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The Elusive Nature of Peace Education

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Peace, together with freedom, equality, and justice, is one of the most desirable values in almost every society. It has become a universal symbol—a master concept that connotes a general, positive state that includes all the positive qualities that are cherished and aspired to by human beings. This meaning becomes evident in our time when we look at the volumes of documents on peace produced by international institutions and organizations including the United Nations and United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Thus, it is not surprising that many societies decide to educate the younger generation in the light of this symbol. The educational system fulfills this mission for society through the schools, which have the authority, the legitimacy, the means, and the conditions to carry it out. Schools are often the only institution that society can formally, intentionally, and extensively use to achieve this mission. In other words, through its agencies (e.g., the Ministry of Education) a society can set its objectives for peace education, prepare the curriculum, delineate the contents of the textbooks and instructional materials, set guidelines for organizing the political climate in the schools, add extracurricular programs, train teachers, instruct schools to show initiative, and oblige students to participate in this learning (see Bar-Tal, in press-a). However, peace education is very different from most subjects given in schools. Because groups and individuals project onto the concept *peace*

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education their own particular vision of a desirable society, the means to achieve it, and the school's role in this mission, the consequence is the very multifaceted state of peace education we see at the present time. Thus, in comparison with other domains of education, peace education is by nature elusive.

THE UNIQUE NATURE OF THE OBJECTIVES OF PEACE EDUCATION

Different educational systems in various states around the world have provided peace education throughout the twentieth century up until today (see reviews by Aspeslagh & Burns, 1996; Hermon, 1988). A review of the programs of education for peace in different states indicates that they differ considerably in terms of ideology, objectives, emphasis, curricula, contents, and practices (see, e.g., Bjerstedt, 1988, 1993a; Haavelsrud, 1974; Wulf, 1974). For example, in Australia, peace education focuses on challenging ethnocentrism, cultural chauvinism, and violence, on the one hand, and promoting cultural diversity, nuclear disarmament, and conflict resolution, on the other (Burns, 1985; Lawson & Hutchinson, 1992). In Japan, peace education mostly targets issues of nuclear disarmament, militarism, and the nature of responsibility for acts of violence performed in the past (Murakami, 1992). In South America, peace education is preoccupied with structural violence, human rights, and economic inequality (Garcia, 1984; Rivera, 1978). In the United States, peace education programs often concern prejudice, violence, and environmental issues (Harris, 1996; Stomfay-Stitz, 1993).

Within the wide range of different peace education programs, a common general objective can be found. They all aim to foster changes that will make the world a better, more humane place. The goal is to diminish, or even to eradicate, a variety of human ills ranging from injustice, inequality, prejudice, and intolerance to abuse of human rights, environmental destruction, violent conflict, war, and other evils in order to create a world of justice, equality, tolerance, human rights, environmental quality, peace, and other positive features (see Bjerstedt, 1993b; Burns & Aspeslagh, 1996; Harris, 1988; Reardon, 1988). The different outlines of the objectives reflect the degree of dissatisfaction with the present situation. Therefore, it is possible to see peace education as a mirror of the political–societal–economic agenda for a given society, because peace objectives often contain a direct challenge to the present state of a society within the suggestions for change (Vriens, 1990). In effect, peace education mobilizes pupils and teachers to take part in a campaign for change. They are to raise their banner toward an alternative vision of society with the aim of counteracting the beliefs, attitudes, and actions that contradict the objectives of peace education. The objectives of peace education can only be achieved by imparting specific values, attitudes, beliefs, skills, and behavioral tendencies that correspond with the objectives. Imparting values of peace is of particular importance as these values influence specific beliefs, attitudes, and behavior. In addition, peace education emphasizes the acquisition of peaceful

behavioral patterns, as changes in behavior ultimately signal the achievement of peace education's objectives. Thus, peace education can be seen as a type of socialization process because its objectives are concerned with the internalization of specific worldviews, as defined by the society in question.

These unique objectives have a number of societal and pedagogical implications, which amplify the elusive nature of peace education. These two groups of implications are discussed as follows.

SOCIETAL IMPLICATIONS

Three main societal implications are discussed: the condition-dependent nature of peace education, its dependence on social agreements, and its function as a social platform.

