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The Critical Difference of Peace Education

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Introduction

How does critical thinking, critical theory and critical pedagogy relate to building peace? Peacebuilding is changing. Change is happening conceptually – from the international to the local (MacGinty 2013), spatially – from the global north to the global south (Richmond 2011), and temporally – from post-conflict to pre-conflict (Boutros-Ghali 1995). The past perceptions of peacebuilding as an intervention that happens after violent conflict have to make space for more inclusive, rooted and preventive measures – such as peace education – that seek to transform violent aspects of societies from within – *so that* violent conflicts do not materialize. In this essay the theoretical constructs of critical literacy, critical theory and critical pedagogy will be examined to illuminate how critical pedagogy in peace education provides practical applications of transforming cultural and symbolic forms of violence when peacebuilding through education. By doing so, this essay considers that although critical literacy provides students the capacity to approach learning materials and identify power and inequality, and, while critical theory is important in delineating discrimination and oppression, critical pedagogy in peace education transcends the recognition of diversity to result in solidarity; or, said another way, critical literacy creates recognition, critical theory takes sides (the side of the oppressed) and critical pedagogy in peace education eliminates impediments to genuine unanimity.

Schools as sites of peacebuilding

Social groups have values, attitudes and behavioural expectations that they transmit to their young in school. Schools are a critical component of confronting complex social problems and looking to build peace because education systems occupy an ideal environment to impart transformative cultural values and effect change. Positive peace requires a long-term, nonviolent, harmonious and sustainable relationship between peoples, governments and the ecosystem (Lederach 2006). Peace education is a form of education that seeks to both recognize violence in society, impart and employ nonviolent tools for transforming conflict and support and create the interconnectivity needed to achieve what Galtung (1996) conceives of as 'positive peace' – the absence of all forms of violence and the presence of harmonious social/environmental relationships.

Education systems are important locations of cultural alteration because they act as both markers of social authority and radical fronts of change. Education systems make choices that include understandings of peoples, places and origins – these understandings are made concrete in textbooks and other documents that showcase some voices while silencing others and make certain things 'known' leaving other things absent or indeed, hidden from view (Eisner 1985). The great 'project' of education incorporates the needs of the nation – creating loyal and obedient citizens from heroic narratives of the past – with the prerequisites for future productivity – recognizing trends and anticipating needed skills.

When looking to build peace (positive peace) education can act as an intervention in the ways we see ourselves, others and the natural world and it provides an ethical platform from which our human outputs are articulated to holistic living and harmonious relationships. Peace education examines the use of history in creating identity and the way education systems are often a 'part of the problem' when inequality and inhumanity are present (Lange 2012). Peace education can illuminate how violence becomes normalized in society in structural (for example: discrimination) and cultural (for example: patriarchy) ways and teaches ways of being and seeing that attempt to be both culturally reflective and socially responsive and responsible (Harris and Morrison 2013).

Contested history and education

Educative systems are places that can create and duplicate cultural understandings and therefore critical consciousness makes it possible to harness the unique positionality of schooling when generating social change (Noddings 2012). There are few forums of socialization more suited to massive cultural change than educative systems. Educative systems are social institutions that occur in almost every nation on earth and even in

places where traditional schooling still exists many societies are embracing values such as human rights, democracy and anti-discrimination. Because peace education is a form of transformational pedagogy (Boulding 1988) it is concerned with more than serving the current needs of a particular society it is concerned with imparting principles and approaches that utilize nonviolence and champion reflective and responsive acts of learning (Bajaj 2008).

Voices in the peace pedagogy

There are myriad individuals whose work has contributed to peace education theory – a common list would include Jane Addams, Maria Montessori, Birgit Brock-Utne, Elise Boulding, Betty Reardon, John Dewey, John Holt, Paulo Freire, Colman McCarthy, Herbert Read, Danial Bar-Tal, Ian Harris and Mary Lee Morrison. For academics, curricular analysts, peace practitioners, NGO's and government ministries the time may have arrived for a deeper analysis, one in which the theories of peaceful transformation become more visible. In the following section critical literacy and critical theory will be contrasted with critical pedagogy and then three forms of peace education programs will be explored to illustrate the difference between recognizing power and building positive peace.

