PEACE EDUCATION

From Peace Movement Ideals
to Ministry of Education Realities,
or
How to succeed in peace education
without really trying

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1. INTRODUCTION: how not to try

According to clearly formulated resolutions from UNESCO, and the First special session on disarmament of the United Nations General Assembly (1978), member states are now to take peace education/disarmament education seriously. That the United States takes it seriously is beyond doubt: precisely this is one of the reasons why that particular country has left UNESCO, not only alleged mal-administration, the feudal manners of the men on the top, and "statism", the supremacy of government over the private sector, and in the United Nations system of the inter-governmental over the non-governmental.\(^1\) Of course, there is a paradox here: most of the schools in most countries belong to the public sector, i.e. under governmental control, and governments very often pursue policies that are far from peaceful, and even if they should be peaceful, pursue peace with means that are far from peaceful, armament. So, how could one ever expect the public school system in any country to go in for peace education, possibly contradicting the master?

A public school system in a nation state is predominantly a mechanism for the transmission of the national myth: shared religion, language and history. In this myth, the wars of the past will have to play a role. By the very fact that a nation state exists and is capable of running a public school system, it follows that some of those wars, of liberation or not, were successful. From this it might follow that peace education in defense of a generally supportive attitude to wars of liberation could be incorporated in a public school curriculum. But, as we all very well know: one thing is our war of liberation, quite another is the wars of liberation of other peoples. Whereas, ours was entirely legitimate, theirs are illegitimate, subversive, engineered from the outside, etc. We hear this every day.

Hence, rather than the policies that gave rise to the birth of the nation state, the policies maintaining it in the system, would be deemed proper for transmission to the next

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* Based on talks given at conferences organized by the education authorities of the University of Tromsø, Norway (January 1984), Kanton Zürich (September 1984); Sweden (Stockholm, November 1984) and Provincia di Torino (April 1985). The title is a play on a musical by a late friend of mine, Abe Burrows (How to succeed in business without really trying).
generation. After the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 the official formula in this connection has been "balance of power". The balance of power thesis is neither quite true (a country may attack even if it is inferior, or it may abstain from attack even if it is superior, for the simple reason that there may be no motivation), nor false (of course, power also deters, be it because it can be used for defense, or for retaliation). But we are not dealing here with peace research, rather with national myths and self-assertiveness. Hence, when governments are admonished to launch peace education in their schools, the most likely outcome will be some effort to justify balance of power policies engaged in by that very same government. In practice, this means justification of armament and the whole military apparatus, as well as policies based on certain images of conflict formations in the global environment held by the top establishment of the very same nation state. Peace, yes, but with security, based on strength = force = self-assertiveness.

One wonders how it could be otherwise? How can a Ministry of Education come up with a curriculum to be taken seriously in primary and secondary schools that could contradict the major assumptions of such rather heavy institutions as the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defense, not to mention the Military itself? A private school might do this, possibly at the risk of losing public subventions on which it might heavily depend, meaning in practice that the school is not that private after all. And this would be a fortiori the case if the nation state is a member of an alliance with a super power on the top, built in the usual manner of alliances, on the basis of an explicit or implicit agreement between governments of the "I shall protect you, but you shall be loyal to me" variety. A military system depends for its efficacy on a minimum of allegiance from the citizens, a military alliance system extends this allegiance transnationally (not only intergovernmentally). There will always be conflicts, dissent from within the system. But to bring countervailing theories and concepts into the public school system is a challenge
too obvious even for democratic nation states to contemplate. Conclusion: peace education is a beautiful vision, one of those lights shining in the 1970's and early 1980's, fading away and then disappearing when confronted with the harsh reality as indicated above. Governments do not want their myths exploded; governments run schools — hence, there will be no such thing.

