

## **Transformative Peace Pedagogy: Fostering a Reflective, Critical, and Inclusive Praxis for Peace Studies**

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One of the key conclusions of a 2014 conference on “Reconstructing Peace Studies,”<sup>1</sup> was that *how we teach* is as important as *what we teach*. Faculty participating in the conference agreed they had minimal knowledge or preparation in the methods and pedagogies of peace education seen as essential to pursuing the transformative outcomes of peace studies programs. This article offers a brief philosophical and pedagogical framework and rationale for transformative peace pedagogy as a preferred approach and philosophy of teaching and learning in peace studies. Transformative peace pedagogy fosters the development of a self-reflective praxis and nurtures a holistic, inclusive relationship between the inner (personal) and outer (political, action oriented) dimensions of peacebuilding. This praxis is the basis for both internal consideration and social and political action that is pursued by peace studies.

### **The Transformative Social Purposes Guiding Peace Studies and Peacebuilding**

The social purposes of peace studies are oriented toward the transformation of a culture of violence. Johan Galtung (1969) observed, “Violence is present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations.” Accordingly, a culture of violence may be understood as a dynamic system of reciprocally reinforcing physical, psychological and structural influences working together to impede human potential (as well as the potential of other

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<sup>1</sup> Co-hosted by the Baker Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies at Juniata College and the Peace and Justice Studies Association. For conference proceedings please see:

<http://www.bakerinstitute.net/reconstructing-peace-studies-conference-proceedings/>

living things). One aspect of peace studies is to develop awareness of these influences, understand their causes and conditions, and identify interrelationships. Peace studies is equally, if not more so concerned with developing knowledge, skills and capacities essential for resisting and transforming these influences and establishing new, preferred conditions as the foundations for a culture of peace.

The transformative work of peacebuilding is rooted in two fundamental dimensions: the psychological (inner) and the structural (outer). The Constitution of UNESCO famously captures what is implied in the psychological task where it states, “since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed.” The structural dimensions, interdependent with the psychological, are more outward looking, involving transformation of social and cultural constructions imbedded in political, institutional and ecological relationships.

The relationship(s) between these inner and outer dimensions is a subject of much rhetorical debate.<sup>2</sup> Most peace scholars and practitioners support the position that the inner work is foundational to – or at the very least enhances -the ability to effectively engage in the outer work. However, under conditions of extreme violence and oppression there is little luxury afforded to focus on personal and spiritual development. In such contexts resistance and engagement in forms of strategic nonviolent action are the entry points to transformation. In addition to disrupting injustice, structural transformation also requires envisioning and modeling of preferred alternatives. This is the constructive work pursued by Gandhi, and in some instances the more socially isolated prefigurative politics described by Engler & Engler (2014).

From a transformative pedagogical perspective, the inner, strategic and constructive are equally valid entry points into the transformative work. The point at which an agent enters is largely contingent upon context, experience and worldview. The path taken is one that helps give meaning to the violence or conflict that is or has been experienced. While there may be contextually relevant points of entry, a transformative pedagogical approach to the teaching of peace studies would emphasize developing capacities of holistic, inclusive, critical and reflective thinking. Such capacities are the basis for both personal growth and socially transformative action.

### **Foundations of Transformative Pedagogy: Personal, Social and Ethical Dimensions**

In the context of transformative learning, transformation indicates a reorientation of worldview that leads to a new rendering of the world and one’s place within it. There are many worldview obstacles that peace studies seeks to redress (militarism, gender,

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<sup>2</sup> The original, shorter version of this article was commissioned for the forthcoming textbook “Current Debates in Peace Studies,” edited by Huston Woods and to be published by Oxford Press. This article was invited as a complement to a series of perspectives exploring debates about personal peace, prefigurative politics and pedagogy.

