

Peace Education in Early Childhood Education

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Introduction

Early childhood education in the United States focuses on educating the youngest of our citizens. Although the age range of what is considered “early childhood” for teacher certification purposes may slightly differ from state to state, it is generally understood that early childhood is birth through age eight. In practice, early childhood education tends to specifically focus on those children younger than primary school grades. Ideas of early childhood have evolved, shifted and transformed over time. The ideas of many theorist, philosophers and educators from Plato, Rousseau and Pestalozzi to Piaget, Vygotsky and Dewey have been addressed, debated and applied to a variety of issues in early childhood.¹

Approaches to early childhood education may vary in the United States but there tends to be an universal emphasis on educating the “whole child” which encompasses understanding the importance of supporting a child in all developmental domains including cognitive, physical, language, social and emotional.² The general holistic approach to early childhood education seems to create an open door to the integration of peace education within the early years of childhood. This is supported by Betty Reardon's recognition that the “holism of early education sets learning in a context of the linkages and interrelationships between cognition and affect and among subjects of study that more closely approximates the natural learning of lived

¹ Weber, E. *Ideas Influencing Early Childhood Education: A Theoretical Analysis*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 1984.

² Roopnarine, J. L., & Johnson, J. E. *Approaches to Early Childhood Education*. Upper Saddle River, N.J: Merrill/Pearson, 2009.

experience.”³ It is within this environment of interrelationships and a more natural learning process that peace education can be most fully realized.

This paper is meant as an introduction to the idea of peace education in early childhood and will focus on the broad possibilities of creating a pedagogical framework for early childhood founded on peace education. Throughout this paper I will discuss early childhood education within a framework of peace education, using the human rights and peace education approach as the main directive with elements of other approaches to peace education integrated. Special attention will be given to the advantages of including a component of education in an outdoor natural setting.

Before discussing the importance of nature in peace education or early childhood education in general, a very brief background and introduction to peace education will be given to provide a basic understanding of this broad and growing field. This will be followed by a discussion of the importance of peace education in an early childhood setting, including the importance of nature and outdoors in the curriculum. After laying that structure, I will propose a curricular framework for early childhood based on the values of peace education that will rest on four pillars; value and respect for self, appreciation of diversity, sense of fairness and justice, and awareness of interconnectedness.

Overview of Peace Education

In order to set the stage for the proposal of an early childhood peace curriculum, an overview of the peace education field will be presented. To begin, Betty Reardon breaks down peace education to education for peace, education about peace and peace knowledge.⁴ Education for peace is concerned with creating preconditions necessary for peace, helping to build the skills and knowledge necessary for peaceful interactions and endeavors. Education about peace teaches about what peaceful conditions are and what the essence of peace is. Peace knowledge includes such things as peace research, peace studies and peace education.

While keeping in mind Betty Reardon’s foundation for peace education, it is also important to note that various forms to peace education exist, all are currently being developed, maintained and investigated. Since each of these forms takes a slightly different point of view and emphasis, they will be briefly examined separately.

Comprehensive peace education takes a wide-lens view of the subject, integrating negative peace and positive peace; negative peace as the absence of direct violence and positive peace as the existence of a socially just society.⁵ Both pieces play an integral part of

³ Reardon, Betty A. *Human Rights Learning: Pedagogies and Politics of Peace*. UNESCO Chair for Peace Education Master Conference: University of Puerto Rico, 2009, 5.

⁴ Reardon, Betty A. (1999). "Peace Education: A Review and Projection." Sweden: School of Education, Malmo University.

⁵ Galtung, Johan. Violence, Peace, and Peace Research. *Journal of Peace Research*, 27 (1969): 291-305.

comprehensive peace education and challenge educators to consider both these elements while reflecting on all aspects of peace from a personal to a global perspective.⁶

Danesh in his integrative peace education approach, argues that “peace in its essence is a spiritual state with political social and ethical expressions” and that “peace must first take place in the human consciousness.”⁷ His focus was on creating a world-view based on unity which he believed is determined by human cognitive and emotive capacities.

Critical peace education grew from Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* intended to reflect on oppression and action upon which to take in order to transform the world. Critical peace education is meant to be problem-posing,⁸ dialogical and analytical in nature leading to a critical consciousness for transformative action.⁸

Gender perspective and human rights peace education challenge the brute forceful views and values of people in power, specifically those of a patriarchal society. Through this view, human rights (including gender rights) can be seen as a counter to violence and a way to achieve equality, justice and peace. It is built on the “fundamental belief in moral equality, a belief that *all* human beings possess an equal inherent dignity or worth.”⁹

While discussing gender perspective in peace education, Betty Reardon would refer to “humane persons” as those peace makers who are gender sensitive. I would elaborate on the idea of humane persons as those who believe in a moral equality for *all*, which includes differences in gender but also differences and variations found among human diversity at large.¹⁰

Ethical approaches to peace education explore the ethical, spiritual and philosophical dimensions of peace education. Within this exploration, care theory (concerned with creating two-way caring relationships) and the need for public reason and deliberation are included within a cosmopolitan perspective which transcends societal boundaries.¹¹

Eco-peace, a more recently developed branch of peace education, calls for the need to consider creating peace with the world as a whole, including all living things and our natural

⁶ Reardon, Betty A. *Comprehensive peace education : Educating for global responsibility*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1988.

⁷ Danesh, H. B. *Education for Peace Reader*. Victoria, Canada: EFP Press, 2011, 23.

⁸ Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum, 1970; Bartlett, Lesley. "Paulo Freire and Peace Education." In *Encyclopedia of Peace Education*, edited by Monisha Bafa. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, Inc., 2008; Baja, Monisha. "'Critical' Peace Education." In *Encyclopedia of Peace Education*, edited by Monisha Baja, 135-146. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2008.