2. Is peace education nevertheless possible?

So, we are in a dilemma. On the one hand, there are the demands of the Establishments in our countries, built into their systems, usually because leading spokesmen such as presidents and prime ministers may have engaged in some festive occasions. On the other hand, there is the despair of peoples all over the world, reaching far into governmental circles, including the heavy institutions mentioned above, that the policies on which peace is supposed to be based, simply do not work. People see it before researchers do, and researchers before the politicians:

offensive weaponry in a country with even the most "peaceful" intention of securing peace through a guaranteed capability of retaliation tends to stimulate equally offensive weaponry in the other country, again possibly with exactly the same motivation; the result is an arms race; then fear sets in and there is an effort to control the arms race, even to undertake some steps in the direction of disarmament; all of these efforts fail in the sense that the total destruction potential is not at all reduced, only some weapon systems are given up, with others more than substituting for them; then tensions, even confrontations, come into the picture along the edges of systems in conflict and finally the result is there: a major war.

So much evidence points in exactly this direction, so much theory. The realists are the people who see this. The idealists of this world are the people who deny it and continue pursuing age-old policies from a period before ideologies pitted systems against each other in a much sharper way than ever before (with the exception, a notable one, of the religious wars in Europe that led precisely to the Peace of Westphalia). People want to be informed, and have a right to be informed. Governments
want to indoctrinate, and so do the more aggressive peace movements.\(^5\) The latter may be as convinced in their one-factor theory (total disarmament, one-world government, cooperation across all borders), as the governments in theirs (balance of power, "balance" sometimes meaning "parity" like in mechanics, quite often meaning "superiority" like in shop-keeping - "being in the black"). Both parties may be equally convinced that peace depends to a large extent on how successful they are indoctrinating the young.\(^6\)

At this point, a distinction implicitly made use of above should be brought out more explicitly: isn't there a difference, when discussing all of this, between a dictatorship and a democracy? I think there is, and I think it should be seen as crucial in the whole debate, although the difference is more important in the rhetoric of democracy than in our sad reality.

In a dictatorship, we would assume "peace education" to be governed by the following five principles:

- a government would evaluate the curriculum, and decide
- only "official" peace movements would be invited to participate in this process - not "dissidents"
- the answers to the basic question: "how to achieve peace" would be given in advance and be in line with governmental policies
- the basic assumptions would not be considered debatable; learning, not discussion is encouraged
- the whole exercise would be surrounded by an atmosphere of nervousness, anxiety.

The main consideration of the Establishment would be how to guarantee, through "peace education", that the young generation will not only come to the same conclusions as those presumably held by the establishment, but even on the basis of the same premises, such as "our experiences in the Second world war". If both premises and conclusions are the same, the indoctrination is much more complete than if only the conclusions coincide: there will always be the risk that new premises might disturb
the thought system, and by some be seen as warranting different conclusions.

What, then, would we expect of peace education in a democracy? Before we discuss the answer, which obviously is the negation of the five points just given, some reflections on the nature of democracy might be in order. Of course, democracy is much more than a system of elections and a way of selecting the leaders of the country, making them responsible to the people indirectly, through the mechanisms of parliaments. This is only parliamentocracy. Democracy, in my view, has very much in common with the scientific research process. Good research presupposes that conclusions are not given in advance, and that any assumption can be questioned; so does good democracy. But the difference is also basic: research is and remains elitist since very special skills are needed whereas democracy is based on the assumption that everybody can participate in this community of people engaged in search and re-search, always anxious to improve the condition of the majority of the members, potentially of all. It is this particular capacity of democracy which makes it possible to adjust the course, to change not only the speed but also the direction by which a society travels through the social landscape, in history. A change may be for the better or for the worse, there is no built in guarantee that the course chosen by the majority, after an extensive debate, necessarily is better for the people as a whole than the course charted by governing elites. But to this another argument can be added: people grow in the process of participating in community/society/world affairs. The challenges work on them.

Voltaire once proposed a very important argument in favour of monarchy: in order to arrive at wise decisions, all that was needed was to educate one person, the monarch, whereas in a democracy one had to educate quite a lot of people, the whole demos. Peace education is that education for the participation of a society in the world system, and it is an indispensable part of a system that wants to refer to itself as
a democracy. Of course, Voltaire is right: education of the monarch costs much less and education of the functionaries in the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defense only a little bit more, being only a question of a couple of hundred, at most a thousand people. Peace education involves educating not only thousands but millions of people. But it is difficult to see how democracy can function without. Unless, that is, that one accepts what so many people seem to accept: democracy may be acceptable for domestic, but never for foreign policy, not to mention world politics - the latter is for the selected few, for the elites, for the specialists, the initiated. And this not only because it is so "difficult", but because there are basic "interests" at stake, some of them even secret, presumably because they don't easily survive exposure to daylight.

