanding the use of the word 'violence' to such a degree that it has hardly any meaning.

> Galtung's idea of structural violence embraces a number of forms which scarcely anyone would regard as seriously as the crushing, tearing, piercing, burning, poisoning, evaporation, strangulation, dehydration and starvation which constitute personal somatic violence. To treat being deprived of 'cultural stimuli' as an evil commensurable with being torn to pieces is a step so audacious as to demand very specific moral justification. This Galtung fails to supply, and, as a result, his notion of peace is a very unsatisfactory ideal against which to evaluate a social order.[10]

This criticism is probably justified. Galtung himself is aware of the dangers of overworking the word violence and frequently uses the less contentious "social injustice" where appropriate.[11] An additional problem with structural violence is presented by Smoker.[12] If one assumes that certain structures, such as feudalism, are inherently violent in the structural sense, then this raises difficulties when dealing with some small-scale societies, such as the Hutterites or Old-Order Amish, who strongly emphasize peaceful values, but which nevertheless exhibit in some respects marked hierarchical structures, particularly in relationships between the sexes. A peaceful society is, in these terms, not necessarily one in which there is complete egalitarianism in all respect, but, as Smoker points out, one which presupposes a shared symbolic reality, a considered interdependence between structural and cultural harmony. Although all the "peaceful societies" studied by Fabbro[13] for example, exhibit to some degree, what we might call sexism they all share in other respects a basically egalitarian social structure, generally lack formal patterns of ranking and stratification and place no restriction on the number of people capable of exercising authority or occupying positions of prestige. Needless to say they are all small, face-to-face communities, which leads Smoker to the conclusion that "world peace" will have to consist of a multitude of "small peaces".[14]

Peace education is t s would undoubtedly agree. In the global sense, education is probably powerless to do much in the cause of world peace, but it has a role in the development of peaceful relationships between individuals arid groups. Most programmes of peace education place considerable emphasis on interpersonal relationships and the peaceful resolution of conflict. In New Zealand, for example, the New Zealand Foundation for Peace Studies has recently followed up the highly successful 1979 publication "Learning Peaceful Relationships", which is still in demand from teachers in primary schools, with a substantial collection of activities for secondary schools entitled "Extending Peaceful Relationships". The aim of these activities is to

> give students a better understanding of themselves, improve ways of sharing and communicating, examine conflict, dispute and violence, and explore options for resolving those problems non-violently.[15]

One problem that arises when teaching conflict resolution skills is that our culture and, indeed, probably most cultures, have a negative view of conflict. In religious systems, utopias and indeed in much political and social thought, conflicts are to be avoided, and peace is often defined as the absence of conflict. However, it is a truism to say that some degree of conflict is inherent in all human contact, and a society without it would be an extremely dull one, like the Houyhnhnms in "Gulliver's Travels" who were all very similar to each other, never argued and had no word for 'opinion' in their language. An ideal, commonly expressed in the peace education literature, is not the avoidance of conflict but its management and resolution without resorting to violence. An important factor in successful conflict resolution is to avoid polarization between conflicting parties, for opponents to

keep in contact with each other rather than avoiding it, and to try and establish dialogue rather than isolating or fighting each other. Indeed, under such circumstances, conflict can be a creative force.

A second element in peace education is an approach closely related to what has become known in recent years as Development Education, arising out of the adult literacy work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. At its centre lies Freire's concept of 'conscientization', a process by which oppressed individuals become critically aware of their historical and cultural situation becoming active subjects rather than passive objects, who are capable of reflecting on their experience and of translating their thoughts into practice. It is the job of teachers here not to impose a specific content on learners but to use their own experience, reality as they know it, and to draw out the implications of that reality. Thus the aim is for oppressed learners to break out of what Freire has called "the culture of silence" in which they see themselves and their position in the world through the eyes of the oppressors, and become capable of "naming the world", seeing reality for themselves. In this form peace education is overtly political, concerned with questions of power and oppression, and explicitly linked with political action. Learning comes through dialogue, not one way communication from teacher to student, a very difficult process to implement in formal educational institutions with their hierarchies and power relationships.