Critical literacy

While critical thinking can be considered an intellectual exercise of appreciation and reflection critical literacy is a practice of identifying power in language and, specifically, “uncovering the perspectives and positions that underpin texts...to ask and judge what these perspectives might mean” (Sandretto 2011, 14). In order to engage with the practice of critical literacy individuals approach text (or expression from any medium of communication) critically. To do so, there needs to be a baseline understanding that the world is not a natural or normal consequence of social history and textual messages tend to provide people with unequal benefits, describe conditions that often privilege the status quo and create avenues of inadequate representation and/or limited participation. Although critical literacy can have many incarnations, the scope of this essay will classify critical literacy varieties as those that involve revealing perceptions and positions in expressions about reality.

Critical literacy tasks us with the obligation to ask questions of reality and interrogate both the location of speakers and the purpose of communication. To repeatedly inquire ‘why the world is the way it is?’ is an opportunity to do more than understand language (literacy) it is an invitation to analyze how language is related to reality and therefore, that reality – as a constructed social product – can be different (Freire and Macedo 1987). The process of critical literacy authorizes the receiver to comprehend reality as both constructed and dynamic and this allows for the possibilities of social

change to move from a “way of thinking” about the status quo to ways of imagining change (McDaniel 2006, 5). Simply put, critical literacy allows us to identify injustice, document contradictions, perceive consequences and imagine social transformation. As an example of the value of critical literacy one could ask ‘did Christopher Columbus discover America?’ Critical literacy interrogates this statement to challenge the veracity of such a claim, position this assertion using historical context and ask ‘in this statement what do the voices gain by this declaration and which voices are being silenced?’ The result of this process leads to a new understanding of history and an awareness of the role of power (in this case colonial power) in establishing social facts. In this example critical literacy destabilizes this reality and therefore leaves room for other considerations of the past. Using critical literacy in schools means students become adept in questioning content, context and relationships between power and social products (Janks 2010).

Critical theory

There are strong connections between critical literacy and critical theory – critical theorists use the tools of assessment and recognition used in critical literacy but expand the domain of their evaluation to include all social phenomenon and not solely the products of a society used in communication. Critical theory has historically been associated with sociological inquiry (the Frankfurt School) and many scholars in both the Humanities and Social Sciences link their investigations of social/cultural phenomenon to the work of critical theorists (Dahms 2008). With the emergence of social science – the investigation of the social and cultural worlds and their impacts – it became possible to connect the practice of academic inquiry to the project of social transformation and many contemporary writers now consider it a primary function of research to illuminate hegemonies that lead to social, cultural or environmental injustice (Gramsci 1971). Through critical theory, observation becomes an apparatus aimed at change.

Whereas critical literacy can be considered *illuminating* the philosophical orientation of critical theory is *emancipatory* to “liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them” (Horkheimer 1982, 244). Although critical theory has a close theoretical association with postmodernism this brief exploration will limit itself to notions of the nature of reality (critical theory) rather than notions of the nature of knowledge (postmodernism). Critical theory has evolved from an understanding that individuals create knowledge through interaction with other things and beings. In this sense, reality is something encountered and *constructed* through experience – this is distinct from the *positivist* conceptualization of reality that posits the existence of observable and independent truth (Guba and Lincoln 1994).

Critical theorists do not want to merely investigate reality as it is encountered they want to change it (Giroux 2003). Critical theory emerges from positions of oppression to take different forms and can be seen in philosophical, social and political contestation to forms of cultural violence such as racism, sexism and colonialism (Galtung 1996). Indeed, the oppositional predisposition of critical theory considers it essential to name an injustice, locate avenues of social transformation and identify agents of change. Critical theory emerges from a social inquiry into inequality, difference and oppression, as such; it is concerned with making visible inequity, inconsistency and domination.

Critical pedagogy

Critical pedagogy builds upon the important awareness-raising practices of critical literacy and critical theory but adds measures of radical love, hope (Freire 2003) and the transformation of students, teachers and groups by de-essentializing identities (Bekerman and Zembylas 2012) and dismantling categorizations of individuals through authentic interaction. By no means a uniform concept, critical pedagogy – from the Frankfurt School to Marxist, and postmodern scholars – is often concerned with inequalities in society and how education facilitates hegemonic power through invisible oppressions (Kincheloe and McLaren 2000).

While pedagogy is considered by some to be the amalgamation of critical theory and educational philosophy the practical nature of acts of critical pedagogy requires processes that eclipse both the binary quality of critical theory (oppressed/oppressor) and the intellectual practices of critical literacy. Critical pedagogy requires the perception that human freedom is related to the act of inclusion, authentic interaction and a cycle of action and reflection that leads to freedom (Freire 2003). Critical pedagogy recognizes the inherent political nature of education and argues that *what* and *how* we learn – whose knowledge is considered – cannot be separated from *whose power* is maintained by education (Kincheloe 2008).