The negation of the five points mentioned above would lead to a process for elaboration of a curriculum where all kinds of organisations within a country would participate together, including the ministries mentioned and the more aggressive peace movements. The debate would go "public", become accessible. The result would be a curriculum with no conclusions given in advance, and with an invitation to the students to question all assumptions. In other words, democracy as a research process. And rather than being surrounded by nervousness, the whole process should be one of delight, of exploring together the processes of world politics in general, with peace as the goal of those processes in particular.

Of course, this is easily said, but not so easily done as so much of what might enter the curriculum is "controversial". I have encountered that word very often, and after some study have come to the conclusion that it stands for something in which the Establishment does not agree. A "controversy" differs from the more plebeian "disagreement"—which ordinary people might run into—by having the Establishment as one party to the disagreement. Disagreements can be handled by the Establishment telling who's right. A controversy is much more problematic since there is even an element of subversiveness
about it, and there is no super-Establishment that can pass
the final judgement. Hence the obvious way out: the
Establishment imposes its view, puts its stamp on "peace
education" as "national security education" and the result,
even in the best of democracies, is remarkably similar to that
of dictatorship. The only difference might be that the level
of nervousness is even higher. After all, there are some
soft strings in democracy establishments, some democratic
inclinations, even some elements of bad consciousness.

However, there is another way out that should be
entirely acceptable, precisely in a democracy. After surveying
the whole area to be covered under the heading of peace
education, the parties engaged in the process may even agree
as to what is controversial and what is not controversial. In the
latter we might include such ideas as the history and
geography of warfare since the Second World War, the history
and geography of the arms race, the results or non-results
of disarmament conferences, information about international
organisations, guides to important theories of peace, of
development, of human rights - just to mention some examples.
It might not even be difficult to commission books in these
areas, assuming that they should be as informative as possible,
with no unsolicited comments from the authors, just giving
facts. The theories of any contemporary peace research may
be surrounded by controversy, but what of the theories of, say,
Immanuel Kant or Bertrand Russell, or Buddha, or Jesus Christ
for that matter (although the latter may be more problematic,
because it may turn out that he had no peace theory)?

Equally important, however, is a list of controversial
topics, but even on that list the parties might agree. Do
balance of power policies lead to peace or war, and under what
conditions? Do disarmament conferences lead to disarmament
or armament, and under what conditions? What about the
policies of our own government, are they peace policies or mainly
war policies? Where are the roots of peace and war to be
located? Are they inside persons, in their genetic or personality
constitution, between persons in their relations in such
important institutions as family, school and work; inside
societies, in their class structure or policy-making structure; between societies in the way international relations are run; within regions, particularly regions having the same civilisation and built into the codes of those civilisations; between regions as for instance in the East-West or North-South relations; or within the world system itself in the way international organisations tending towards world government are constructed? The reader will of course sense that these categories do not necessarily exclude each other, and probably himself have some ideas where the source of war and where the source of peace might be located, or rather have their point of gravity (hint to the reader a peace researcher: it may not necessarily be at the same place!)

The way out is then very simple: teach the non-controversial in the more classical school manner; leave the controversial topics to debate! What could be more democratic, what could be more in line with its edicts of rational discourse and search for solutions than simply having teachers enter the classroom with some material, much of it cut from newspapers, even from the same day, presenting different views for the students and then have the students debate with the teacher participating, playing the difficult role of presenting honestly his or her own views and at the same time animating the debate (the latter is probably best done precisely when the is honest and comes out with his/her own position). The students might then make a report, possibly come to a conclusion, possibly conclude that there is more than one conclusion, and so on.

Of course, in this process many things will be said that are not necessarily pleasant to establishment ears. The capacity to tolerate this, to let it happen even in public schools, seems to be a rather important benchmark of democracy. And it is precisely at this point that I am sceptical: I have great doubts that it will happen. Not that the government itself will necessarily intervene. But groups of parents may, simply because they disagree with something that someone has said, knowing that the disagreement is at the same time a controversy, and that for this reason they will be protected
or at least not attacked by the government if they come out in the open attacking the teachers, the schools, where the "incident" has occurred (such as questioning the nuclear policy of NATO in a NATO country or the role of the Red Army in a WTO country).