Some indication of the difficulties of this approach to peace education can be seen in an interesting attempt to create such a dialogue, based in this case not on Freire but on the principles of Martin Buber. The Education for Peace Project, initiated in 1979 by Haim Gordon at Ben Gurion University in Israel, was a sustained endeavour to promote an Arab-Jewish dialogue which would address both personal and political issues. The main activities of this project took place in "Buberian Learning Groups" which consisted of equal numbers of Arab and Jewish Israelis, students and teachers from the area, the aim being to reach a close relationship and understanding between the two groups based on Buber's philosophy of dialogue. Within the groups there was formal course work based on Buber's ideas, more informal group exercises and field trips, such as a visit to Egypt. The project lasted three years.

There is not the space here to go into the complexities of the project in any detail[16] but three important problems arising out of the project, and which lie at the heart of a development approach to peace education, can be raised. Firstly, as Gordon himself points out, it is naive to expect that dialogue will reach those persons who are stubbornly resigned to mistrust. It proved futile in encounters with religious or Political fanatics or mediocre and cowardly bureaucrats. This is a problem that Freire also is aware of. It is one thing to have dialogue with the oppressed, or with those who are willing to learn, quite another to have it with the oppressors. Secondly, although improved communications between the members of the group was well documented, they failed to realise Gordon's expectations of political action in the wider context: It was as if there was a chasm between the laboratory conditions of the project and a personal involvement in "altering history" toward the promotion of peace. Finally, as Hassan notes in her critique of the project[17], it is difficult to conceive of an I-Thou dialogue being possible between persons who are significantly unequal in their relationship: Jews and Arabs are not equal in Israel, and furthermore the Education for Peace Project itself was based on the candid belief that Israel should be a Jewish state in which Arab citizens will continue to be a minority whose national aspirations will not be realized.

Essentially the Education for Peace Project was a quest for responsibility, a plan to give the participants broader understanding of ways of working for social justice and to demand such involvement. It arose out of a particular situation, but raised issues that all attempts at peace education must address. Probably the most crucial global situation is the existence of nuclear weapons. It is now over forty years since they were first developed and used, and yet in our classrooms this dominant fact of the present age seldom appears as a topic of discussion or study. Lifton has coined the term "nuclear numbness" for our refusal to face the facts of the nuclear age.[18] We are confused, and in our confusion, often in despair. The situation we tell ourselves is so immense that the solution lies entirely out of our hands.

However, although nuclear questions may not be discussed widely in schools there is abundant evidence that young people are seriously concerned about their future in the nuclear age. Tizard[19] suggests that there is evidence of widespread anxiety among young people, although these anxieties need to be set within the context of their general high level of anxiety and depression. The serious and malignant effect of the nuclear threat on the young may be difficult to disentangle from those resulting from other malign influences such as unemployment, a daily diet of TV violence and the spread of drug abuse. No study has however shown any serious psychopathology resulting among young people from the threat of nuclear war and there appears to be little conclusive evidence of the effects of the attitudes of youngsters on their actual behaviour. A recent New Zealand study has, in fact, presented some evidence that while adolescents are pessimistic about the future in general, believing nuclear war to be a distinct possibility, they remain more positive on a personal level.[20] It does appear likely though, that their level of knowledge of nuclear issues is generally low, but that they would like to be better informed, even though they rarely discuss their anxieties with adults. Perhaps this is not surprising as many adults would not be prepared for the hard questions young people will ask if the issue is opened up. One of the reasons why adults are reluctant to discuss nuclear matters with young people is a perhaps justifiable fear of increasing their anxiety. On the other hand, although there is little hard evidence on the question, it is possible that those who are better informed or more concerned are able to deal with their fears more easily. Many teachers, no doubt, also avoid bringing nuclear issues into their classrooms because of the political implications that are inevitably involved. They fear parental and official protest and censure if they raised, for example, the ways in which governments manipulate information so as to present only one side of the argument, or the concern that Falk expresses that "the existence of nuclear weapons, even without any occurrence of nuclear war interferes with democratic governance in fundamental ways".[21]