⁹ Snauwaert, Dale T. "Human rights and cosmopolitan democratic education." *Philosophical Studies in Education*, 40 (2009): 94.

¹⁰ Reardon, Betty A. *Education for a Culture of Peace in a Gender Perspective*. Paris: UNESCO, 2001.

¹¹ Noddings, Nel. "Caring and Peace Education." In *Encyclopedia of Peace Education*, edited by Monisha Baja. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, Inc., 2008; Snauwaert, "Human Rights and Cosmopolitan Democratic Education;" Snauwaert, Dale T. "Democracy, Public Reason, and Peace Education." *Global Campaign for Peace Education Newsletter*, 88 (2011): 1-5.

systems, creating an education for sustainability as an element of peace education.¹² A goal of such an approach would be “to have humans live in peace with nature, appreciating that their own survival and health depends upon the health of water, air, plants and animals.”¹³

Approaches to peace education vary widely but all hold similar characteristics and goals. All forms of peace education are concerned with cultivating citizens of a cosmopolitan perspective who are capable of working towards a humane and just society. I think Betty Reardon most clearly and succinctly lays forth the purpose of peace education as promoting “the development of an authentic planetary consciousness that will enable us to function as global citizens and to transform the present human condition by changing the social structures and the patterns of thought that have created it.”¹⁴ If peace education is on the forefront of early childhood, it becomes feasible that there will be less need for *change* in the patterns of thought and world views and more emphasis on the *establishment* of world views for peace.

Early Childhood as a Foundation of Peace

Early childhood is a time when a child is laying the foundation for future development capabilities across all domains. The interplay of language, cognition, social-emotional capacities and physical abilities come into use more frequently and purposefully. As children develop language, they use it to convey their needs and wants, express their emotions, and verbally solve conflict. As children’s cognitive ability allows them to see a distinction between themselves and others, they use their new social skills to test out friendship-making capabilities. Because of these great steps in development, early childhood becomes a crucial time for developing the skills and capacities necessary for peace making, peace keeping, and peace building. Early childhood educators can be instrumental in building those capacities in what Betty Reardon might refer to as teaching for peace, which as mentioned earlier is concerned with creating preconditions necessary for peace.

Supporting the importance of including a peace curriculum in early childhood is research which has helped uncover optimal developmental periods of the brain. It is the early years of life that are considered “prime time” for brain development which can affect a child’s social capacities, critical to preconditions necessary for peace. It was found that “both quality of care and security of attachment affect children’s later capacity for empathy, emotional regulation, and behavioral control.”¹⁵ This suggests that if peace education is included in early childhood experiences it can be extremely influential in building a child’s later capacities for peace such as empathy, emotional regulation and behavioral control which will prove to be important pieces. Betty Reardon describes human rights as the “ethical core” of peace education.¹⁶ When better to

¹² Brenes, Abelardo. "Education for Sustainable Development Based on the Earth Charter." *In Factis Pax* 2, no. 1 (2008): 1-29; Mische, Patriacia & Harris, Ian. "Environmental Peacemaking, Peacekeeping, and Peacebuilding." In *The Encyclopedia of Peace Education*, edited by Monisha Baja. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, 2008.

¹³ Mische & Harris, "Environmental Peacemaking, Peacekeeping, and Peacebuilding," 3.

¹⁴ Reardon, *Comprehensive Peace Education*, x.

¹⁵ Shore, R. "'What have we learned?' in 'Rethinking the brain'." New York: Families and Work Institute, 1991, 41.

¹⁶ Reardon, Betty A. *Human Rights Learning: Pedagogies and Politics of Peace*. UNESCO Chair for Peace Education Master Conference: University of Puerto Rico, 2009, 2.

build this core of human rights understanding (along with other capacities for peace) than during the early childhood years when the core of the person themselves is being built? Early childhood should be used as a place to lay down the building blocks for our future peace leaders.

Including Nature and Outdoor Experiences in the Early Childhood Curriculum

Nature provides an abundance of rich experiences for children in which these building blocks can be formed. These experiences have the potential to provide strong learning and developmental opportunities for all children as well as play a key role in developing a peace curriculum for early childhood. Providing time in nature will allow children at an early childhood level to have unique opportunities for growth in all domains of development; social, emotional, cognitive, language, and physical. For young children, outdoor time in nature will provide the setting for more active physical endeavors while enhancing motor fitness, balance, agility, body awareness, motor planning, and coordination. In addition, this time has great potential to allow for children to partake in more active communication, social-emotional skills and cognitive endeavors as well. Outdoors in nature children will be constantly challenged to use problem solving and decision making skills in an ever changing and sometimes unpredictable environment. The freedom and open-endedness of the natural environment allows them to develop play and communication skills crucial to language, social, and emotional development. Being in nature will also enhance opportunities for children to find patterns, similarities and differences using critical thinking and creative skills while developing a bond with nature and being exposed to a bigger more interconnected pictures of the world in which they live. Including this component of exposure to nature and natural experiences provides opportunities for healthy developmental growth and as this paper will highlight, opportunities for the integration of peace education and building the child's capacities for an understanding of peace.

Pedagogy of Peace in Early Childhood: Standing on Four Pillars of Peace

It is through the establishment of four pillars of peace that I propose an early childhood peace education curriculum: self-value and self respect, appreciation of diversity, sense of fairness and justice, and the awareness of interconnectedness. These four elements will be used to create a curricular framework for early childhood educators who wish to embrace peace education and create a classroom culture based on peace.

Self-Value and Self-Respect

In order to help children develop the skills to build and maintain peaceful relationships and endeavors, early childhood educators must recognize the importance of creating a positive self image built on love and respect for oneself. In learning to love and value oneself, self-worth can be recognized. In understanding one's self-worth, one can believe they deserve a just and peaceful society therefore becoming capable of striving for it. If we are not to value and respect ourselves, than how can we envision the most just situation for ourselves and others? Betty Reardon acknowledges that learners of all ages must examine and challenge the current practices

and situations, including affairs of person justice.¹⁷ With a strong sense of self worth and a positive identity, one can stand up for oneself and the injustices which they experience. The early childhood years are most important in developing this value of self because this is a time when the sense of self is taking major steps in development.