In peace education, critical pedagogy is more than the radicalization of educands and the revolutionary potential for a kind of education that displays, investigates and challenges forces of power (McLaren 2000). Critical pedagogy, in peace education, relates to the universal quality of human suffering (Rorty 1989) and the goal of surpassing the recognition of difference and violence to pursue an objective of inclusion. Kincheloe states that “white people must learn to learn to listen to nonwhites and indigenous people’s criticism of them and of the cultural norms they have established and imposed on people of a lower socioeconomic class” (2008, 34) but when you survey a classroom in search of an individual who holds such reified (white, male, wealthy) hegemonic power, they rarely exist. It could be an invisible disability, a social stigma related to sexuality or income, a history of trauma, a

personality of gentleness or introversion that eschews domatory tendencies, or any number of other possible markers of difference.

The practice of critical pedagogy in peace education requires that all characteristics of identity that can be perceived of as 'more than' or 'less than' be discarded. When critical pedagogues are educating for peace they are not simply looking for those who have, and those who *have less* (or at least are perceived so) but are looking to create radical love in the classroom. Bekerman and Zembylas aver, "critical pedagogy is about improving the learning and life opportunities of all students, notably the typically marginalized ones" (2012, 221). This essay argues that critical pedagogy in peace education needs to connect with and appreciate the knowledge's brought to the classroom from all educands regardless of where each student's identity *potentially* places them socially. When we, as critical pedagogues interject the notion of difference in the classroom we must be very certain that our inquisition of power does not result in the disempowerment of others. It may be useful to interrogate difference in the classroom to introduce diverse ways of being and perceiving but as peace educators the perceptions and practices of critical pedagogy must result in authentically valuing diversity *while* celebrating individual worth; we need to engage to destabilize identity characteristics and reveal inherent human dignity.

In the following section three examples of critical pedagogy in peace education will be explored to highlight how critical pedagogues who educate for peace consider the classroom as more than a location where violence and social inequality exist but an avenue of interpersonal, affective transformation.

Montessori education

Maria Montessori believed that existing educative systems were harmful to the genuine potential of learning and that the true role of education rested with the outcomes of society, including the elimination of war (Duckworth 2006). Montessori perceived that education systems were perpetrators of 'war culture' and were a reason that there were continued cycles of violence and poverty (Duckworth 2006). Montessori proposed a child-centric pedagogy (teaching) that was not hindered by authoritarian separations between student and teacher and deeply connected to the act of love (Harris 2004). By letting a child's curiosity about the world guide his or her learning a student could explore the multiplicity of human and natural life while in a safe environment. Importantly, Montessori saw the role of the teacher as a guide or facilitator rather than as a repository of information sending information in a unidirectional trajectory at 'ignorant' children.

Montessori was responsible for one of the first forms of 'critical' pedagogy - examining the art, science, and outcomes of education and her

work (and her model of education still used today in Montessori schools) accentuates the importance of teaching universal social responsibility. Montessori acknowledged that a child learns the violent values of society in school and could, therefore, learn about peaceful values there too (Duckworth 2008). The Montessori method is used worldwide and has become a recognized pedagogical construct in education (<http://montessoriconnections.com/about-montessori-education/what-is-the-montessori-method/>).

The Prem Rawat peace education program (PEP)

Mohandas Gandhi was a critic of educational systems as he found them to be signifiers and sustainers of the violent status quo (Allen 2007). He perceived of structural and cultural violence as something that needed to be socially challenged and considered cooperation with existing education systems a form of exploitation (Allen 2007). As long as educative systems continued to ignore their role in 'war culture' Gandhi explained that violence would continue. Gandhi perceived of personal transformation (to nonviolence and love) as a primary goal of education and saw the transformation of society as a desirable, although secondary outcome. Students in modern education, to Gandhi, become participants in a society that normalizes violence and aggression and, further, educators who utilize teaching methods that duplicate inequality and ignore the qualities of nonviolence and transformative love become accomplices in 'war culture' as well (Allen 2007).

