

EDUCATING PEACEFULLY: THE MAKING OF MANDELAS

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ABSTRACT

Can a peace maker be made? What role do schools play in the creation of a 'peaceful' person? Is it possible to manufacture Nelson Mandela-like global citizens? This paper will explore the proposition that peace makers can be created through just, peaceful and democratic curriculum design, pedagogical approaches, organisational structures and community engagement.

KEYWORDS

Curriculum - pedagogy - social justice - peace - democracy

INTRODUCTION

Accepting the 1993 Nobel Peace Prize, the then South African President, Nelson Mandela spoke of the '...challenge of the dichotomies of war and peace, violence and non-violence, racism and human dignity, oppression and repression and liberty and human rights, poverty and freedom from want.' (Mandela, 1993) It is this very challenge that characterizes Nelson Mandela as a realistic, tangible role model complete with imperfections, a passion for social justice and ultimately, success. His life is punctuated by determination, adversity and most recently, propensity for forgiveness rather than reprisals. He offers to those in pursuit of peace a model for change that accepts plausible human responses such as violence to oppression and moves beyond such reactions to lead others in practices that bring about significant change. Nelson Mandela displays the resilience, determination and leadership that we strive to develop in our students through the curriculum we teach, the pedagogy we employ and the way we organize our schools and society. If students are to become global citizens prepared to learn throughout life and contribute effectively to peace, democracy and institutional structures that demand justice and equality then we need to clearly teach and model necessary skills in today's classrooms, schools and communities.

Few would challenge the notion that in a perfect world where the ideal curriculum exists, explicit peace education catering for the development of global citizens forms an essential component of the curriculum framework. In the real world, the continued pressure on educational institutions, students, teachers and the curriculum itself to meet predetermined benchmarks in a congested environment, challenges the place of peace education as foundational to a substantive educational program. Peace education is defined and delivered in markedly different ways.

Perhaps the most comprehensive definition is presented by Harris and Synott (2002, p. 4) who wrote:

By 'peace education', we mean teaching encounters that draw out from people their desires for peace and provide them with nonviolent alternatives for managing conflicts, as well as the skills for critical analysis of the structural arrangements that legitimate and produce injustice and inequality.

Peace education in schools has primarily focused on '...conflict resolution, peer mediation, and violence prevention...' (Groff, 2002, p. 9). Regardless of the aims, peace education is often characterized by its delivery at pre-determined points in an educational journey. Whilst many stand-alone peace education programs experience degrees of success in regards to developing youth as skilled, knowledgeable advocates for peace in specific contexts, (Ardizzone, 2003; Eckhardt, 1984; Fountain, 1999) the ongoing evidence of conflict in our society raises questions in regards to the effectiveness of the transfer and application of such skills to new contexts. An alternative to isolated peace education programs is to 'educate peacefully'. This holistic approach is characterized by three primary domains which include the curriculum, school organization and community engagement. Curriculum focuses on the teaching approaches and learning experiences whilst the school organization incorporates issues such as school leadership, ethos and functional structure. The final domain, community engagement deals with the essential role played by the wider society in advocating and modeling peaceful practices.

Educating peacefully, a holistic approach to peace education ensures that as the inevitable national and state curriculum priorities change, the creation of lifelong learners who are skilled, culturally intelligent global citizens adequately equipped to preserve and create peace in the twenty-first century is not lost in the scramble to meet predetermined outcomes. Candy, Crebert & O'Leary (1994) assert that lifelong learners are

characterized by a critical spirit, a sense of the interconnectedness of fields of study and the ability to critically evaluate information. They go on to argue that pedagogical methodology that incorporates experiential, real-world problem-based learning with reflective practices promotes lifelong learning. These very characteristics of both the lifelong learner and the required pedagogy mirror those required for effective peace education. Such characteristics and distinct pedagogical approaches offer effective platforms from which to launch a holistic approach to peace education that maintains the teaching of peace knowledge and skills through the curriculum. Additionally, it models conflict resolution strategies, peaceful policies and practices in both the organization of the educational institution and its engagement with the wider community. A holistic approach to peace education features a wide range of educational imperatives and may incorporate curriculum, pedagogy, professional development, pastoral care, behaviour management and evaluation procedures. This paper will deal briefly with the potential to create skilled and knowledgeable Mandela-like global citizens as a result of aspects from all three domains; curriculum, school organization and community involvement.

