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**Popoki, What Color is Peace?**  
**Exploring critical approaches to thinking,**  
**imagining and expressing peace with the cat, Popoki**

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The Popoki Peace Project is a celebration of life in all its richness and variation. It uses the cat Popoki as a metaphor for life that is viable and possible, a radical democratic politics which allows for subjects to “performatively assert their right to livable life where there has been no such prior authorization.”<sup>1</sup> Begun in Japan in 2006, the Project attempts to address the need to delve into the meaning of peace in a contemporary context and to find new ways of promoting critical thinking, critical imagination and critical expressions of peace. In its work, the Project attempts to create ‘oases of peace,’ non-violent, alternative spaces in which all participants are active partners in celebrating life and diversity, and creating positive peace.

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<sup>1</sup> Salih, Sara, with Judith Butler, eds. (2004) *The Judith Butler Reader*. Blackwell Publishing, p.12  
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Participation and a politics of inclusion are essential components of the Popoki Peace Project's goal of peace, defined here as a dynamic set of social relations that not only involves the negation of all kinds of violence, but also requires the imagination and creation of new sites of peaceful expression. As such, peace is a process which is constantly being created and transformed, and which is tangible in a variety of contexts, including material space, conceptual space, chronological space and others. The Popoki Peace Project approach rests on the belief that our ability to create peace lies in our ability to *feel* peace not only in terms of how our own life experiences and perceptions have been shaped in and through our bodies, but how our embodied existence allows us to connect with other lives. In so doing, it also enables us to create a space for the expression and recognition of a wide variety of 'livable lives,' including queer and other alternatives.

Creating peace in today's world requires addressing issues of diversity and identity, both collective and individual. As identity is rooted in our bodies, in educating for peace we must address body memories, the "record of the felt world of self and other in all its sensuous and relational qualities."<sup>2</sup> At the same time, we must develop democratic approaches to problem solving which allow for both diversity and inclusion. Inclusion, in its most public form, can be defined as a means of collective problem-solving. As such, it is a condition of democratic legitimacy.<sup>3</sup> Social inclusion or, in Young's terms 'differentiated solidarity,' is an essential part of democracy; ideally 'citizens' both take part in decision making and are open to having their ideas challenged and their views change. Critical thinking provides an important tool for engagement in this type of debate. At the same time, the Popoki Peace Project sees inclusion as more than an objective strategy or methodology; it rests on the ability to draw from our embodied lives and memories to find the energy and courage necessary for compassion and empathy. For inclusion at this level, not only critical thinking, but also critical imagination and critical expression are essential.

This paper focuses on the way these skills are fostered by the Popoki Peace Project in the context of a critical pedagogy of peace. It will both discuss the theoretical bases of the

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<sup>2</sup> Shapiro, Sherry. (2002) "The Commonality of the Body: Pedagogy and Peace Culture." Solomon, G. and B. Nevo, eds. (2002) *Peace Education: The Concept, Principles and Practices around the World*. NY: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, p.150.

<sup>3</sup> See Young, Iris Marion. (2000) *Inclusion and Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Project as critical pedagogy and offer some tools to educators and others who might want to use Popoki in their own contexts. The paper will begin with a brief introduction of the Popoki Peace Project, followed by a discussion of the underlying ideas and methodology. The final section gives some concrete examples from the work of the Project, including a brief consideration of some of the responses in Japan and other countries and contexts, such as in Palestine and Timor Leste.

## The Popoki Peace Project

Based in Kobe, Japan, the Popoki Peace Project promotes the use the entire body and mind to celebrate life and difference and to delve into the various meanings of ‘peace.’ It seeks to challenge conventional views about the definition and making of peace, and to allow people to discover their own potential as ‘peace makers.’ The activities of the group are based on a bilingual (Japanese/English) picture book published in 2007 entitled *Popoki, What Color is Peace? Popoki’s Peace Book 1*.<sup>4</sup>

Each of the book’s 47 pages describes a situation from the life of a cat named Popoki and poses a related question about peace. The first half of the book uses the body and senses to help the reader to ‘feel’ peace as it is rooted in our bodies.<sup>5</sup> It begins, for example, with color. “When Popoki was a kitten, he had bright blue eyes; blue like the ocean or the sky on a clear day. I wonder if the color of peace is blue.”<sup>6</sup> In the following pages, readers are asked the sound, taste, feel and smell of peace.