Peace Education Is Condition Dependent

Peace education is always related to the particular conditions prevailing in the society that carries out this educational mission. These conditions produce the specific needs, goals, and concerns of a society, which are reflected in a particular peace education program. Different conditions can affect various aspects of society. For example, societies differ in terms of the nature of intergroup relationships: some are at war or involved in an intractable conflict, whereas others live in relative peace with cooperative intergroup relationships; societies differ in structure: some are multicultural, whereas others are relatively homogeneous; societies differ in economic equality: some are economically polarized, whereas others live in relative equality; societies differ in their civic culture: some are democratic, tolerant, and open, whereas others are relatively autocratic, intolerant, and closed. The different conditions just described pose particular needs, goals, and concerns, which are expressed in the issues that preoccupy a specific society. Issues raised by the conditions in a society may pertain to war, intractable conflict, violence, intolerance, prejudice, inequality, or other problems. The nature of peace education is dictated by the issues that preoccupy a specific society, because it has to be perceived as being relevant and functional to the societal needs, goals, and concerns. This is an important requirement for the initiation and realization of peace education in any society. Nevertheless, it is inevitable that such a requirement contributes to the elusive nature of peace education, because different societies strive to achieve a wide variety of objectives and also because each society views peace education differently. The overall result is that different societies have different definitions of the nature of peace education and its scope, and therefore set different objectives, propose different curricula, and write different texts (see, e.g., Bjerstedt, 1986, 1988, 1990). Moreover, societies differ with regard to their commitment to peace education. Whereas some see it as an important mechanism to change society for the better, others may avoid reference to controversial issues

and restrict it to particular objectives or even ban it altogether. Indeed, different political, economic, and societal conditions inevitably influence whether peace education is implemented in schools, what kind it is, and how it is carried out.

Peace Education Is Based on Societal Agreement

The objectives of peace education propose a vision for a particular society by specifying the desired direction that society should take, and sometimes offering alternatives to the present state of affairs. This implies that, in democratic societies, members of society have to agree with the objectives and contents of peace education. Without legitimization, peace education would be difficult to implement successfully. Clearly, it is relatively simple and easy to develop peace education when it contains those values that society cherishes, proposes goals that society embraces, and suggests a framework of solutions and courses of action that society accepts. However, in reality, such situations are rare and it is more common that certain sections of society do not support the objectives of peace education. The objectives may be perceived as posing a threat to a particular group, several groups, or even society as a whole (see examples provided by Cairns, 1987; Collinge, 1993). Some groups may be afraid of losing power, status, privilege, or wealth. Other groups may perceive the objectives of peace education as negating their ideological beliefs. Some groups may perceive that the objectives of peace education threaten traditional cultural values, or even the order of the social system.

Thus, peace education is a special challenge, based, as it is, on the need for societal agreement in order to implement it successfully in schools. That is, at least a significant part of society has to accept the objectives propagated by peace education and its principles in order to legitimize its institution in the educational system. Agreement should be achieved through public debate, which reflects societal negotiation in democratic societies. The outcome of societal agreement is that the objectives of peace education (content, curricula, and projects) will be the result of consideration, compromise, and adaptation to the constraints of a particular society. It can be said that each society develops a particular peace education that is responsive to its own political dictates. This aspect of the development of peace education is another factor contributing to its elusiveness.

Peace Education Serves as Societal Platform

The objectives of peace education do not only relate to pupils in schools but also concern the whole of society. They suggest directions for all members of society and propose desirable values, beliefs, attitudes, and patterns of behavior. Therefore, if objectives are to be achieved, peace education cannot merely be an isolated

venture in schools. A society that places peace education on its agenda has to spread its messages through other social institutions and channels of communication in order to show the pupils that they are part of a general effort to change society.