Peace: A Holistic Approach

In the current political and educational environment it is no longer enough to argue for the inclusion of an area of study in the curriculum simply because it is a noble pursuit or because it may, optimistically lead to a more peaceful society in the future. To expect a place in the contemporary, congested curriculum, an area of study must do this and more. It must contribute to the achievement of benchmark literacy and numeracy levels, develop higher order thinking skills, cultivate the attributes of both a lifelong learner and a culturally intelligent global citizen and contribute directly to academic results. Without these characteristics, any area of study will struggle to justify its place in the contemporary curriculum. A holistic approach to peace education which incorporates more than a single domain offers greater opportunity to meet these criteria than explicit, stand-alone peace education programs. A study (Wahlstrom, n.d, as cited in Hall, 1993, p. 18) of 375 Finnish adolescents aged between 17 and 18 years of age found that ‘...boys considered warfare to be an intrinsic part of human nature and wanted an increase in armaments spending’. Such findings suggest that the opportunity to educate peacefully has currency in our contemporary society. In the classroom setting, such an approach might include a change of focus. For example, in a

typical study of conflict at a senior secondary level, students might investigate the history of the Palestinian – Israeli conflict and be tested on their application of skills in relation to evidence from the period. A holistic approach might focus on this period through a selection of investigations into the many peace plans that have been proposed and adopted in the region culminating in the creation of an alternative proposal for peace outlining general characteristics and their justification. Such an approach would also involve the investigation by students into examples of empowerment, disempowerment and authority within their own school context. Students might interview or observe others and reflect upon their own experiences of student identification with place in regards to designated school areas such as a senior common room or nominated year level lunch area. They may also involve the community through investigations into the struggle for land rights and ensuing conflict in relation to Aboriginal native title. Guest speakers, excursions and real world learning would make connections between their own experiences and those of their community whilst developing understandings of history and other nations. Finally, students would return to the core curriculum and reflect upon knowledge and skills developed during the process of designing a proposal for peace in addition to reflecting on their new or developing understandings of their own environment and that of their community.

The curriculum, school organization and community domains that characterize a holistic approach contribute collaboratively to the development of students both as individuals and as members of a global community. Such an approach makes every attempt for a more peaceful future but also meets the academic, social and cultural needs of governments, educational institutions, communities, society and most importantly the students we teach. A holistic approach to educating peacefully incorporates pedagogies that explicitly teach skills such as reflective practice and critical self-awareness. Candy (et al., 1994, p. 128) suggests that such approaches to teaching are most likely to build foundations on which lifelong learning skills can be built. In addition, such a methodology teaches ways of approaching, transferring and interpreting knowledge that allows for learning to take place between different environments and over time thus allowing skilled students to learn and develop new and appropriate approaches and understandings as their world inevitably changes. The added exposure to models of organizational and societal practices through the school and

community domains further exemplify peaceful ways and challenge accepted practices. This collaborative approach may include teachers as curriculum designers and facilitators, democratic structures within the school and classroom and appropriate community engagement.

Curriculum Designers

In order to educate peacefully, curriculum design must be underpinned by shared values and created in part by those that teach it. Educators must also be given adequate time to develop innovative pedagogy and to hone skills with which to reflect upon, evaluate and renew curriculum. Eisner (1985, p. vi) recalls that:

There was a period in American Education when curricula developed by educational laboratories and commercial publishing houses were to be “installed” in schools. One engaged in curriculum installation, often in the same way that one installed carpeting or a new air filter in one’s car. Nothing could have been further from the truth. Teachers need to have a stake in what they teach. They are not merely passive tubes or mechanical conveyers of someone else’s ambitions and interests.

When teachers are fully involved in the development of curriculum, its implementation, evaluation and modification; peaceful, democratic and just approaches are being modeled and genuinely valued in educational institutions. We should not imagine for a moment that students are oblivious to the disenchantment of teachers who, in a climate of external review, deliver prescribed curriculum in which they are minor stakeholders and have little sense of ownership. The relationship between teacher and student is paramount to quality education. Without a significant stake in curriculum then the delivery may revert to an out-dated model which bears no resemblance to the ‘experiential-based and problem-based learning’ model (Candy et al., 1993, p. 128) that lends itself to developing attributes of a lifelong learning. If teachers are involved in institutions where peaceful approaches are given priority then the opportunity exists for them to feel part of a just, democratic, and peaceful organization. Educating peacefully is not restricted to students; a holistic approach demands that those that teach be respected, valued and empowered members of the education profession. MacBeath (1997, as cited in McGhie and Barr, 2000, p. 61) suggests that,

Schools do not improve in a climate of threat and sanctions. The metaphor of levering standards from the outside is a deeply misguided one. Schools improve,

just as pupils do, when they are secure and confident enough to be self-critical and when they have the tools and the expertise to evaluate themselves.