In the second half of the book, Popoki’s life is used to illustrate questions about peace in different settings, encouraging the reader to think about aspects of peace in three broad areas: peace with the self, peace with nature and peace with others. For example, the first page of the second half reads as follows. “Soon after Popoki was born, he was thrown away in a trashcan in a park. Fortunately he met Ronni and she took him home with her. Is a society with disregard for living things a peaceful one?”<sup>7</sup> The reader is taken on a journey of discovery, beginning with imagining peace in terms of his/her own body and continuing on to

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<sup>4</sup> Alexander, Ronni. 2007. *Popoki, What Color is Peace? Popoki’s Peace Book 1*. Epic. The book has sold about 3500 copies and the third printing was released in Japan in July 2008. While not in published form, the book has been translated and files are available in the following languages: Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, Hebrew, Indonesian, Khmer, Korean, Tetun and Thai.

<sup>5</sup> An interesting discussion of this with relation to dance can be found in Opt. Cit. Shapiro.

<sup>6</sup> Alexander *op cit.* p.4

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p.27

finally question whether one can have peace if others do not. A short DVD version, “Popoki’s Peace Message,” is also available.<sup>8</sup>

The Popoki Peace Project uses the book and DVD in workshops and other activities, all of which are interactive and emphasize creative expression through use of the body, senses and emotions as well as the intellect. The methodology is based on questioning, dialogue, creative expression and sharing in an attempt to involve teacher and learner in a joint production of knowledge and to include all voices, allowing for diverse modes of expression and promoting the ideals of inclusion and differentiated solidarity. Through this approach, the Project hopes to not only provide access to the tools necessary for active participation in collective problem solving, but to develop empathy and understanding of our shared vulnerability as humans.

Most workshops begin with a reading of part of *Popoki, What Color is Peace?* and include a joint creative project which encourages participants to use not only their intellect but their entire body to engage in critical imagination and expression of ‘peace.’ The need to pool and share experiences fosters the learning about inclusion and democratic methodologies. The creative expression of peace which comes out in workshops is always different from that which is expressed in discussions, evidence that our imagination of peace is in fact rooted in our bodies and physical experience as well as in our minds. Similarly, when Popoki questions the color, taste, smell, etc. of war or other negative experiences, it produces a different array of descriptions from those usually given in oral histories and testimonies.

Popoki Peace workshops have been held throughout Japan and in many other countries, involving audiences of all ages. They usually last for about two hours, with an average of about 30 participants per session. Each workshop has a theme (images of peace and/or war, current political issues, human rights, sexual minorities, gender, food security, environment, etc.) which is generally based on the needs of the participants and/or sponsoring organization. Popoki has been used in formal education (junior and senior high school, university) as well as for staff training in organizations such as the YMCA and faculty development at the university level. In addition, scholarly presentations and/or workshops about the work of the

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<sup>8</sup> *Iwanami DVD Book Peace Archives International Museum for Peace*, (2005), Iwanami Shoten Publishers. The DVD also includes data about the Museum collection and a 25 min. documentary about war, peace and violence in the 20<sup>th</sup> century entitled “Popoki’s Peace Machine Journey,” narrated by the cat Popoki and his kitten friend, Mimi.

Popoki Peace Project have been made at conferences of organizations such as the International Institute for Peace Education (2008), International Peace Research Association and the Peace Studies Association of Japan.

## **The Popoki Peace Project as Critical Pedagogy**

The Project was begun at a time in Japan when political attitudes were moving rapidly in the direction of changing Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution in order to, among other things, create a full-fledged military force rather than the current Self-Defense Force and allow for full military participation in peace keeping and other overseas operations.<sup>9</sup> Much of this takes place within a discourse for ‘peaceanddemocracy’ that does not problematize peace or democracy, and which seeks to normalize the use of force, military action and violence. This discourse uses rhetoric from the ‘war on terror’ and the global culture of violence in an attempt to de-legitimize the post-war Japanese abhorrence of war and nuclear weapons, characterizing such thinking as unrealistic and old-fashioned. In many ways the term ‘peace’ has thus become synonymous with ‘war,’ and we see virtually on a daily basis how militarization is encroaching on not only social institutions such as universities, but also on the minds and values of individuals.