Utilizing Gandhi's critique of education, Prem Rawat created his 'Peace Education' model for use in a variety of institutions, including correctional facilities, schools, community groups, and wellness centres. The Prem Rawat Peace Education Program utilizes Gandhian peace education components that seek to transform the individual based on qualities such as self-awareness, hope and contentedness. The goal of Prem Rawat peace education is the nonviolent transformation of the self (<http://tprf.org/programs/peace-education-program/>).

The National Peace Academy

The National Peace Academy (NPA) is an educational facility that was fashioned to increase global and local peacebuilding skills through holistic *peacelearning* - learning activities that inspire and equip peacebuilders to engage and manifest peace. The NPA philosophical foundations arise from the Earth Charter (2000) and envision that the practice of *peacelearning* involves both inner and outer transformation that manifests through the "right relationships with oneself, other persons, other cultures [and] other life" (Principle 16-f).

Committed to providing the tools and mindsets necessary to manifest positive peace in society the NPA addresses the root causes of social,

political, economic, environmental and collective conflict through offering *peacelearnings* that addresses five components of human relationships: personal, social, political, institutional, and ecological. Similar to the aforementioned forms of critical pedagogy mentioned in this commentary (Montessori and PEP), the NPA is a repository of vital resources for building peace (<http://nationalpeaceacademy.us/>).

Discussion: How are these three approaches informed by critical pedagogy?

Critical pedagogy creates learning environments that foster loving, nonviolent transformation: personal or collective, local or global. The previous three approaches are informed by critical pedagogy in the following manner: Montessori education perceives that the imposition of authoritative values (obedience, duty, sacrifice) lead to war – a definitive form of organized violence - whereas the values of peace (love, stewardship and sustainability) result in positive and reciprocal relationships, personal and social responsibility and a sense of inclusion that contributes to self-esteem. Prem Rawat peace education perceives that eradicating the violence of the ‘self’ is the first step in creating a culture of peace. Just as Gandhi believed that inner transformation was an essential component to authentic revolution, Prem Rawat peace education works toward transforming one’s inner violence. This program relates to holistic transformation – how can we be nonviolent when we have yet to address the violence within ourselves? The National Peace Academy considers the act of transformation to be a vital and foundational process to becoming a builder of peace. *Peacelearning* refers to aspects of information, tools, techniques and capacities that give humans the tools to be agents of change in personal, social, political, institutional and ecological domains. Montessori education acts to transform society, Prem Rawat peace education works to transform the self and *peacelearning* at NPA seeks to transform the world.

Discussion: How do these three approaches enact critical pedagogy?

In critical pedagogy a connection is made between acquiring the mindsets and means of building positive peace to the formation of loving and nonviolent relationships between educands (student/learners) and educators (facilitator/learners). Without this vital connection learning is reduced to a ‘banking’ process that disconnects the content of learning from mental/social/emotional transformation, but, when this process is in place (when critical pedagogy is enacted) then the result of learning is an authentic co-created, co-creating space of loving, nonviolent change (Freire 2003). Enacting critical pedagogy means putting into practice - through aspiration and pedagogy – inclusive learning practices that require love, cherish human dignity and support transformation away from violence. Violence can be conceived of as the avoidable harm that we inflict upon others and ourselves. In Montessori education, the child is the centre of a loving and nonviolent

learning environment and this form of critical pedagogy connects the experience of early learning to the act of social responsibility. Prem Rawat peace education enacts critical pedagogy by focusing on personal transformation. Society is made up of individuals. Those who practice the discipline of *personal* nonviolence are better prepared to stem *interpersonal* violence and increase the peace dividend for all of us. Finally, NPA *peacelearning* is distinct from 'practice' programs or peacebuilding trainings as the pedagogical orientation is explicitly based upon gaining outer abilities *and* inner qualities. Critical pedagogy is enacted by *peacelearning* through the creation of loving relationships – interconnection (in five spheres) that do not merely benefit or profit participants but lovingly transform them.

These three programs (there are many, many more) seek to activate the conceptual underpinnings of peace education – that worldviews can change and that education systems are a part of building worldviews. As a form of critical pedagogy peace education has something very significant to contribute to the complex understandings of the world around us and in particular, position learning as a co-created, inclusive and empowering experience that results in positive change.

Conclusion

Critical pedagogy is a variety of orientations that build upon critical thinking, critical literacy and critical theory. Critical pedagogy in peace education has additional goals to the recognition of power, inequality and oppression in society by adding an element of radical love. Critical pedagogy in peace education aims at more than awareness of reality but the transformation of reality toward positive peace.

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