development and economics, racism...), and these violent worldviews are reproduced and codified into social institutions and human arrangements. The pedagogical approach of peace studies, however, should not be to simply replace these violent ideologies with more peaceful ones. Such an approach is indoctrination. The learner in such an arrangement is treated as an object onto or into which knowledge and ideas are imparted<sup>3</sup>; not permitting the learner to critically and ethically grapple with concepts under consideration. Transformative peace pedagogy is the antithesis of indoctrination. It is an ethical, elicitive and learner-centered approach to worldview transformation that honors the dignity and subjectivity of the learner. Fostering ethical, inter and intra-subjective relationships with concepts, knowledge, knowledge creation, and other persons is the hallmark of transformative learning. This is consistent with Betty Reardon's articulation of pedagogy as the "determinant of human relationships in the educational process. It is itself the medium of communication between teacher and learner, and that aspect of the educational process which most affects what learners receive from their teachers" (Reardon, 1993). From this perspective, transformative pedagogy requires establishing ethical relationships in and through all dimensions of teaching and learning.

Peace is a moral and ethical pursuit. Inquiry into the definition of peace, the conditions of peace, and the processes through which those conditions are pursued is a process of moral interpretation. Values and ethics form the core inquiry for assessment of ethical action. Developing the skills and capacities to interpret and negotiate values and morality in social and political contexts forms the foundation of many peacemaking and peacebuilding skills.

Knowledge construction itself is a moral and ethically reflective, transformative and formative process. Transformative learning theory is thus concerned with the modes and processes of facilitating worldview transformation and shifts of perception. The processes through which such learning is pursued are dialectical, requiring internal and external dialogue between existing knowledge and perceptions and fresh considerations towards the development of potential new phenomenological dispositions. Construed dialogically, it is an ethical, learner-centered, non-indoctrinating process. Theorist Jack Mezirow (1991) describes transformative pedagogy as having a constructivist phenomenological orientation based on the assumption that "meaning exists within ourselves rather than in external forms such as books and that the personal meanings that we attribute to our experience are acquired and validated through human interaction and communication" (Mezirow, 1991, p. xiv).

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<sup>3</sup> This is a foundational premise of Paulo Freire's critical and emancipatory pedagogy as outlined in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2000). Freire's work is often the primary or sole source cited when exploring the foundations of transformative learning in peace education. In instances where a single voice is our main source of knowledge that knowledge is often left to uncritical interpretation and/or rote understanding. The author has intentionally left Freire out of the conversation in this article to highlight other perspectives often overlooked that might enhance understanding of transformative pedagogy. A dialogue between Freire and the authors cited here might be a source for a future article.

As peace studies presented here is oriented toward transformation, it follows that an ethical, transformative pedagogy should be the preferred mode of learning. Dale Snauwaert, in a discussion of Betty Reardon's assessment of the field, identifies the rationale for ethical and reflective inquiry as the basis of peace education pedagogy:

Reardon's basic presupposition is that political efficacy [one of the transformative intentions of peace education], the capacity to engage in transformative political action, is contingent upon the cognitive, ethical, and self-reflective capacities of citizens. Transformative action is a reflective-practice. Being a reflective practice it requires both the capacity and space for authentic open reflective inquiry in dialogue with the diverse range of other citizens. It requires "authentic open inquiry." (Reardon & Snauwaert, 2011, p. 2)

Snauwaert's analysis points to another premise, that knowledge and meaning making is socially constructed and verified. Martin Buber's (1970) ruminations on what he describes as the two primary forms of relationships, "I-it" and "I-thou," is instructive in this regard. In the "I-it" relationship one experiences the other as an object separate from the self. "I-thou" relationships, on the other hand, are built upon mutuality and are characterized by encounters with other's subjectivity. Through these ethical, inter-subjective encounters meaning is validated and new perceptions can emerge. Betty Reardon, in a response to Snauwaert, adds to this dialogue a more politically efficacious perspective. She suggests "were it [the reflective learning] to be left at the inward without the communal sharing, it might become meditative rather than ruminative, remaining personal, not becoming a social learning process, preparatory to the public political discourse for change" (Reardon & Snauwaert, p. 8).