In reference to sense of self development, work by developmental psychologist, Erik Erickson established that a sense of trust was the first and most basic stage as babies and very young children form a relationship with themselves and their social world. In the following early childhood years, he proposed that autonomy and initiative were essential as children develop healthy self and social relationship.¹⁸ Through interactions with peers, adults and the environment, children get to know themselves; their abilities, their preferences and their feelings.¹⁹ When children enter an early childhood school environment, the possibility to interact with peers, adults and multiple environments is dramatically increased, therefore creating great opportunity to enhance trust, autonomy and initiative.

Education and the learning process itself becomes a natural setting in which these elements and other sense-of-self growth can take place. According to Reardon “true learning [is] an organic, vibrant process through which we develop our human identities and social capacities.”²⁰ In a sense this conceptualization of learning is meant for all educators who strive to espouse peace education but early childhood educators should pay particular attention to this notion. They must promote this “true learning” as a way to develop their young students’ identity and social capacities and in doing so enable children with the potential to help build a peaceful society. Contributing to the idea of social capacities, Dale Snauwaert makes a clear connection between peace education and the facilitation of public reason and deliberation.²¹ If children are to one day become citizens involved in public reason and deliberation in order to further peaceful efforts, a strong understanding and respect for self will play a major role in successfully doing so. One must know one's self, their capacities and understand their thoughts if they are to contribute to such reason and deliberation towards a movement of peace.

It is also through love and respect of oneself that love and respect for others can be grown. We must first love and understand ourselves as people in order to love and respect others as people. This self awareness and self respect will help a child understand the respect and dignity that should be applied towards others because, as Dale Snauwaert writes “a sense of justice, grounded in a proper sense of self-respect, is a capacity and higher-order regulative desire to affirm and act from a recognition of moral reciprocity, to offer to others terms of social cooperation that they would agree to under conditions of equality and fairness.”²² These terms of

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Crain, W. C. *Theories of Development: Concepts and Applications*. Upper Saddle River, N.J: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2005.

¹⁹ Ormrod, J.E. *Educational Psychology: Developing Learners, 7th edition*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education Inc., Allyn & Bacon, 2001.

²⁰ Reardon, *Human Rights Learning*, 23

²¹ Snauwaert, "Democracy, Public Reason, and Peace Education."

²² Snauwaert, Dale T. "Upholding a Human Right to Peace." *Global Campaign for Peace Education Newsletter*, no. 105 (2013): 5.

social cooperation can begin to be tested and strengthened as children gain a sense of themselves and others while early childhood educators guide children towards an understanding of moral reciprocity.

First classroom experiences are also a time in which children learn their value within a classroom or community and begin to gain a sense that they are an accepted, appreciated member of a group. Early childhood educators should be supportive in the development of a child's appreciation and respect for self through helping each child become a vital member of the classroom community. Through a caring, thoughtfully planned environment, teachers of young children can help establish the sense of self worth and self respect.

It is through getting to know oneself and her/his value and acceptance in a community, that children can become aware of their place in the world at large. As the care theory of peace education helps us understand, "as human beings, we are inevitably in relation, and our individuality arises in relation."²³ As young children mature and become exposed to a variety of experiences, their ability to know themselves in relation to others changes.²⁴ Maturity and experience assists in the process of making this inter-relational understanding more meaningful and connected. If fostered properly from early childhood, social interactions can help establish a positive self identity and therefore set the stage for positive, peaceful relationships in order to appreciate the value of peaceful interactions and capacities such as cooperation, empathy, caring, and respect.

Cultivating Self-Value and Self-Respect

There is much that can be done in an early childhood education setting to help children value, appreciate and respect themselves. First teachers must nurture a trusting relationship between themselves and students. Over time, teachers can also help young children develop trusting, caring relationships with their peers. Teachers must truly care for their young students, giving them the feeling that they are loved and appreciated. By creating a caring, trusting relationship, the capacity to care can be cultivated in each child. Caring is imperatively placed in a pedagogy that embraces peace education as an essential capacity "that will facilitate the emergence of a culture of peace."²⁵

All children should also be given the opportunity to find their area of success and feel self-efficacious, building their sense of self-worth. Building self-worth, which is a "general belief about the event to which one is a good, capable individual," can be fortified through giving children a variety of experiences, allowing them opportunity to do things on their own, appreciating their efforts and providing the opportunity to make choices.²⁶ When a teacher provides such opportunities children are given the chance to understand themselves and their preferences while developing autonomy and initiative. Indeed peace educators would support

²³ Noddings, "Caring and Peace Education," 1.

²⁴ Ormrod, *Educational Psychology*.

²⁵ Reardon, *Education for a Culture of Peace in a Gender Perspective*, 85.

²⁶ Ormrod, *Educational Psychology*.

the notion of providing choice and variety of experiences. In "Human Rights and Cosmopolitan Democratic Education," Dale Snauwaert writes, "If all human beings are equal, then they should have the right to define and pursue their own conception of the good life (consistent with the equal rights of others). They should have a right to decide their own interests, for there exists no higher moral authority."²⁷ All members of a society, including our youngest children should be afforded such experiences to realize their interests, their capacity for decision making and the empowerment that comes with it.

Outdoors/Nature Component

Providing an element of the educational experience which takes place in a natural setting outdoors, will give a child the space, time and environment to reflect and find one's self. In *How Nature Helps Children Develop*, Crain brings to light how "nature creates states of quiet and calm"²⁸ through which children are given the means to digest and reflect upon their life experience.²⁹ The freedom and choice of work and play in nature inherently provides opportunities for confidence building,³⁰ and advances in self-esteem,³¹ and self-efficacy,³² all necessary for developing value and respect for self.