Secure, confident, self-critical administrators and teachers offer their students insights into peaceful ways of managing complex organisations. Such models allow students to apply and transfer these practices to their own personal and professional dealings throughout life. In practice it means that students continue to learn, reflect and critique both skills and understandings in a range of contexts over time.

Pedagogy

‘Perhaps the greatest of all pedagogical fallacies is the notion that a person learns only the particular thing he is studying at the time.’ (Dewey, as cited in Eisner, 1985, p. 87). A holistic approach to peace education embraces pedagogical methodology that is just, models democratic processes and attempts to create a peaceful environment in which to learn. Harris (1990, p. 255) argues that ‘peace pedagogy’, characterized by dialogue, cooperation, problem solving, affirmation and democratic boundary setting needs to take the place of outmoded educational practices. Such practices present the teacher as the font of all knowledge, create competitive classrooms, allow and create passive, powerless students and use force as a means of control. ‘Peace pedagogy’ and the pedagogical methodology which encourages lifelong learning share common imperatives such as reflective practices, self-directed, problem-based and peer-assisted learning (Candy et al., 1994, p. 128). A peaceful environment does not mean a quiet classroom, in fact, quite possibly the opposite. What it does mean is that each participant in the learning environment feels valued, respected and empowered whilst simultaneously learning skills and developing understandings for the present and future. One cannot realistically expect students to comprehend and apply democratic processes to their personal interactions after spending their days in a dictatorial classroom. It would be unlikely that a future business owner, employer or dutiful worker would approach problem solving in a just and peaceful manner if their school learning environment had not allowed for fair and equitable processes. Burns (1990, as cited in Hall, 1993) asserts that student-centred learning is critical to successful peace education. There is nothing new in claims that student-centred learning is beneficial to the gaining of skills, knowledge and attributes, however it is critical to the aims of a holistic approach to peace education because it models the skills that culturally intelligent, global citizens must have,

and that is the consideration and valuing of others, the skills to contribute effectively to a group environment and an understanding of the balance between roles and responsibilities. Pedagogical methodology that is peaceful in its application is crucial to a holistic approach as it models learning, problem solving and human interaction that enable the lifelong learner to apply such skills to both their present and future learning environments.

Pastoral care initiatives and a multitude of subject areas deal in part with complex issues relating to conflict and disadvantage and are effective vehicles through which to teach about peace. Vrienns (1997) proposes that teachers create a learning environment in which hope for the future is seen as realistic, where skills are developed through experiential learning and where debate and analysis form part of the culture of the classroom. In order for any curriculum area to contribute to the goal of educating peacefully, the pedagogical approach is critical. McGhie and Barr (2000, p. 49) argue that pedagogical methodology requires '...collaborative learning and a focus on meaning-making and knowledge building rather than simply information processing.' Students who are exposed to a cursory, stand-alone study of conflicts, social injustices and anti-democratic practices focusing primarily on a pessimistic chronological journey miss the opportunity to make a real connection between themselves, the invaluable experience of their predecessors and their own peaceful futures. A critical inquiry approach that considers perspectives and evidence models a methodology that demands inquiry rather than blind acceptance. In addition, such an approach allows for empathy and the emotions that accompany it to be investigated, ensuring that students see clearly, for example, that the characteristics of anti-Semitic attitudes in Europe prior to World War Two differ little from the attitudes often shown towards the weak, quiet or just plain different in school grounds every day. We need to ensure that we genuinely investigate events through a critical inquiry approach so that the essential, peaceful lessons of history are not lost in the struggle for a place in an outcomes driven curriculum that may be propelled by changeable political agendas. It is imperative that we instil in our students the willingness to investigate issues whilst equipping them with the skills to make informed meaning of their world and pursue knowledge and understanding rather than information both now and in the future. Only then will the way we teach impact positively on the creation of future generations with an eye for social justice, peace and democratic practices.