The Popoki Peace Project was begun as a strategy for confronting this usurpation of ‘peace’ through critical peace education. In other words, it grew out of the perceived need to question and clarify of the meaning of ‘peace’ and to seek social transformation in the direction of building a culture of peace. Generally, critical thinking is defined as “a search for the social, historical, and political roots of conventional knowledge and an orientation to transform learning and society,” and critical thinkers “focus on social inequities and probe the disparities between democratic principles and undemocratic realities.”<sup>10</sup>

Critical pedagogy is similar to feminist, queer and other liberation pedagogies that seek to

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<sup>9</sup> Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution renounces war and prohibits the use and/or threat of the use of force in international relations. It reads, “Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes. (2) In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of [belligerency](#) of the state will not be recognized.”

<sup>10</sup> Benesch, Sarah. “Critical Thinking: A Learning Process for Democracy.” *TESOL Quarterly*, Vol.27, No.3, Special-Topic Issue: Adult Literacies, (Autumn, 1993), p.546. Susan Gabel has contributed an interesting argument to the topic of critical pedagogy in education with her claim that it does not address the issue of ‘disabled’ people and their alternative ways of communication. “Some Conceptual Problems with Critical Pedagogy,” *Curriculum Inquiry*, Vol.32, No. 2 (Summer 2002), pp.177-201

“challenge systems of domination, question social construction of knowledge and power, generate consciousness and critical thinking, and to promote social change.”<sup>11</sup> As such, critical pedagogy should encourage social participation and involvement to challenge the status quo, seeking to identify and resist injustice at all levels. At the same time, it should create new local sites of resistance and difference, promoting non-violent conflict intervention and social transformation.

The Popoki Peace Project engages in work for social transformation using methodologies such as creative expression and questioning in workshops, seminars and other activities. In general, we attempt to provide necessary information in a non-threatening way, and allow participants to at least contribute to, and preferably take the lead in their own learning experiences. Unlike positivist approaches which try to separate mind and body and give priority to the rationality of the mind over the ‘natural’ aspects of the body, we begin with the belief that our bodies lie at the root of how and what we experience, and what we know.

Focusing on the mind and body together allows us to engage more dynamically in the fostering of critical imagination and creative expression. These comprise a fundamental part of critical peace pedagogy because they acknowledge and encourage imagination and expression of emotions and sensations which are essential for the envisioning of a multiplicity of possible lives, ranging perhaps from mundane to fantastic, and the creation of alternative futures. Creative expression takes “distinguishable qualities - the various ‘nesses’ of experience,” and orders, manipulates, and refashions them toward still further qualities.<sup>12</sup> Art and creative expression thus defined become essential to all educational endeavors, giving substance to the qualitative side of intelligence and allowing for alternative modes of expression and participation. Through giving voice to alternative methods of challenging the status quo, this can play an important role in social transformation.

Work for peace should take place in peaceful environments which respect diversity and allow for inclusion. We try not only to teach ‘peace’ but to do it in an inclusive and ‘peaceful’ way. Workshops and other presentation spaces are envisioned as healing spaces or ‘oases of peace’ in which teachers and learners become partners in a journey to discover and realize peace.

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<sup>11</sup> Chow, Esther Ngan-ling, Chadwick Fleck, Gang-Hua Fan, Joshua Hoseph, Deanna M. Lyter. “Exploring Feminist Pedagogy: Infusing Dialogue, Participation, and Experience in Teaching and Learning.” *Teaching Sociology*, Vol.31, No.3, July 2003, p.260

<sup>12</sup> Villemain, Francis T. “Democracy, Education, and Art.” *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Vol.1, No.1 (Spring 1966), p.30

These oases can be described as material spaces in what Foucault calls ‘heteropia,’ in other words, social sites in relation with all others “but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invent the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror or reflect.”<sup>13</sup> These spaces allow for reconfiguration of relations in an inclusive and democratic way both in terms of physical space and in cognitive and imaginative processes.