Peace education in schools without a wider social campaign is fruitless and disconnected from social reality. Pupils soon feel that it is irrelevant to their life experience and view it as an insignificant endeavor. Thus, although the term *peace education* is often restricted to educational practices in schools, there is also the need for peace education on a wider scale that applies to the whole of society (Bar-Tal, in press-b). Societal peace education is related to society's peace culture and is supposed to reach members of society through the channels of the mass media, literature, television programs, films, and the like. Each society has its own ways and means to express the values propagated by peace education. Because societies differ so greatly with regard to the manifestation of peace values by means of institutions and the available channels of communication, this adds another factor to the elusiveness of peace education.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

In addition to societal there are also pedagogical implications that derive from the unique characteristics of peace education objectives, which also contribute to its elusiveness. The objectives of peace education differ remarkably from the objectives of traditional, educational subjects. Their unique nature requires the development of special methods to achieve them. An innovative and creative approach is needed to carry out the educational mission of peace education. The pedagogical implications are elaborated as follows.

Peace Education Is an Orientation

Peace education can be regarded neither as a separate subject matter nor as a project, but must be seen as an educational orientation that provides the objectives and the instructional framework for learning in schools. It must be incorporated into the objectives and curricula of other subjects and be interwoven into their instruction (Harris, 1988). Peace education provides a prism through which the pupils learn to view and evaluate topics and issues raised in the various subjects, and through this process they learn to view and evaluate current issues in society. History, geography, the social sciences, literature, and languages are the most salient examples of subjects that should include suitable themes for peace education (e.g., the causes of war, its cost, the causes of discrimination, peacemaking, different types of peace, the meaning of justice, and the importance of equality). Teaching these subjects, using peace education orientations, and keeping its objectives in mind is the best way to implement peace education in schools. In addition, particular courses focusing specifically on different themes of peace education should be

developed and offered in schools to complement the themes of traditional subjects (see suggestions by Harris, 1988; Merryfield & Remy, 1995).

It is assumed that such an approach requires an engagement with current concerns in society. However, this requirement means that peace education is subject to ambiguity. This is because deciding how much peace education should be incorporated into subjects, which special courses should be developed, and how all these measures can be accomplished are complex decisions determined by political and pedagogical constraints.

Peace Education Has To Be Open Minded

It is essential that peace education be open minded and should avoid becoming simple indoctrination. This means that it has to remain open to alternative views, with an emphasis on skepticism, critical thinking, and creativity (Harris, 1988; Reardon, 1988). These characteristics are necessary in peace education in view of the objectives, which are supposed to prepare the students to function in society. Thus, pupils have to learn to weigh and evaluate issues, to consider alternatives, to voice criticism, to originate creative ideas, and to make rational decisions. It is the openness of peace education that develops pupils psychologically and specifically prepares them to adhere to the values of peace education while providing them with tools for coping with real-life issues in accordance with these values. It also equips them to solve dilemmas of contradicting values that are encountered in real-life situations, but perhaps most important of all it facilitates the internalization of peace values and inoculates against adopting nonpeaceful alternatives.

The pedagogical implications of peace education make it a most demanding task for educators. It contradicts the principles of traditional education and sets standards that schools often find hard to achieve. Such standards are not new and have been set in the past, but they are of special importance in achieving the objectives of peace education. They challenge the educators to develop new programs and methods of teaching within the framework of peace education.

Peace Education Has To Be Relevant

Peace education, by nature, deals with the problems that concern a society. These problems are high on the public agenda and often the focus of public controversies. It is thus imperative that peace education be related to concrete, current concerns and social issues. Peace education must not only deal with values and behavioral principles on a general level but should also relate them to specific issues and cases that arise in a society. A relevant approach will show students that they are dealing with real-life issues that concern society. In this way they will be encouraged to apply general values to specific instances taking place. Because each society has its own specific concerns and issues to which peace education has to refer, the

content of peace education must reflect this and programs should be tailored to address the relevant themes.

Peace Education Requires Experiential Learning

Because peace education aims to form a state of mind, its principal modes of instruction target experience. Experiential learning is the key method for the acquisition of values, attitudes, perceptions, skills, and behavioral tendencies, in other words, their internalization. Internalization cannot be achieved by merely preaching; its main acquisition mechanism is practice. Students need to live under the conditions described in peace education in order to internalize its objectives, and they must put into practice the ways of life prescribed for society by peace education for the achievement of its goals. Such a learning climate should include conditions that reflect the objectives of peace education, such as, for instance, tolerance, cooperation, peaceful conflict resolution, multiculturalism, a nonviolent environment, social sensitivity, respect for human rights, and the like (see examples by Bey & Turner, 1995; Deutsch, 1993; Hall, 1999; Hicks, 1988). Setting up experiential learning in schools is a difficult task for educators. It not only requires pedagogical expertise but also, more importantly, demands that teachers have the skill and ability to manage the learning environment while serving as role models for the students.