Appreciation of Diversity

Even the youngest students arriving in an early childhood educational setting, bring with them experiences that contribute to their understanding of diversity.³³ Before children can fully articulate perceived differences, they are aware differences such as skin color and gender.³⁴ Early childhood educators ideally have an understanding of the cognitive abilities that may be present at this young age and be aware of how this affects with understanding. Cognitive theorist, Piaget would categorize these young children in a pre-operational stage, meaning that they construct knowledge based on very concrete observations.³⁵ The concrete interpretation of

²⁷ Snauwaert, "Human Rights and Cosmopolitan Democratic Education", 94

²⁸ Crain, W. "How Nature Helps Children Develop." *Montessori Life*. 9(2), (2001): 23.

²⁹ Powell, M. "The Hidden Curriculum of Recess." *Children, Youth & Environments*, 17(4), (2007): 86-106.; Crain, W. "How Nature Helps Children Develop."

³⁰ Allison, P., Carr, D., & Meldrum, G. "Potential for Excellence: Interdisciplinary Learning Outdoors as a Moral Enterprise." *Curriculum Journal*, 23 (2012): 43-58; Maller, C. "Promoting Children's Mental, Emotional and Social Health through Contact with Nature: A Model." *Health Education*, 109 (2009): 522-543; Powell, "The Hidden Curriculum of Recess."

³¹ O'Brien, L., & Murray, R. "Forest School and its Impacts on Young Children: Case Studies in Britain." *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening*, (6) (2007): 249-265.

³² Sweatman, M., & Warner, A. "Integrating Nature Experiences into Early Childhood Education." *Canadian Children*, 34 (2009): 4-9.

³³ Tatum, B. D. "The Early Years: Is my skin brown because I drink chocolate milk?" in *Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria? and other conversations about race*. New York: BasicBooks, 1997; Roopnarine & Johnson, *Approaches to Early Childhood Education*.

³⁴ Ramsey, Patricia "Young Children's Thinking About Ethnic Diversity." In *Children's ethnic socialization: Pluralism and development*, edited by Phinney, J. S., & Rotheram-Borus, M. J. Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1987.

³⁵ Crain, W. C. *Theories of Development*; Ormrod, *Educational Psychology*.

information received can lead to misinterpretation of certain information such as skin color being determined by what kind of milk children drink³⁶ or length of time they are exposed to the sun.³⁷ Their understanding can also be based upon experiences in which they interpret adult behavior and how they receive answers to their questions.³⁸

It is the job of early childhood educators who strive to create an appreciation for diversity, and therefore aid in building a peace education pedagogy, to support a child in creating a positive understanding of those who may seem different from themselves. Educators working with these young children must help their students establish respect and understanding of diversity in variety of races, cultures, ages, ability levels, socioeconomic status, family structures, gender and sexual orientation. By addressing children's misconceptions, naive theories and possible fears, educators can have an impact on guiding this type of thinking away from turning into stereotypes or prejudices by creating a space in which it is possible "to relate to others customs and behaviors, ways of thinking and ways of managing their...cultures."³⁹ Betty Reardon's work, *Education for a culture of peace in a gender perspective* would emphasize cultivating the capacity for "tolerance of differences in any area where people may differ, even conflict; appreciation of and ability to view human diversity in terms of complementary; and moral inclusion, considering those who are different and with whom we differ as being within the realm of justice and deserving of fair treatment."⁴⁰ Early childhood educators would also need to be aware of such goals. As young children are constructing their views of the world around them and the people in it, teachers must help their students put experiences into relational perspective to build tolerance, appreciation and moral inclusion.

The early childhood curriculum based on peace education will cultivate an appreciation for those who are "different" or come from a background that is different from their own but they must also allow children to feel that their own culture is accepted and appreciated. Just as early childhood educators want to help children develop a positive sense of self, they also must aim to help them establish a positive sense of their home or family culture. A feeling that one's cultural experiences are appreciated and those experiences can contribute to the bigger community can help support a development of positive sense of self and others and set children up for understanding themselves in a wider context.⁴¹

Supporting Appreciation of Diversity

It is up to the educator to create a community in which diversity is embraced and appreciated. In order to achieve such a goal, it starts with the teacher.⁴² As mentioned earlier, perceptions of differences which young children adopt can be the product of adult reactions and

³⁶ Tatum, B. D. "The Early Years."

³⁷ Roopnarine, J. L., & Johnson, J. E. *Approaches to Early Childhood Education*.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Reardon, *Education for a Culture of Peace in a Gender Perspective*, 71-72.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 72

⁴¹ Ormrod, *Educational Psychology*;

⁴² Gonzalez-Mena, J. *Diversity in Early Care and Education: Honoring Differences*. Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2008.

attitudes towards diversity. The teacher who is going to fully embrace peace education in the early childhood setting, must be willing to take a look at her/himself and the attitudes and values which s/he holds. Teachers themselves must truly honor and respect differences in order to serve as a model for the young students. Teachers must be aware of the way they interact with family of their students. Both explicit and implicate actions will be registered and interpreted by young children so it becomes extremely important to model respect for families of all types and include family into the classroom activities when possible.

