

Chapter 7

Promoting Peace Through Education: Creating Globally Competent Learners in the UK

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ABSTRACT

Recent political events in the Western world emphasize the need for changes in the current education system, in particular a move towards the promotion of values of peace. This chapter will focus on why an exam-driven education system is detrimental to promoting peace in education. It will outline why peace education is necessary and makes tentative recommendations to be implemented in the UK. Strategies are developed through studying Australian and Japanese education systems, drawing key lessons for the UK and other European nations. Consequently, it will reaffirm that providing young people with political and moral literacy will create a learning experience based on their environment and instill a sense of responsibility and respect for common humanity in a globalized world.

INTRODUCTION

The human world today is dominated by competition and conflict. Children are born into a natural physical environment that is vastly diminished in a rapidly urbanising world. Fun and play are replaced by social media interactions and wellbeing is compromised at the expense of educational and career progression. Competition functions at all levels: young people are conditioned to compete for higher exam grades than their peers, adults are conditioned to work longer and harder in order to be more ‘productive’, and relationships deteriorate as a result of this neglect.

The neoliberal, capitalist structures of the world propagate this structural violence in many areas of modern life, including education. Competition, aggression and conflict are all present in today’s educational establishments: from exam testing, teacher victimisation, playground and online bullying to creating opposing group identities in multicultural societies (Danesh, 2006). Beyond the confines of

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education, structural violence is present in the workplace through competitive aggression, celebrity spats on social media and aggressive behaviour in sports and politics. This culture of violence has shifted the human experience from seeking fulfilment, to coping with mental trauma of living in 2017.

Peace education is critical in shifting the conflict-inducing world we function in today. The relationship between peace and education has been long established, with many variations of its form occurring. One of the most referred to is peace education as promoting stability in regions of conflict (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Institute for Statistics, n.d.). There has been an underlying assumption therefore that countries that are not engaged in warfare on the home front do not need peace education. Yet peace cannot simply be an absence of war (Toh Swee-Hin, 1997).

Educational institutions, especially schools, have a role in equipping young people with the values and dispositions to strive for a more peaceful world. In this context, peace education encapsulates values of peace such as open mindedness, intercultural understanding and respect for human dignity. Global citizenship and moral education in this context will be discussed as methods of promoting these values of peace, beyond the knowledge-based peace education in conflict areas.

The current political climate demonstrates people's frustration in the changing relationship between the people and its government. The rise of xenophobic cases (The Telegraph, 2016) in the UK post Brexit, and in the US after the election of Trump indicate a clear surge in the language of hate and 'otherness'. Right wing parties in Europe, America and Australia have an undercurrent of anti-immigrant rhetoric, and civil disobedience action by women around the world show the anger of many vocal protesters. In an unstable, ever changing, globalised world, peace education has never been more critical. The fact that international migration in 2015 reached 244 million people – the highest in modern world history since World War Two (UN International Migration Report, 2015) shows the changing fabric of many societies in becoming multicultural and diverse. This emphasises the need to build cohesive societies, showing the need for people to connect, demonstrate empathy and build supportive communities within this context.

This chapter seeks to address the gap between traditional theories of peace education and the current educational system in a globalised world. The focus of the chapter will be on current educational issues in the UK, before suggesting strategies to aim towards a more peace-oriented education in Britain and beyond. Solutions are developed through field research and case studies from Australia and Japan.

BACKGROUND

Prior to 1964, peace in its simplest form was defined as the absence of war, which Galtung theorised to be 'negative peace'. He defined 'positive peace' as structural integration, optimism, and perceiving peace as a preventative measure against violence (Grewal, 2003). Galtung's definition of positive and negative peace was arguably the biggest controversial shift in peace theory. It is imperative to note the significance of this distinction as it plays a critical role in understanding peace education. For Galtung, positive peace could only be obtained when indirect structural and cultural violence would be dismantled. This includes societal issues such as poverty, hunger, discrimination and social injustice. It is important to note the inclusion of social injustice as this leads us directly to peace education today. Social injustice – identified as structural violence - permeates all levels of modern, western society, as discussed in the introduction. This includes poverty, civil rights such as racism and discrimination and unequal education systems, amongst others. To weaken social injustice through peace education is to weaken structural

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