When we first began our work, we used the four pillars for learning suggested by UNESCO as a basis for our work. These are: Learning to know (concepts and knowledge), Learning to do (preparation for peace and non-violence), Learning to live together (inclusion, mutual assistance and solidarity) and Learning to be (creating a peaceful and non-violent learning environment).<sup>14</sup> The emphasis on critical thinking, imagination and expression described above is linked to the first two pillars and the goals of inclusion and creating ‘oases of peace’ are related to the latter ones

The experience of the past two years has shown that while these pillars are important, they are insufficient to achieve the kind of critical space we are hoping to create. As a result, we have added three more pillars: Learning to imagine and express the imagined, Learning to remember (seeking alternative pasts and histories) and Learning to have hope. (*See Figure 1*)

Figure 1 Learning Peace with the Popoki Peace Project

(Source: the author based on UNESCO 1996)

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<sup>13</sup> According to Foucault, social space can be divided into three aspects: real space, utopian space and heterotopia, the space in between. Heterotopias can be both “counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found in the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted,” and also an “image of thought.” They can be material, as well as conceptual, virtual, urban and geopolitical. Fischman, Gustavo E. and Peter McLaren, “Expanding Democratic Choices: Schooling for Democracy: Toward a Critical Utopianism.” *Contemporary Sociology*, Vol.29, No.1 Utopian Visions: Engaged Sociologies for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, (Jan. 2000), pp.168-179 and Foucault, Michel. “Of Other Spaces (1967), Heteropias. (accessed 2008.6.23)

(<http://foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia/foucault.heteroTopia.en.html>)

<sup>14</sup> UNESCO (1996). This report stresses lifelong learning and “learning how to learn.” A later UNESCO Report (2001) held that of the four pillars, Learning to live together and to be were related to peaceful living, and as such were not essential to name in peace education. (p.5)

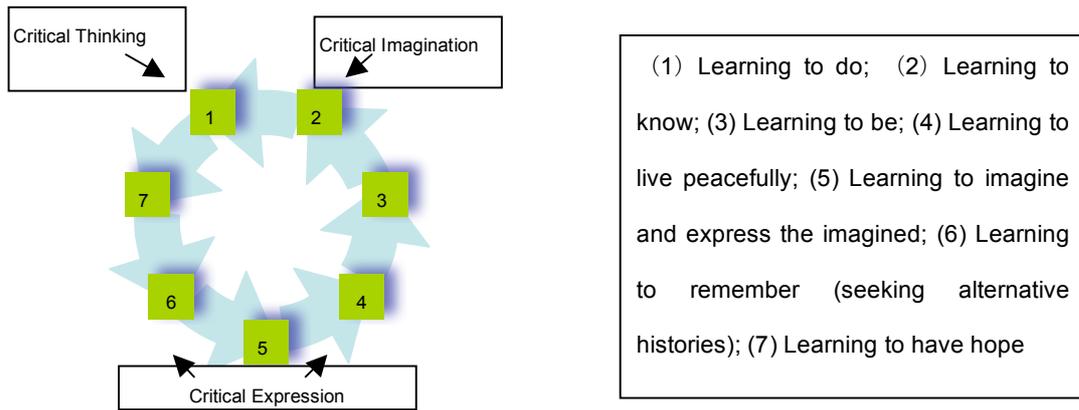


Figure 1 is meant to show that these pillars are linked and both foster, and are based on, critical thinking, imagination and expression. The dissonance between the order of the numbers and the direction of the arrows is meant to symbolize that the flow is multi-directional and multi-dimensional. The three additional pillars are described below:

### ***Learning to imagine and express the imagined***

For most of us, education has taught us that in order to discover ‘objective reality’ we must be ‘scientific.’ This means we must transcend the body, distancing ourselves from the ‘natural’ and seeking instead to make rational and reasoned assessments of what we experience. As a result, for many adults, particularly those who have been successful in tertiary education, intellectual pursuits and imagination are related only in so far as imagination is necessary for the scholarly expression of ideas. These people have learned to lock their imaginations away, and many have forgotten how to consciously express themselves without words. In Japan and elsewhere, this inability and/or reluctance to use alternative forms of expression is also true for many young people. This tendency is reinforced by social hierarchies which give priority to verbal expression and apply standards of ‘excellence’ to alternative forms of expression which often leave individuals feeling they are “unable” or “not good at” creative expression.

