

Education for Peace Must Be Peace

“There is no way to peace; peace is the way.” A.J. Muste

I am a School Sister of Notre Dame who has over the course of many years of teaching and even more years of learning come to believe in the very marrow of my bones that peace education is essential to the establishment of the beloved community where all share in the wealth and care of Earth; poverty, hunger, and homelessness are not tolerated; all forms of discrimination, bigotry, and prejudice are replaced by an inclusive community of love and respect. I have come to believe that education that is itself peace can help to build the beloved kingdom where love will triumph over fear, hatred, and violence, and God's peace with justice will reign.

It seems to me that the only way to there from here is through some kind of education for peace that is itself peace. I make no claim to knowing the way or even that there is one way. I can only begin to suggest what education for peace, that is itself peace, might look like. Let me propose, simply propose, five principles that might guide education that seeks to transform our ways of thinking and being.

First, peace education must be deeply spiritual in nature. It grows out of a rich relationship with God incarnate in all of creation. Education that is peace requires a deep personal relationship with God that joins contemplation and action. It recognizes the essential unity of the inward and outward journeys that take us deep into the heart of God and then compels us to act to build up God's community. Education for peace nurtures a spirituality through which we become conscious of the social reality which shapes our world and our responsibility to be co-creators with God of the new reality.

Second, education for peace must be clearly focused on the human person. At its core education that seeks peace must be directed toward the development of the whole person and must strive to help each person reach the fullness of her or his potential as individuals created in God's image and assist them to direct their gifts toward building Earth. Peace education is grounded in the conviction that the world can be changed through the transformation of persons.

Third, education that seeks peace always critically confronts the current reality, complete with its dangers and possibilities and challenges us to accept responsibility for the common good. We are in the world to foster that which builds the reign of God and to confront with the Gospel that which does not. Education, if it is to foster transformation that leads to God's peace, must carefully examine the signs of the times taking the realities of the world on their own terms, examining them with the eyes of faith, and subjecting them to the scrutiny of the Gospel. Only critical reflection on reality can lead to liberating action to establish peace with justice.

Fourth, education that is itself peace must be grounded in solidarity and deeply communitarian in nature. We know deep in our souls that we were created for communion. We know deep in our hearts that we can only develop our full potential when we are in right relationship with each other and with God's creation.

Peace education embraces the truth of solidarity and seeks to dissolve the false dichotomies which divide rich from poor, north from south; domestic from foreign; teacher from student, and human beings from our planet home. The growing inequality created by poverty, environmental degradation, and exclusion creates deep divides that threaten the inherent unity that lies at the heart of God's design. Peace education seeks to foster a clear sense of the common good and to cultivate in each of us a willingness to risk everything to ensure the rights and dignity of our brothers and sisters near and far and the sustainability of our planet home.

Finally, education for peace must be transformative action infused with hope that seeks to close the gap between the real and the ideal; what is and what must be; this age and the next. This is not a hope that waits patiently. It is rather a hope that compels us to act now for a future not yet clearly seen. Peace education requires an absolute commitment to hope grounded in faith and rooted in the conviction that another world is possible. It is hope that believes that God's beloved community will come, that it is in fact, already in our midst. Education for peace, that is itself peace, is a passionate commitment to act on behalf of the liberation of human persons and the integrity of creation in order to bring about the systemic change necessary to realize God's peace.

This brief discussion of some principles which might guide peace education is an attempt to move us one step closer to an education that is not simply education *about* peace, or even education *for* peace, it is an attempt to describe education that *is* peace. Peace is possible only if our educational institutions and our educational practices are themselves peace-filled. Peace is possible only if education is itself a process of conscientização and liberation; a process that develops our capacity to know critically and to act courageously to change the social relationships and structures that create violence.

Peace is possible because education for peace is possible. The pedagogical paths which have led endlessly down the road of violence and oppression in the past were of our own making and they can be remade. We know what education can be; we have some idea of what education for peace should be. We are convinced that education can empower those it touches to create and recreate reality because we believe that education can be peace.

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