And that, of course, might make one turn to private schools, presumably less vulnerable to governmental, explicit or implicit, pressure. One such school, perhaps one of the best secondary schools in Europe, the Ecole Internationale de Génève, started a programme in world peace studies, well endowed with a grant from a transnational corporation. The programme seems to be of only one-year duration, possibly even being eliminated, possibly due to some kind of pressure, some kind of fear that this is too controversial. Of course, the school is a special one catering to international civil servants (most of them in the U.N. system), and the functionaries of transnational corporations (with headquarters in the Geneva area, but also elsewhere). Where the former might be in favour of a relatively open debate, the latter might not. But how is it possible, today, to discuss anything of relevance to peace and war without being able to look into the role played by international capital?

Another possibility might be Rudolf Steiner schools found all over in the First World countries. The characteristic feature is the encouragement of debate, of self-awareness, of consciousness of what goes on. The graduates from such schools tend to be perhaps somewhat short on very concrete knowledge, but extremely long on three rather important aspects of learning: a sense and grasp of aesthetic dimensions, ability to formulate and verbalise, and a burning desire to learn more! A shortcoming, however, is that the schools being tied to Rudolf Steiner and his ideas not only of pedagogy but also of cosmology and society, might be handicapped by one of the weaknesses of that particular genius: he had fascinating views on nature, human beings, societies, on culture — and not only religion but certainly also language and art — but very little at least that I can discover of insight, or interest, or interesting thoughts about the world system. In addition, the schools, brilliantly organised and also financed, may cater to the interests of the
middle-class bourgeoisie with esoteric, half-religious inclinations more than to the politically conscious and interested.

3. **Conclusion: let us try!**

And yet, in spite of all these difficulties, peace education is destined to come. The school system cannot in the longer run close itself to matters of major importance for the populations at large as witnessed by the extent and the depth of the peace movement of the 1980's, not only in the First World, but also in the Second, the Socialist countries, World. People simply want to know more about peace matters. If the school doesn't offer any opportunity for more knowledge, questions and answers, debate, then the party to suffer most will be the school itself, and those running the schools, the public authorities. In a democracy, people will find their knowledge elsewhere, in a process that has come particularly far in the Federal Republic of Germany with its almost incredible production of books and magazines in this field, easily available, produced everywhere and consumed everywhere, contributing to very high levels of insight in the population at large. A level often much above the level found in Establishment circles, even among governmental functionaries who should know better! This may even be the best way of learning: it is education rather than schooling, with no public authority, no officialdom having been permitted to spray its layer of dust, its greyness over books that have passed the filters of the ministries of education and been proclaimed suitable for innocent youth.

But the trouble is that the school will look anachronistic if this challenge is not taken seriously. And democracy will suffer from not legitimising the concern with peace and the open debate that is the condition for this concern to be processed in the direction of practical, but also innovative, peace policies. It is not so much that in a school setting people will develop new or better ideas. Rather, the point is that when the school
withholds its stamp of approval from this subject of concern the public might draw the conclusion that the field is still off-limits and one had better not engage in it. The same of course, applies to the universities: the moment they have a chair of peace studies, that field becomes "recognised" and people react to it in a different manner, even if what comes out of the holder of that chair may be pure nonsense.

Then, at the same time, may one not also hope that the teaching of peace education could contribute to something more than legitimacy, not only to education, but possibly even to a modicum of that scarce commodity, peace? I think yes, and both at the level of the primary school and the secondary school, not only at the university level.