At another level, the separation of the natural and rational leads people to deny their ability to be imaginative and to be reluctant to engage in activities which require them to express the world of their imagination, perhaps out of fear of being criticized for not being ‘realistic.’ This becomes an obstacle to peace activism, as we can not create a world that we are unable and/or unwilling to imagine.

After encountering this reluctance to engage with creative and imaginative work in a wide

range of situations and cultural settings, we came to recognize that what is needed is more than just a non-threatening learning environment. We thus seek to help people to re-learn how to imagine, and to express what they experience through acknowledging and legitimizing their embodied experience and knowledge.

### **Learning to remember (seeking alternative pasts and histories)**

One objective of critical theory is to give voice to those who have been silenced and to make visible those who have been made invisible. Remembrance, as a political act, gives legitimacy to those who have been lost and allows for a transcendence of time, incorporating past, present and future. On the one hand, it allows for the sharing and/or creation of collective memory. On the other, it also provides opportunities for acknowledgement of our own vulnerability.

Remembrance and the related act of grieving takes place in political spaces which determine the relative importance of those who are to be remembered and those who are not. Judith Butler discusses the process whereby grievability is publicly distributed, making grieving and/or mourning acceptable for some deaths but not for others.<sup>15</sup> Those most likely to be denied grievability are those who in life were least able to performatively assert their right to livable lives. They are the most invisible among the invisible.

In this context, the recognition of how our bodies lie at the core of our experiences and perceptions is particularly important, as it allows us to explore a wide variety of experience and sensation. The embodied view of the world also allows us to discover our physical frailty and dependence on one another. Grief can be transformative in that it makes us recognize our vulnerability and allows us to assert our shared humanity, acknowledging both sameness and difference in a way that overcomes the duality of mind versus body. It allows us, perhaps, to overcome the political spaces in which remembering, and grieving, take place. It is in such spaces that true inclusion and participation become possible, and new sites of resistance created.

Through our work with Popoki Peace Project, we have learned the power of embodied memory with regard to the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as well as the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake (1995). We are currently working to develop our ability to use

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<sup>15</sup> Butler, Judith. (2004) *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London: Verso, p.34  
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this to make our learning environments more inclusive and to continue to find new subjects and methods of remembrance.

### **Learning to have hope**

One objective of peace education is to eliminate and/or reduce direct violence. As Solomon (2002) and others point out, this can be a very different process depending on whether it occurs in the context of intractable conflicts or regions of relative tranquility. This may be particularly true when the focus of peace education is the recognition of differing collective narratives.

The Popoki Peace Project grew out of the need to address the situation in Japan. In Japan, there is little space for alternatives to the mainstream Japanese collective narrative, making it difficult to assert one's right to a 'livable life' outside of that narrative. At the same time, due to changing economic and social circumstances, life within that collective narrative has become much less 'livable' for a growing number of people. Some of them choose violence toward others; many of them instead engage in violence toward themselves.

Peace education often uses the stories of suffering as a means of communication with, and ultimate acceptance of, the other. Valuing that suffering is an important way of generating a sense of shared humanity and vulnerability. Placing the body at the center of our understanding of such experiences allows us to explore not only the intellectual harm, but the emotional, sensual and relational suffering that took place. Understanding the body as not only the most intimate of spaces but also as part of the public arena enables us to further explore the depth of human suffering, also opens up possibilities for exploring other emotions and shared experience.

The Popoki Peace Project has begun to explore the role of peace education in situations of extreme isolation and lack of hope. Life experiences have taught people how abandon hope and how to despair. It is thus necessary to (re-)learn how to have hope. In our work, we have discovered in addition to an understanding of shared vulnerability, shared laughter is extremely important in this process.

### **Taking Popoki Home: Hints for Conducting Popoki Peace Lessons**

The purpose of this section is to share some of the basic workshop techniques. As was indicated earlier, the basic Popoki workshop lasts for about two hours. Most workshops

begin with an outline of the content and objectives of that particular program and some type of introductory questions or quiz related to the particular theme of the workshop. As one purpose is to create an atmosphere conducive to participation, these should be non-threatening questions such as “What color is peace?” or done in such a way as to promote interest in the theme but also surprise participants at their shared lack of knowledge in a non-threatening way. An effort is made at all times to encourage participation in a variety of ways, not only in terms of the ‘correct’ answer.