### **Transdisciplinarity: A Framework for Pursuing Peace Knowledge and Action**

Implied in this social constructionist theory of knowledge creation is the necessity for dialogical encounters with diverse perspectives toward the possibility of identifying and agreeing upon a shared moral or ethical position. This rationale can be extended to another premise, that the pursuit of peace knowledge should be transdisciplinary in nature. Peace researcher Kenneth Boulding (1956) proposed the need for a unified or transdisciplinary approach to knowledge and theory construction that he named eiconics. His rationale was premised on his observation of an interconnected global web of violence that he believed could only be transformed through knowledge sharing across the disciplines. He proposed the approach as an ethical imperative in pursuit of knowledge creation for the common good. Betty Reardon (2000) identifies "peace knowledge" as an umbrella term, encompassing the more discrete realms of peace research, peace studies, peace education and peace action. Each of these realms characterizes a particular study or approach to the pursuit of peace of various academic disciplines, yet they all share the common purpose of knowledge development for a culture of peace. Academically, these realms are studied in a reductionist fashion,

orienting such studies as false dichotomies. The academic obstacles to transdisciplinary knowledge generation need to be addressed by peace studies as a unique form of structural violence (Jenkins, 2008; Galtung, 1969).

It follows from the preceding premises, therefore, that the methods of research, analysis and interpretation called for in pursuing the socially transformative purposes of peace knowledge should be multiple in scope and not limited to one theory of knowledge or science. Johan Galtung argued that peace studies should “be concerned with both nomothetic, universalizing and ideographic, singularizing methodologies” (Galtung, 2002, p. 16). The rationale for this holistic methodology is rooted in the applied nature of peace studies and the place peace studies finds itself situated within the cosmology of time. Galtung observes that “Peace studies can be conveniently and usefully divided into: past-oriented, *empirical*, what worked and what did not; present-oriented, *critical*, evaluating present policies; future-oriented, *constructive*, elaborating future policies” (p. 16). Each of these approaches has a unique scientific basis and accompanying limitations. Empiricism is useful in learning from fact and past observations, but it is not useful in guiding the unobserved future. The critical approach is moral/ethical, scientifically interpreting present conditions through a values lens. The constructive is the most future oriented, relating “theories to values to construct a transcendence from reality into potential reality...” (p. 17). Elise Boulding (1988) emphasized this constructive, futures orientation in her research. She was resolute in her call for nurturing social imagination, which she described as “the capacity to visualize the present in fresh ways and to visualize the not-yet in positive ways, in order to release society from the paralysis induced by technological dependency and the fear of nuclear war” (1988, p. 116). Without imaginative/interpretive processes new possibilities, theories and testable hypotheses would never be pursued.

### **Conclusion: Fostering a Reflective, Critical, Transformative Praxis for Peace Studies**

The arguments and premises presented here attempt to provide a philosophical and pedagogical framework and rationale for a more inclusive and transformative approach to teaching and learning in peace studies. Ultimately, personal and social transformation – a range of which is sought through peace studies – is a radical endeavor. Transformation requires a complete reorientation of self and society; as such transformation is not achieved by simply exchanging old parts with new. Transformation, as outlined here, is pursued through critical, reflective inquiry and requires an inclusive-holistic understanding of the relationship of knowledge, learning and action. This orientation may seem to extend a superhuman standard to the expected learning outcomes of a student of peace studies: to be rooted in a Meta consciousness while simultaneously engaged in the micro details of peacebuilding work. To be in all places at once means one is never fully present in the moment. A more human goal is the development of a reflective, critical and transformative praxis. Such a praxis establishes a bridge between the false divides of the inner and the outer, the principled and the strategic, and helps the

peacebuilder/peacelearner to see, imagine and construct the whole.

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