Peaceful School Organisation

Some would argue that the constraints of timetabling, specifically the coordination of enrolled students, able teachers and available teaching spaces restrict the ease at which a school might employ appropriate pedagogical methodology to support a holistic approach to peace education. What is often easier is to use a range of test instruments to 'stream', 'journey' or 'ability group' students so that teachers can better direct their instruction to the level of their cohort. Such methods do not necessarily extinguish the opportunity for student-centred learning, and may in fact be suitable for developmental subjects; however, an approach such as this does little for ensuring inclusive education where students and teachers experience socially just, democratic and peaceful modeling of processes and policies. Firstly, a school would need to be absolutely confident that their initial testing was just. Assessment is complex and multi-faceted, as are the students it tests. Secondly, the social implications of streaming can be far from peaceful as students, their peers and parents very quickly identify the academically capable group as well as those less so inclined. This grouping of students, suggest Feiler and Gibson (1999, p. 148) '...can be limiting or harmful to those unlucky enough to be assigned to a 'low ability' group'. Finally, the global citizen in the new millennium will rarely be expected to work in isolation or in a group characterized by like minded approaches. Mixed ability groupings, provided they are supported by adequate and increased staffing, model life itself; a blend of attitudes, styles, problem solving techniques, proficiency at skills and varying approaches to communication. Harris (2002, p. 30) puts forward the suggestion that in our enthusiasm to teach students highly developed academic skills we have neglected the essential 'human relations skills'. If the future we wish to contribute to includes current students who show aptitude for both academic and relational skills then, as Rubinstein and Stoneman (1972, p. 143) propose, outdated understandings must be discarded.

It is now held that a child's intellectual skills and abilities, instead of being fixed by heredity, are formed in the process of his life and experiences – in particular through his interaction with adults through the use of language. It follows clearly that the group of which a child forms part is itself a crucial factor in his development, providing him with stimulation in many different ways. The modern theory of intelligence make it clear that to group children in different streams, A, B and C (and even

down to N, O, P in a very large school) according to a prediction about future intellectual development, is no longer a viable procedure. The child's development will be determined, to some extent, by the specific group of which he forms part.

From a purely self-seeking perspective, we as educators need to model the attributes of the society in which we wish to retire. Present day students will manage our superannuation funds, operate the facilities we use and perform the medical procedures we require in our future. We need to ensure that they develop appropriate skills that prepare them to deal with the multiplicity that characterises human nature as well as the attributes that allow them to continue to foster new knowledge, skills and understandings. The way in which we group students in our classrooms may well be mirrored in the way our future students group patient access to medical procedures or distribute dividends; we need to ensure that we model just, peaceful and democratic processes in every action being viewed and experienced by our students.

Community Involvement

In the current climate of an obesity epidemic and related health issues, we cringe at the very thought of Australian schools going the way of some of our American colleagues and allowing fast food outlets to control the tuckshops at our schools. Yet we seem to lose little sleep over the impact of multi-national companies with questionable environmental and industrial relations records sponsoring our football team or providing donations as part of an advertising agreement that has their logo on the school newsletter. Everything we do sends a clear message to our students. By allowing such partnerships to not only exist but be promoted, we clearly indicate to students, staff and the community that the educational institution involved not only supports organizations with questionable justice, peace and democratic process records, we are willing advocates for them. According to Claxton (2000, p. 28) 'Adults induct young people into the views of their culture through their actions as well as their words.' The hidden curriculum, the gaps and silences, the advocacy and prominence of events, people and practices send strong and clear messages to students about what it is we value and respect. There is little doubt that if we use our mission statements, school ethos and underlying values as a marketing tool rather than a genuine system of shared beliefs then we as educators and administrators are deceiving and misleading our parents, guardians and communities. We also risk missing the

opportunity to play a more substantive role in shaping a just society and perhaps more importantly, modeling appropriate action to students through educating peacefully.

CONCLUSION

Whilst the traditional caretakers of stand-alone peace education programs in schools struggle to maintain the prominence of a curriculum that directly investigates issues of social justice, peace and democratic practices in a crowded curriculum, a more holistic approach to peace education presents distinct advantages. It allows schools to do more than focus solely on the already complex task of teaching skills for resolving conflict, peer conciliation and the prevention of violence. Through the implementation of the three primary domains; curriculum, school organization and community engagement, schools are able to teach, learn, model and advocate for peaceful practices, skills and knowledge. A holistic approach to peace education as opposed to stand-alone peace education programs is both academically and socially progressive as it provides opportunity for a more peaceful future in addition to providing for core learning outcomes through best practice pedagogical methodology and school organization. A school characterized by a structure and curriculum that is inclusive and student centred provides for real world opportunities through critical inquiry, designed and regularly evaluated by those equipped to appraise and deliver it. In addition, appropriate community engagement offers students learning opportunities whilst positioning the school as a partner to industry and a significant stakeholder in the lifelong learning environments of our community. A holistic approach to peace education through the domains of curriculum, school organization and community engagement offers current students the opportunity to experience peaceful, world-class learning for life. This approach also allows for these same students to access new skills and understandings as resilient, Mandela-like global citizens equipped with the skills and attributes required to deal with ever changing environments and needs.

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