The next phase of the workshop is usually a reading of some pages from *Popoki, What Color is Peace?* The purpose of this is to help participants to think about peace at different levels and in different contexts (peace with self, nature and others) and to imagine themselves in different situations. One goal is to encourage participants to take a broad view of ‘peace’ as involving not only direct violence but also structural and cultural violence. Ultimately, the Project asks whether a positive view of peace might be created that does not rely only on the negation of violence.

The use of the book is done in one of several ways. It might be an interactive reading, interactive performance or group reading where everyone reads one page. In the former, pages are selected in advance on the basis of their relation to the overall theme and participants are asked to respond. The reading of one page apiece allows for impromptu discussion and emphasizes personal difference in expression. Of course, people are allowed to opt out of reading, and to participate in a different way.<sup>16</sup>

Most workshops incorporate movement. For example, sometimes participants are asked after the reading to do their own version of Popoki taking a walk, and everyone goes around the room as Popoki. Another exercise involving movement is the use of a ‘yes/no rope.’ Participants are asked a ‘yes/no’ question and they must position themselves along the rope according to the degree to which they either agree or disagree with the question. This allows for them to physically experience the range of opinion and allows for each person to express her/himself, giving equal weight to each one. Once people have positioned themselves, they are asked to explain their choice. All ideas are accepted as valid, although the facilitator might also provide additional information or ideas. Positions along the rope are not

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<sup>16</sup> Sometimes cards are made of selected pages and participants are asked to discuss the meaning of the page and then rank them in terms of importance for achieve peace, etc.

permanent and sometimes people opt to change.

By this time in the workshop, people are generally fairly relaxed and ready for some group work. Often they are asked to give examples from their own experience of ‘non-peace’ or to discuss a list of concepts in terms of what might be most important for peace (or to that day’s theme, etc.). These exercises foster critical thinking, participation and learning from one another’s experiences, all of which are important skills for the participatory democracy. In these groups, generally someone will take a leadership role. If that leadership becomes too dominant and some members become excluded, the facilitator might intervene to allow for full participation by all group members. Important aspects of this work are to acknowledge diversity and to negotiate different modes of active participation.

Once this work is accomplished, the groups are ready for their art and/or creative expression project. They are generally given a choice of two or three projects, as well as the choice to make their own original creation. The content is selected according to the overall workshop theme. All projects include Popoki. The most simple might be to draw a peace garden to walk in with Popoki. Another might be to plan a peace meal to be eaten with Popoki or make a mobile expressing the group’s image of a world that is peaceful for both the group and for Popoki. Other drawing projects might entail such topics as the road to peace or gender equality, human rights issues, or configurations of peaceful lifestyles.

Often, the finished projects do not include the group members themselves. In that case, at the end they are asked to go back and include themselves in the drawing. This is one way to encourage them to think concretely about what they might do to contribute to peace (or the solution to whatever problem they are addressing). The program concludes with sharing of the different projects and comments, questions and general discussion.

## **Popoki in Action**

Over the past two years, Popoki has been used in a variety of settings and the response has been extremely positive.<sup>17</sup> One key to this success lies in Popoki himself. Popoki is everybody’s friend. In psychological terminology, this means that participants use Popoki to project. He becomes teacher, parent, child, student, friend, or whatever the person wants

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<sup>17</sup> For a discussion of responses to different programs see Alexander (2006). An on-line version is available at the Kobe University Library Repository  
[http://www.research.kobe-u.ac.jp/gsics-publication/jics/alexander\\_14-3.pdf](http://www.research.kobe-u.ac.jp/gsics-publication/jics/alexander_14-3.pdf)

him to be. Popoki manages to make friends even in cultures where cats are not particularly valued (e.g. Palestine, Timor Leste) and with individuals who claim to dislike cats. For people who do like cats, Popoki of course makes things more fun.

Popoki was present at an international camp held in Japan for primary school children from Japan, Korea, Thailand, China and Taiwan. Large Popokis with name tags in each language decorated the cafeteria. A Popoki question box was set up, and the questions submitted by the campers were answered during a special Popoki Time after each meal. In the evening, a page or two might be read at the campfire; some art and other projects might include Popoki. In the course of the 4-day camp, Popoki became everybody's friend, and there were tears at the end when they had to say good-bye.