In primary school, one would probably be less concerned with the details of post-second world war history (or longer historical perspectives, for that matter), more concerned with what is close to the pupils in space and time. Maybe the focus should be more on conflicts and their resolution. And they are numerous: in family, at school - if not yet at work, because of the way our societies try to keep children innocent by keeping them away from the workplace as long as possible. The teachers should be equipped with insights in conflict theory at the intra-personal, inter-personal and to some extent intra-societal levels - leaving the inter-societal, intra-regional, inter-regional and intra-global to secondary education. (The reader will recognise the boxes made use of above for the possible location of the sources of peace and the sources of war). Special emphasis could be on the roots of conflict, on their expressions in attitudes and behaviour (prejudice and hatred, discrimination and violence); and various processes of conflict resolution. Very quickly, the teacher will recognise his/her own needs for conflict theory in order to engage in better conflict practice, and also discover the extent to which conflicts tend to be swept under the carpet, not only in the family and the school, but certainly in the workplace - the latter coinciding with the school for the teachers. The purpose is to show the lower level members of the systems a smooth
surface, rarely admitting major problems or conflicts before the solution is already at hand.

But this is the classical way of non-learning, of not learning to be, of not tapping the capacity to learn. Much better would be for teachers and students to come up with examples of conflicts, from some of their own personal situations, even conflicts that still hurt, put them on the table literally speaking, and discuss solutions. And maybe this should be done a number of times before the teacher carefully tries to draw conclusions, to systematise and organise. Conflict consciousness should lead to a much broader repertory of conflict resolution processes and hence to much more mature human beings, precisely the material out of which better democracies can be made.

In secondary schools, one might go further, higher up in the hierarchies of social complexity, further away from the here and now, into social and world spaces. There will be sufficient material available from history and "civics", there should be more than enough to discuss. One particularly useful exercise might be counterfactual history: what might have been done to save the Roman Empire, if you consider the effort worthwhile? What might have happened if Franz Ferdinand had not travelled to Sarajevo? What should the countries around Nazi Germany have done in the 1930's? A less dogmatic, less empirical view of history might lead to higher levels of social imagination, and social imagination is also the material out of which constructive peace policies can be made.

At the highest level of the gymnasium/lycée, close to the baccalauréat, one might even discuss quite complicated problems: how would you conduct a disarmament conference where two powers each have three weapon systems with different profiles as opposed to a conference where three powers have two different weapon systems with different profiles? One wants superiority, one parity? I can assure the reader that disarmament negotiators have not been trained that way, but approach the matter in an amateurish manner, with the security interests of their own nation on top of their minds. Some mental preparation might help.

Then, very importantly: how do these problems look
from the point of view of different civilisations? Why are there more wars in Christianity and Islam than in Buddhism? Why are Eskimos so peaceful? What would a world of Buddhist Eskimos look like? Twelve years at school should have given the students more than enough material to reflect on such issues, peace education can then demand of them that they should even reflect in a mature goal-directed manner.

Provided peace education is not used for indoctrination, by the Establishment or by the peace movements through over-eager teachers, we might in some years get a reservoir of people with increased awareness and increased curiosity. They will certainly not have the answers to all these problems, as little as we have in peace research. What we have in peace research is more the knowledge that conventional wisdom is more conventional than wise, and usually blatantly wrong and self-serving, than positive ideas about what to do. Of course, this alone makes many people feel that peace researchers are ideological, precisely because they reject what is conventionally held to be true. When conventions are backed by very solid interests as in countries tied up in alliances to super-powers (not to mention the super powers themselves), or heavily militarised countries, then there will be difficulties, not only for people's education but also for peace research. For that reason, of the four countries I know personally, in terms of the efforts to bring peace education into the schools, I would have doubts about the NATO members Italy and Norway, and also about Switzerland. I would be much more optimistic about non-aligned Sweden, also because the military play a much less dominant role in the social formation than is the case in Switzerland. I think it would be very difficult in the first three countries mentioned to come up with an analysis in public schools of the conflict formations in which their country is somehow embedded that would not end up with Establishment conclusions. It might be quite possible in Sweden to do exactly that.

However, regardless of how intricate all these problems are: let us go ahead! We do not have the answer to all the problems indicated in this paper, not to mention too many
problems not touched upon. The only way of getting insight into the problem is through practice. And the ball is in the court of the ministries of education. It has been placed there not only by popular movements in general and peace movements in particular, but also by inter-governmental organisations of major significance. It is now for these ministries to take up the challenge. And sooner rather than later, because many are now watching rather eagerly what does or does not happen...