The political nature of peace education is probably most clearly evident when the focus is on the harmful consequences of arms and military solutions to conflict, particularly those involving nuclear weapons. This approach is often called Disarmament Education.[22] It promotes a clearly identified aim to contribute, as the final document of the Tenth U.N. General Assembly Special Session on Disarmament puts it, to a better understanding and acquaintance with the problems created by the arms race and with the need for disarmament.[23] In the words of one of the proponents of disarmament education there is a need to mobilize the masses and equip them with the ideology of disarmament".[24] Guha's aim is very clear: to promote support for a total moritorium on products, research and development of any type of armament, whether nuclear or non-nuclear on a global scale. Education is seen as a primary means of building up public opinion in favour of disarmament, which entails fundamental changes, for the school, as it is presently constituted, is seen as one of the obstacles to disarmament, and has been described as "the child and mother of the warfare ideology".[25] It is accused of fostering competition rather than cooperation, maintaining a warfare ritual around national festivities and symbols, concentrating in subjects like History far too much on the celebration of military values and at its most extreme forcing young people into military activities such as School Cadets. Disarmament education seeks to overcome this perceived bias in schools by creating and reinforcing positive attitudes to disarmament, engendering commitment in students towards action in disarmament projects.

It should be noted here that proponents of disarmament education are not actually advocating the indoctrination of students into these views. Nevertheless, given the aims presented above, the dangers of over-enthusiastic teachers pushing their own opinions to the exclusion of all alternatives must be recognized. There are plenty of critics who accuse peace education of being indoctrinatory, biased particularly against the USA, and with an explicit aim to weaken the Western Alliance.[26] During the 1987 election campaign, the Coalition of Concerned Citizens portrayed Peace Studies as

a key element of Labour's political indoctrination. It is the "Trojan Horse" which Russell Marshall has allowed the Peace Movement to stable in our schools.

It is a front for all kinds of propoganda - unilateral disarmament, radical feminism, liberalising of sexual attitudes, promotion of Maori sovereignty and exercises designed to change children's values.[27]

Another New Zealand opponent of peace education has written:

"to date the state has not used its coercive power for the purpose of political indoctrination, although this century long tradition is currently under active threat".[28]

Several studies have shown that this "century long tradition" might not be quite as pure as Newman likes to think.[29] Nevertheless peace educators must beware of giving hostages to such critics. An explicit distinction must always be drawn between peace education in schools and the public awareness activities of peace movements. The latter have particular views to get across and in a democracy it is legitimate for them to use the most effective methods they can to proselytize these views. The school however, is not in the business of making converts to particular causes, but ought to concentrate on producing educated, thoughtful citizens who can make up their own minds on issues, with concern for such qualities as evidence, logic and force of argument. In schools, when dealing with, for example, nuclear weapons, all sides must be open to critical scrutiny. It may well be, of course, that when subjected to such examinations the claims of nuclear deterrence may prove to be a threadbare option for young people, which could be one of the reasons why the raising of these questions in schools has created such alarm in some quarters.

A legitimate reply to such critics might well be that issues of peace and war are not "merely fashionable pursuits" but are among the most crucial questions that the school in a democracy can encourage its young citizens to think seriously about. How then should these issues be approached? The role of the teacher when dealing with such controversial issues is at the heart of the problem and is a question that has in recent years been discussed quite extensively in the educational literature. Much of this discussion arises out of the work of the Humanities Curriculum Project of the Schools Council in Britain.[30] This project is based on the premises that controversial issues should be handled in the classroom with adolescents but that discussion rather than instruction and divergence of views rather than consensus should be aimed at. In order to achieve this aim teachers should see their' roles as neutral chairpersons of the discussion with responsibility for quality and standards in learning. As McNaughton has pointed out this approach falls within a tradition of educational thought, from Dewey to Piaget and Freire, which places emphasis on pupil autonomy, active thought, dialogue and discovery in learning.[31] It must be emphasized that there is no suggestion that controversial matters such as peace studies should be taught only by teachers who have no strong views on the subject themselves. For one thing, such a teacher would be unlikely to inspire much enthusiasm in the students. In addition it would be next to impossible to achieve, as one of the characteristics of any controversial issue that is worth discussing seriously in the classroom, a characteristic that ought not to be hidden from the students, is that most people do hold strong views about such questions. Many feel, of course, that young people ought not to express firm opinions in schools, an attitude that surfaced during a 1987 election visit to Onslow College by Jim Bolger, Leader of the Opposition, during which he was strongly challenged by students on the nuclear issue. Apple has pointed out that the "hidden curriculum" of the school teaches an unrealistic and basically consensus oriented perspective which prevents students from understanding the dialectic of controversy and conflict. The existing social order is legitimated since change, conflict and creation of values are systematically neglected.[32]