"Popoki" was the first word that everyone learned at camp that was the same in all languages. At first, the questions submitted were about Popoki's physical characteristics, but gradually they changed to contain questions and/or expressions of campers' feelings and desire for peace. For example, one Taiwanese camper wrote about how she had become friends with a Chinese camper and her disappointment and confusion about why they could not remain friends after leaving. Similarly, at an international youth peace camp in Timor Leste, Popoki not only became everyone's friend but he also provided a way to discuss difficult topics such as personal loss (friends and relatives killed in the conflict), the legitimacy of violence and non-violence, and other controversial political issues/positions. Popoki made it possible to talk about these otherwise explosive topics in a safe way.

A second reason for the acceptance of Popoki is the flexibility of the material. Popoki's basic questions are applicable to almost anything one would want to address in peace education. While it is possible to discern the normative position of the author from reading between the lines the text, the use of questioning allows readers and facilitators to use the book freely and to provide their own answers. Popoki has been used in Japan in workshops on the Constitution or alternative life styles. In Japan, war and armed conflict are not an immediate problem; workshops in Timor Leste addressed direct violence because that was the most significant reality for the participants. Although the stance of the Popoki Peace Project is non-violent, the approach allowed participants to discuss the relative merits of the use of violence and come to their own conclusions without having non-violence forced on them.

The Popoki Peace Project uses Popoki, but in reality Popoki is just an entry point to a peace

education pedagogy which stresses critical imagination, expression and thinking. Popoki makes these activities seem more accessible and perhaps less threatening; the use of humor makes difficult subject matter more enjoyable. With Popoki we are serious and at the same time able to laugh at our serious selves.

There are several points in every workshop when the atmosphere in the room changes. The most noticeable one is when groups become engaged in their creative project. So far this has been true regardless of location, topic, age, gender, language, etc. although of course it is easier to achieve with some groups than with others. The moment comes when the intellectual aspects connect with movement, imagination and creative expression. People relax and enjoy themselves. They become excited and express their passion. They laugh. Sometimes their voices get louder; sometimes their physical stance and position change. We believe that this is the result of the way in which the workshops acknowledge and give an opportunity for expressing embodied memory and knowledge.

The respect for diversity combined with the emphasis on inclusion at workshops is also important in their success because allows for a variety of modes of participation. Everyone participates, but not necessarily in the same way. This is especially important in intercultural settings, where verbal communication might be difficult. When some people have difficulty with language, discussion can be exhausting. Popoki allows for other ways of communication. Not only does it take the pressure off those with fewer skills in the language of communication, but it can change group dynamics in cases where those with strong language skills dominate.

There are of course differences and surprises. In drawing Popoki's peace garden, an American group of children each made their own drawing on the common paper. This is not unusual. What was surprising was that they each made a wall around their space. We have yet to see that in Japan. When asked to draw the road to peace, an international group of peace educators created a board game. In response to the same project, a group of Palestinian youth workers drew the road but not the goal. Another group of Palestinians drew both, with barbed wire on the road to indicate the difficulty of arriving at peace. A group of Japanese teachers were unable to agree on a joint goal, but their road was filled with symbols of peace and joy. Another Japanese group had each individual use one sheet of paper to express their view of their section of the road, and then linked all the sections

together. Each section had different symbols, but they were primarily happy and/or peaceful ones rather than indications of struggle. An exception from Japan was an all-day project by a group of teenagers, who chose to look at why young people do not want to be engaged in political struggle. Their work showed such issues as apathy, refusal of adult society to take them seriously and bullying.

In Timor Leste, a workshop was held during a time of violence. The participants at an international peace camp were divided into groups based on shared language, and were asked to first draw non-peace in their lives and then draw the situation where that non-peace is solved. Some of the Timorese participants were at first unable to draw the non-peace and instead drew 'peace.' After they were finished, a discussion ensued about why that particular peace was desirable. This discussion enabled them to eventually draw 'non-peace' in their country. The Japanese at the same camp drew non-peace with no difficulty, but were unable to come up with a satisfactory (to them) version of peace. One of the difficulties for that group was how to address individual versus collective peace. At this workshop, Japanese, Korean and Hong Kong Chinese participants all addressed the problem of suicide. This proved very difficult for Timorese youth to comprehend and led to serious discussions about the meaning of life. Popoki was present in all of these drawings and discussions, but the young people were talking about themselves and their own friends, families, lives and futures.