When I speak of diversity it is in terms that go beyond racial differences, including differences in cultural customs, ages, ability levels, socioeconomic status, family structures, gender and sexual orientation. So when considering constructing such an environment to support understanding and appreciation of differences, teachers must be mindful of all groups and individual differences. At the early childhood education level, gender tolerance and appreciation is imperative to address. As Betty Reardon (2001) points out, gender may be the first encounter with differences and states that “persons who are gender tolerant and gender sensitive are likely to manifest tolerance of other differences and to be able to develop a mature appreciation for diversity.”⁴³ Teachers can create an environment in which this is embraced by fully making no judgments or assumptions based on gender. In an early childhood setting, this means creating equal opportunity for girls and boys to do the same work and have the same choices. This is important because “if early childhood children experience an environment in which both girls and boys are perceived and treated as being of equal worth, they will receive the message that human difference does not carry with it unequal human value.”⁴⁴

Beyond gender tolerance, appreciation and understanding of diversity will blossom in a culturally inclusive classroom. This means the environments and activities will represent diverse experiences and perspectives, exposing children to contributions that have been made by those groups that may be underrepresented as contributors to society. Books and other classroom materials should include people of diversity - different races, cultures, family structures, women in roles that may not be seen in the mainstream. This is not meant to be a special once a year unit on diversity or differences but something to integrate and infuse into the early learning classroom. To mirror this thoughtfully planned environment in their actions, teachers should provide opportunity for their students to be represented in a variety of roles regardless of race, gender, or other aspects of diversity and avoid prescribing “social norms” for gender, race or class.

Because young children’s cognitive ability may lead them to conjure up misconceptions based on the concrete information they receive, it is up to teachers and other adults to challenge these assumptions to help broaden the child’s perspective. I once had a student who believed women did not drive. She made this assumption based on the fact the no women in her family drove. I made sure to point out such cases in books when there was a women driver and gave her the opportunity to see female members of our staff drive a car. In providing such experiences, her current views were being challenged which cognitive theorists would say

⁴³ Reardon, *Education for a Culture of Peace in a Gender Perspective*, 72-73.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 77.

creates disequilibrium or cognitive dissonance to expand her current schema.⁴⁵ The expansion of her current schema allows for the challenge and ultimately the acceptance of different and new ideas.

Appreciation and respect for diversity should extend beyond the classroom walls as well. The early childhood teacher truly adopting a peace education pedagogy would also take into consideration the need for a cosmopolitan approach, transcending boundaries, in a sense of extending beyond their own class group. Just as in human rights peace education “respect for persons should not...be limited to any particular nation state; it should be cosmopolitan in a sense that it transcends political boundaries,”⁴⁶ in early childhood peace education respect, understanding and appreciation should extend beyond the classroom walls to the community, to other communities and eventually to all humanity. Teachers can support this by modeling such respect and creating opportunities for children to do so, which may include collaborative work with other class groups and other schools or involvement in the community for a start.

Outdoors/Nature Component

In order to understand ideas of differences and diversity, children should be given abundant and varied experiences with diversity. A great opportunity to enhance this would be to include experiencing the diversity found in our natural world. Experiences with the diversity of nature can lay way for the understanding of the diversity among people, creating similes, metaphors, contrasts and comparisons perhaps furthering the understanding of and appreciation for diversity which a child may encounter in various forms. Time outdoors in an open-ended, natural environment will also provide the necessity for communication and collaboration between children, which is essential in getting to know a diverse range of people and understanding their ideas and thoughts.⁴⁷

Sense of Fairness / Justice

An early childhood classroom is a perfect time to develop the values and attitudes necessary for an understanding of fairness and justice. At this stage, children are just beginning to gain an awareness of the perspective of others (Ormrod, 2011). They are being placed in a classroom setting where there are many children who hold multiple opinions, needs and wants. They may, for the first time, need to defend the position of having their own needs and wants met within a common good for the group.

As children are becoming aware of others' views and opinions, teachers and professionals working with young children must help them to understand their needs and wants as part of a whole. If we are to build children capable of working towards a “common commitment to the general public good [and] a just distribution and equitable enjoyment of benefits and resources”

⁴⁵ Ormrod, *Educational Psychology*.

⁴⁶ Snauwaert, "Human Rights and Cosmopolitan Democratic Education", 94.

⁴⁷ Powell, M. "The Hidden Curriculum of Recess"; O'Brien & Murray, "Forest School and its Impacts on Young Children."

(Reardon, 2009, p8), which I believe is necessary for a classroom culture that truly supports a peace agenda, it should start with building the foundation of those values at the early childhood level.

As children experience conflict, differences in opinion, or find themselves having unmet wants and needs it is possible that they may become confused, angry, or resentful. It is the job of early childhood educators to help a child express those feelings in a healthy manner and work toward understanding the outcome. In a classroom community that supports peaceful conflict resolution, group cooperation, and peer understanding, children should be guided to work through the fairness/justice conflicts and eventually gain the skills to work through them more independently. Whether it is an internal conflict based on an individual's own need, the conflict of a single child and a peer, or group conflict involving the needs of the whole class, each can be a learning opportunity for the children.

Creating a Sense of Fairness and Justice

Creating a classroom community that integrates fairness and a sense of justice throughout all processes will be key in helping children develop their own sense of justice. This starts by allowing and supporting opportunities that examine and challenge current situations. For an early childhood student this might mean inquiry into a personal situation with support from a teacher. Teachers themselves should be aware of injustices in order to help their students identify and understand such issues. The questioning and challenging must start somewhere. An effective and practical setting to start would be at an early childhood setting. Beyond examining personal situations this can mean questioning classroom practices or school-wide policy that may seem unfair or unjust.

Those teaching young children should not put aside questions but assent to students' challenges and inquiries into what is going on in their immediate environment and the world around them. Children at this age naturally want to know "why" and ask this on a regular basis. Teachers who strive to instill a sense of fairness and justice in their students will embrace these "whys" as opportunities to explore issues more deeply and critically. *In Human Rights Learning: Pedagogies and Politics for Peace*, when speaking of human rights as components of justice Betty Reardon conceptualizes "just societies [as] those that are conscious of vulnerabilities, seek to prevent them from becoming the occasions of avoidable harm, and devote resources to care for those who are vulnerable so long as they are in such condition."⁴⁸ Such ideology should be built into any classroom culture, especially that of young children who are developing their sense of the world and idea of justice. If children in their earliest school years are given the opportunity to explore their "whys", while uncovering vulnerabilities and harmful or unfair situations, they will have great practice and experience in order to apply such skills to a larger degree as they develop their cognitive capacity. Evaluating and questioning their personal experiences, classroom practices or school policy can pave the way to evaluating economic, political, social, cultural and environmental injustices.