Peace Education Is Teacher Dependent

The success of peace education is more dependent on the views, motivations, and abilities of teachers than traditional subjects are. This is so, first, because it refers mainly to the acquisition of values, attitudes, skills, and behavioral tendencies by pupils. This means that the teachers who teach peace education must themselves be in line with its objectives. Teachers who carry out peace education have to cherish its values, hold comparable attitudes, and exhibit similar behavioral tendencies. This precondition is problematic because most teachers do not enter the teaching profession because they hold peace education objectives; some may even have opinions that contradict the values of peace education.

In addition, a special level of pedagogical skills and expertise is required to implement peace education in schools, because it requires the internalization of values, attitudes, and beliefs as well as the use of experiential learning and dedication to causes that may be controversial in that society. In order to implement peace education, teachers have to possess these skills and knowledge and be motivated to carry it out (Reardon, 1988). Educational systems will first have to set up training programs to impart these skills and knowledge, as without them peace education cannot achieve its objectives.

Difficulties in Evaluating Peace Education

It is difficult to evaluate the achievements of peace education, because its objectives pertain mainly to the internalization of values, attitudes, skills, and patterns of behaviors (see Nevo, chap. 24, this volume). The tests and exams normally used in schools are unsuitable for the evaluation of peace education outcomes, because they do not usually evaluate a state of mind but rather the level of acquired knowledge. The evaluation of peace education requires special techniques adapted to measuring a different kind of outcome. This implies a special call to educators to come up with a creative and original solution because evaluation is an essential aspect of peace education implementation. Evaluation allows the selection of those programs and methods that are effective and have proved capable of achieving the special objectives of peace education.

SUMMARY

The present analysis explains why peace education is elusive, that is equivocal, openly defined, conditional, disputable, and controvertible. First, the elusiveness of peace education is related to the social, political, and economic implications of the objectives. The objectives, in contrast to those of traditional subjects, suggest an agenda for societal change. They concern the existing norms, ideologies, structures, and institutions in society, and they often propose alternatives to them. Peace education is thus a societal program that concerns society. Its objectives are relevant to society's ideas about its well being. However, ideas differ from one society to another, even though each hopes to achieve the same goal, which is a more peaceful society. Each society constructs its own ideas of peace and sets objectives accordingly. Moreover, ideas of peace often instigate debate, controversy, and even conflict. Therefore, the programs of peace education implemented in democratic societies are the outcome of societal negotiation.

Peace education is also elusive because it is more about attempting to develop a particular frame of mind rather than transmitting a body of knowledge, as is the case of the traditional subjects of education in schools. In other words, the implicit objective of traditional subjects in schools, such as mathematics, biology, or even the social sciences, is the transmission of knowledge. In contrast, in peace education, the objectives imply not only the transmission of knowledge but, more importantly, also the change of the affective, attitudinal, and behavioral repertoire of the pupils. These objectives dictate a variety of pedagogical practices requiring an innovative and creative approach. Educators need to develop new curricula, programs, and modes of instruction to implement peace education in schools.

In addition, the objectives of peace education imply that its content differs considerably from traditional subjects. Whereas the content of traditional subjects is well defined (i.e., pupils in every part of the world can identify the subject from

its content), the content of peace education is of a wider scope and is less defined. Even though their objectives may be similar, each society will set up a different form of peace education that is dependent on the issues at large, conditions, and culture, as well as the views and creativity of the educators.

This chapter points out those unique features of peace education that determine its development. Peace education, therefore, poses a special challenge to society and its agents, the educators. Though it is often viewed as *mission impossible*, in my view it serves a momentous and indispensable function in any society. Peace education provides hope for a better future for the younger members of society, because it indicates that their society is aware of its ills and is striving to remedy them in order to build a better place to live. Such hope is essential as it provides goals toward a better future and places it within their grasp; for without such goals, society is doomed to decline and decay.

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