Sometimes there are surprises in the ways people react to the text. When asked whether their peace was related to that of others, a Palestinian participant immediately asked whether the question pertained to individuals or groups. At that workshop, the Palestinians were divided into those who answered 'yes' and those who answered 'no.' In Japan, many people remark on this question, but there is rarely strong disagreement about the answer, and the question of individual versus group does not arise. Sometimes people can not reply when asked about the color, taste, etc. of peace; other times they are delighted by the questions.

The most interesting and challenging part of using Popoki in different settings is that raises different questions. Recently in Israel and Palestine, two questions were raised repeatedly. One was whether hope comes before social change, or if instead social change is a prerequisite for hope. Another was about the meaning of discussing peace in places/situations that are not peaceful. Particularly in Palestine, the question of the meaning

of peace and peace education under occupation was raised. Personally I am grateful for these difficult questions and the discussions that ensued. I am convinced that Popoki is useful in different places and situations, but the issues and presentation must be adjusted. A goal of the Popoki Peace Project is to have many Popokis in many countries, all engaging in their own versions of Popoki's work.

## **Conclusion**

The Popoki Peace Project uses a critical peace pedagogy which emphasizes use of the body, senses, emotions and imagination as well as the intellect. Ultimately, it is hoped that the emotional and sensual part will fuse with the intellectual part into new expressions of, and action for, peace.

The combination of critical thought, imagination and expression underlying the work of the Popoki Peace Project contributes to social transformation in five ways. The first involves modes of participation. In allowing for a broad range of expression, the emphasis on alternative modes of expression makes space for those who might be uncomfortable with discussions to participate in other ways. The second aspect involves who participates. By emphasizing inclusion and constantly questioning norms of exclusion, the Project seeks to be open to all expressions of 'possible life.' The third aspect concerns what in fact is discussed. The emphasis on critical imagination and expression, coupled with the inclusive stance, allows for a greater (and perhaps different) range of alternatives, both in terms of content and in terms of presentation. The fourth aspect involves a challenge to western liberal ideas of 'reasoned judgments' through the emphasis on the body, senses and emotions. This affords the 'soft' and 'human' side of decision-making such as caring, emotion and sensation a place in the decision-making process. As a result, it allows for a disorderly and vibrant democracy, in which multiple modes of expression are both reasonable and desirable.<sup>18</sup> The fifth aspect involves the creation of hope, or at least the attempt to do so. To the extent that this is successful, it contributes to the formation of a community which is grounded in understanding of our shared humanity, vulnerability and life. It is hoped that this community will grow and that Popoki and his friends will spring up all around the world, each with his/her unique take on the work of the Popoki Peace Project.

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<sup>18</sup> See for example Young, Iris Marion. "Activist Challenges to Deliberative Democracy." *Political Theory*, October 2001, p.688

The experience of participation in one Popoki Peace Project workshop will probably not create a peace-maker, but it certainly provides an entry point for envisioning and creating peace. As an educator, Popoki (and the Project) see their role as standing beside each participant, challenging the unique real and imaginary worlds they bring to the workshop, respecting their diversity, curiosity and desires, and helping them to understand, expand and perhaps re-invent their ‘worlds.’ Popoki, Project members and participants all grow, learn and experience together in the course of a workshop. As such, each workshop is unique and we all find ourselves a little bit different after each one.

*Popoki, What Color is Peace?* ends with the following: “Popoki is in Ronni’s heart, and in the hearts of everyone seeking peace. Take a good look. Maybe you can find Popoki in your heart, too.” It is believed that the discovery of Popoki in one’s own heart gives one the impetus and confidence for hope and for action to create, in the words of Gabriel Garcia Marques, “a new and overwhelming utopia of life, where nobody can decide for somebody else, even the way to die, where love can be certain and happiness possible, and where the generations condemned to a hundred years of solitude will have once and for all a second chance on earth.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Marques, Gabriel Garcia. Nobel Lecture: ‘The Solitude of Latin America.’ [http://nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/literature/laureates/1982/marquez-lecture-e.html](http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1982/marquez-lecture-e.html) (accessed 2008.6.22)  
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