⁴⁸ Reardon, *Human Rights Learning*, 20

Children's literature can assist teachers, encourage children to embrace the ideology of peace education and offer an effective means in which to explore issues beyond first hand experiences. Critical literacy "which encourages readers to adopt a questioning stance and to work toward changing themselves and their world" can be integrated into the widely held preschool practice of story time.⁴⁹ Children's books with social justice themes or underlying questions can be read to children with discussion after the book guided towards addressing social issues of justice and fairness at their level of understanding. Through doing this, teachers will be able to promote certain themes found in a peace education framework such as the building of perspective,⁵⁰ challenging of social injustices,⁵¹ environmental injustice and even equitable distribution of resources.⁵² These themes begin in classroom readings but extend to a wider context through building these skills of critical analysis. Teachers that have used critical literacy in their classroom found that the skills developed in the classroom were used to confront larger societal issues.⁵³

Another tool which should be used to create a peaceful and positive community while addressing justice/fairness issues is the classroom meeting. It is common practice in preschools and other early childhood settings to have regular classroom meetings. In early childhood, classroom meetings are typically used to determine the schedule for the day, discuss weather or give a special presentation. In a classroom that desires to be one built on peace understanding, classroom meetings can also be used as a discussion platform. To bring together a multifaceted issue or open discussion to the whole group, teachers can present topics at classroom meetings to get feedback from the group and interaction of individual students' ideas. In an early childhood education setting, this can even be seen as what Dale Snauwaert might call a "democratic public space, a public forum wherein opinions and perspectives can be communicated" essential to a truly democratic and peaceful community.⁵⁴

Outdoors/Nature Component

Open-ended outdoor time promotes children working together, collaborating and communicating. During this collaborative time children are learning to understand others, their views and needs while beginning to grasp the ideas of fairness and justice. Reardon makes clear that a culture of peace is fair and just and does not accept violence as an answer.⁵⁵ Young children need time and space to grapple with such big ideas. Open-ended time in nature allows just that. In fact, a case study by Mark Powell found that children engaged in regular free time in nature regulated such things as fairness and rejected violence as a way to accomplish a goal

⁴⁹ McDaniel, Cynthia. "Critical Literacy: A Questioning Stance and the Possibility for Change." *The Reading Teacher*, 57 (2004): 472.

⁵⁰ Snauwaert, "Human rights and cosmopolitan democratic education."

⁵¹ Reardon, *Human Rights Learning*.

⁵² Mische & Harris, "Environmental Peacemaking, Peacekeeping, and Peacebuilding."

⁵³ Chafel, J. A., Flint, A. S., Hammel, K., & Pomeroy, K. H. Young Children, Social Issues, and Critical Literacy: Stories of Teachers and Researchers. *Young Children*, (2007): 73-81; McDaniel, "Critical Literacy."

⁵⁴ Snauwaert, "Human rights and cosmopolitan democratic education," 101.

⁵⁵ Reardon, *Human Rights Learning*.

when playing outside.⁵⁶ In order for children to appreciate a fair and just situation for all, the capacity to care about others must exist. Some research suggests that the capacity to care may be enhanced through experiences in and with nature. A study by Maller's indicates that children who engage in caring nature activities such as caring for plants and animals were able to easily transfer the skills over to caring and nurturing of people and considering the feelings of others.⁵⁷

Interconnectedness

If children are given the opportunity to see themselves as part of a whole in terms of solving conflict in a just and fair manner, children will begin to make sense of the interrelationships between themselves and others. In order to truly work towards a just and peaceful society one must realize the relationships s/he has with others. It is through the realization of these relationships and the interconnectedness present, that one can most authentically solve problems and come to peaceful, just terms. Through the growing life experiences of a preschooler, many in which take place inside an early childhood classroom group, young children can begin to understand themselves as part of a whole. The social nature of a group in a classroom presents opportunity for children to see their effects on others.

It is also necessary that children be aware of their relationship with the natural environment. Helping children in an unthreatening way, to "appreciate that their own survival and health depends upon the health of water, air, plants and animals" is an integral piece to giving them a sense of interconnectedness.⁵⁸ Children need to know how their actions affect the natural world and in turn how those effects have an impact on the human race and other living creatures on earth. According to the biophilia hypothesis defined by Edward Wilson,⁵⁹ young children have an innate sense of their relationship with natural elements and have a desire to be in contact with them. Teachers in an early childhood setting should use the opportunity of the young student's inclination to be in nature as a tool for creating the awareness of the interconnections present between all humans and between humans and the rest of the natural world.

Promoting Awareness of Interconnectedness

To become aware of the interconnectedness that exists between us all, children must have the opportunity to interact in positive, productive ways with peers and adults. Within these interactions children must be given the freedom to act and react autonomously. This can happen in an environment that is well prepared to support the freedom of movement and choice as well as encourage communication and dialogue among all members of the group. If teachers provide children with this opportunity, "dialogical relationships" can be formed while developing a sense

⁵⁶ Powell, M. "The Hidden Curriculum of Recess."

⁵⁷ Maller, "Promoting Children's Mental, Emotional and Social Health through Contact with Nature: A Model."

⁵⁸ Mische & Harris, "Environmental Peacemaking, Peacekeeping, and Peacebuilding," 3.