The notion of the teacher as neutral chairperson has not been without its critics. For Warnock, the neutral teacher evokes "the nightmare of the knitters at the guillotine"[33], and teachers ought, by contrast, to present a model of moral principle, "an imaginative vision of how things ought to be though they are not".[34] In practice, it is a central part of the Humanities Curriculum Project approach that teachers spell out clearly to the students that for the purpose of the discussion they are adopting a position of neutrality and why they are doing it. Nothing in the procedure is hidden and thus students are able to criticize the teacher's performance.

"He's a communist but he's a good chairman".

"You had difficulty hanging on to your neutrality this morning".[35]

In his study of the neutral chairperson concept in operation in three New Zealand high schools[36], McNaughton in fact found that often neutrality as a procedural device ultimately withered away, to be replaced by free discussion of all views, teacher included. This was sometimes demanded by students who were interested in the teachers' views and didn't feel in the least threatened by them. At other times teachers might inject a biased opinion into the discussion in order to revive flagging interest. A crucial element in all this would appear to be a degree of mutual trust and respect that would lead to a more cooperative teaching/learning mode.

In conclusion, then, the following is put forward as a legitimate and realistic programme for peace education in schools. At all levels, from pre-school onwards, efforts should be made towards developing harmonious personal relationships, peaceful resolution of disputes and greater interpersonal cooperation. This means more than just "good manners" but entails a deliberate attempt on the part of the school to reduce violence using methods and techniques such as those advocated in the New Zealand Foundation for Peace Studies' books mentioned above. With the widespread concern for violence in the community it is incredible that there should he such opposition to an educational approach which seeks deliberately to do something to reduce it.

In addition, peace studies could be introduced, particularly with older students, as part of the academic work of the school, probably in conjunction with other subjects such as social studies, history, geography, health and science. Problems of peace and war, conflict and resolution of disputes are among the most important that young people can turn their minds to and an education which ignores such matters on the grounds that they are too controversial is seriously inadequate. If there is a bias in peace studies it is in favour of peace, much as health education aims to promote health and social studies to improve tolerance of differences between people of widely varying cultures. Particular attention must be paid to the nuclear issue as one of the most important facts of the present age and which young people exhibit some degree of anxiety about. All sides of the argument and all views must be presented fairly, the predominant modes of procedure being discussion and investigation rather than instruction. Indeed one of the aims of the teacher ought to be. bringing pupils to realize the controversial nature of questions about peace and nuclear power weapons. Teachers engaging in peace studies must be constantly aware that there are always plenty of critics who would accuse them of indoctrinating children into a set of dogmatic conclusions or adherence to particular policies, and parents in particular need to be assured that even if their children are having a variety of controversial views placed before them, no one view is being imposed on them. The teacher's educational role is to ensure high standards of debate, concern for evidence, logic and clear argument. The discipline of the teacher as neutral chairperson could well be used at the early states of the study, not in Freire's sense of neutrality as a tool for the maintenance of the status quo, but as an initial step towards a more cooperative exploration of the issues that lies at the centre of the procedures of peace education. To use the Freirean model, issues of peace and war, violence, nuclear power and nuclear weapons become powerful generative themes to be explored critically through dialogue. Students then become not passive recipients of dogma but active participants in the search for alternatives to war and violent conflict, a search that is a matter of widespread and enduring concern and that ought to be part of the agenda of any educational institution.

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