⁵⁹ As discussed in Louv, Richard. *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*. Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2005.

of interconnectedness.⁶⁰ In the processes of interactions, teachers of young children who are just beginning to gain a sense of “the other” can highlight causations of how each affects another, the relationships between members of the classroom community and each member's contribution to the whole group and wider community and world.

This view of **holism** is supported by peace educators and is instrumental in creating a curricular model of peace education for early childhood. Preschool teachers and other early childhood educators tend to conduct units of study in a holistic manner - interconnecting subject content and focusing on the whole child in all developmental domains. Early childhood educators wishing to embrace a peace pedagogy must grow from this vantage point and focus the holism present between people, places, events and the natural world we live in; helping children view all people as one human species among many valued living species on our single planet. For children of preschool age, this could mean taking simple steps in acknowledging all humanity as one by asking questions that require reflection within a preschooler's capability including "what makes us human" or "what makes us each unique". Teachers can also point out and discuss natural cycles or systems at an early childhood level such as how the rain is important for the trees, plants and animals. Beginning to explore those topics will set building blocks for the exploration of larger, more complicated queries as developmental advances allow for more in depth discussions.

As Betty Reardon points out in *Human Rights Learning: Pedagogies and Politics of Peace*, “A holistic approach calls for identifying links and relationships among issues and problems.”⁶¹ It is important for teachers to identify these links for their young students but it also important for early childhood educators to identify and value these links for themselves. They must perceive a child not simply as a child within the context of their classroom but within the world as a whole, taking into account children’s experiences, background and family history. This means intimately getting to know each student and responding in appropriate ways for each individual. A truly holistic approach to early childhood education also places value on working with families and integrating a child’s home life into school life.

In support of understanding the interconnectedness of human to human relationships, one must also **understand the interdependence we have with the rest of the natural world**. If children are given exposure to the natural connections of our planet it leads the way for interpretation and understanding of the interconnectivity which constantly surrounds us in all endeavors. I agree with Mische & Harris in their statement that “humans are not apart from or over Nature, but part of the Earth’s larger community of life.”⁶² This is true in that human activity affects our natural environment and the life of all creatures on earth (including humans). We are indeed part of earth’s community and children need to be given opportunity to realize that from a very young age. Currently we are experiencing a disconnect or distancing from humans and the rest of the

⁶⁰ Snauwaert, Dale T. "The ethics and ontology of cosmopolitanism: Education for a shared humanity." *Current Issues in Comparative Education*, 12 (2009): 14-22.

⁶¹ Reardon, *Human Rights Learning*, 6

⁶² Mische & Harris, "Environmental Peacemaking, Peacekeeping, and Peacebuilding," 3.

natural world.⁶³ Early childhood educators have the power and I would argue the responsibility to close that gap by building children who see the connection *that is* life on earth. Spending time outdoors, studying animals, teaching children human impact on nature, and discussing natural systems are all ways to promote such understanding. As mentioned earlier, cultivating caring is important for creating a culture of peace. The caring component should be extended beyond human relationships to the relationships with all living beings and the natural world in which we live.

Outdoors/Nature Component

Experiences in and with nature are an integral part of developing a child's sense of interconnectedness. To combat the distance that is taking place between people and the natural world, early childhood educators can expose children to the natural world from a young age and with consistency. They can help children understand systems and cycles of nature as part of who we are as people and how we function in this living world. Outdoor time in nature is important "for children's discovery of their environment and of their own place in the world."⁶⁴ I believe this to be very true; if children do not understand the world in which they live, humans' role in it and how it functions as a system, they will not fully understand their own place and the impact they have on the world. An early childhood curriculum that supports peace in its entirety will encourage what Mische and Harris would call environmental peace making.⁶⁵ This is only possible if we give children the opportunity to act as such by exposing them to their natural environment, providing the chance for environmental peace-making.

Building the Four Pillars

Educators working with preschool age and other early childhood groups, who wish to create a culture of peace in their learning environment will recognize the importance of developing and supporting creativity and critical thinking in their young students. While the four pillars I suggest; value and respect for self, appreciation of diversity, sense of fairness and justice, and awareness of interconnectedness are the integral substance of an early childhood curriculum supporting a peace agenda, they will only be fully realized when built from creativity and critical thinking processes.

Creativity

Young children are naturally curious and excited about new things. They are in a stage of imagination and creativity. They naturally immerse themselves in imaginative play using creative processes in doing so. Creativity, new and original behavior and/or ideas will be key in developing young children's capacity for peace and should be fostered at this ripe creative age.⁶⁶

⁶³ Mische & Harris, "Environmental Peacemaking, Peacekeeping, and Peacebuilding"; Louv, *Last Child in the Woods*.

⁶⁴ Maller, "Promoting Children's Mental, Emotional and Social Health through Contact with Nature," 529.

⁶⁵ Mische & Harris, "Environmental Peacemaking, Peacekeeping, and Peacebuilding."

⁶⁶ Ormrod, *Educational Psychology*.

In order to imagine a new situation, a different more peaceful world, one must be able to *imagine* in general through the process of creative thoughts and eventually create change through the process of creative actions. Mische and Harris discuss education for social responsibility as teachers posing problems and helping students search for solutions.⁶⁷ With a strong creative skill set, imaging solutions and creative possibilities will be easier and more natural of a process. Betty Reardon describes this in terms of hope, an essential of peace, as that which “enables us to believe in the possibility of positive change...elicited and developed through practicing the skills of visioning, imaging and modeling.”⁶⁸ These are skills which can be developed through a young child’s natural use of creativity and imagination.

Teachers can build upon the child’s natural creative inclination at this age by giving them various outlets in which to express their creativity. Whether through play, art, building, constructing, storytelling, or physical adventures indoors and outdoors, creative thoughts and behaviors are valued in an early childhood setting which wishes to generate a peace pedagogy. Creativity requires the ability to take risks and it requires time. Providing children freedom with appropriate levels of security and support will establish this space to take risk. Providing children with the time they need to explore their ideas and maintaining an environment in which mistakes and failures are appreciated as learning opportunities will support creative processes and risk taking.

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking also becomes a necessary vehicle in developing the four pillars of early childhood peace education. If we want our children to be able to challenge world views and question current unfair practices, they must be taught to be critical in their thinking processes. If children are to be able to identify the problems in which to find creative solutions, they must be able to *see* the problems in the first place through a critical lens. If a teacher is to take on an element of early childhood peace education such as critical literacy, one in which children are asked to think deeply about what they are reading/hearing, they must have the critical thinking skills to do so.

Dale Snauwaert proposes thinking as a “reflective activity wherein one literally stops and steps back within one’s self to reflect upon the meaning and value of the thought.”⁶⁹ While this may seem a lofty goal for young children who are only beginning to gain a sense of self and awareness of others, the ideas of thinking and reflecting are quite applicable to the early childhood years. This might be done through classroom activities that require such authentic thinking to take place. In *Making Thinking Visible*, Ritchhart, Church, and Morrison describe “thinking routines”, activities that help children to interpret, wonder, question, reflect and take perspective.⁷⁰ This may include having children carefully observe a painting, respond to each

⁶⁷ Mische & Harris, "Environmental Peacemaking, Peacekeeping, and Peacebuilding."

⁶⁸ Reardon, Betty A. *Education for a Culture of Peace in a Gender Perspective*, 86

⁶⁹ Snauwaert, "Human rights and cosmopolitan democratic education," 97

⁷⁰ Ritchhart, R., Church, M., & Morrison, K. *Making Thinking Visible: How to Promote Engagement, Understanding, and Independence for All Learners*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2011.

other's comments or making connections between new and previously learned information. In providing such experiences for young children, teachers are promoting skills for critical thinking.

Attentive listening, active observation, and good communication skills are necessary in the full process of critically thinking and applying critical thoughts. While thinking often begins as internal, it is in response to something that is being heard or something that has been observed. Thinking becomes external as thoughts are communicated to others and in this manner, communication of thoughts is crucial for the thinking/applying process. Communication also becomes important in creating a relationship of dialogue. This dialogical component is acknowledged by many peace educators as being key in the peace education process. Noddings describes dialogue as “a basic requirement in a caring relationship.”⁷¹ As discussed earlier, caring relationships are often the foundation of a positive, productive early childhood experience and the capacity for caring is essential in peace education.

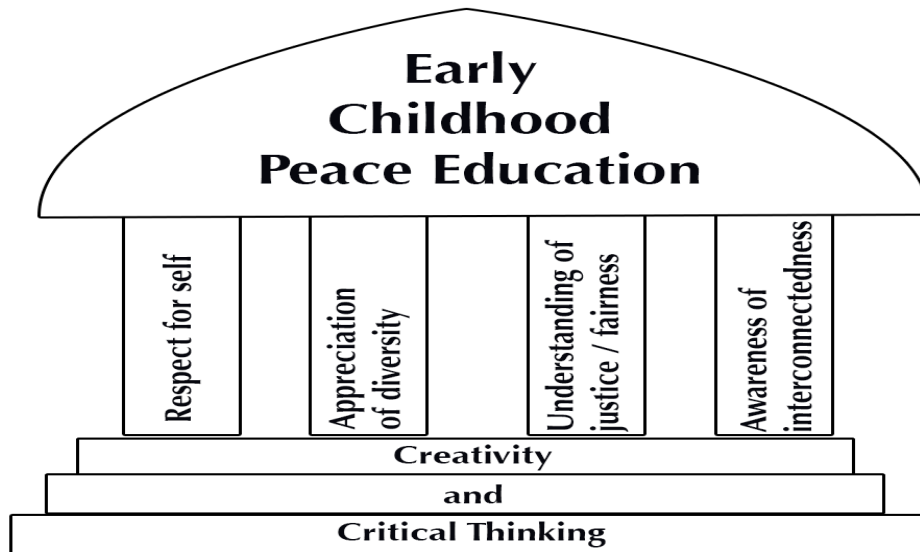
The process of critical thinking and the skills that go along with it are applicable to all pillars described in this curriculum. One must be able to reflect upon oneself and experiences to develop understanding, value and respect of self. To understand and appreciate diversity, a child must be aware of diversity and be able to reflect upon the differences s/he encounters. Children must be able to communicate with others and listen to others if they are to understand those who are different from themselves. If children experience differences in people as a means in which difference in just and fair treatment is distributed, they must be able to acknowledge that difference and reflect upon the reasons, approaching the situation from a critical standpoint. In understanding the interconnectedness that is constantly present between all peoples and between people and the rest of the natural world, children are using attentive observation and listening skills to make those connections.

Outdoor/Nature Component

Again, special attention is given here to the potential for including a component of outdoor natural experiences in early childhood education. Creativity has the ability to thrive outdoors in nature as children work in an open-ended environment. A myriad of interpretations and actions are available when working in nature. The rich environment of the natural world presents a variety of choices for engagement in creative endeavors. Children are able to make their own decisions and interpretation of the "loose parts" which nature provides.⁷² Working in nature provides teachers with great opportunities to promote critical thinking and cognitive engagement as they ask questions, make connections and help children create hypothesis to the "whats and whys" of the natural experiences. Also, as one's body is physically engaged in unplanned, unstructured challenges in nature one will have to think critically to solve the problems in this complex environment that constantly requires reflection, critical thinking and decisions making.

⁷¹ Noddings, "Caring and Peace Education," 2.

⁷² Louv, Richard. *Last Child in the Woods*.



Early Childhood Peace Education Curricular Model

Conclusion

Peace education in early childhood has the potential to make a significant and lasting impact. It is in the early years of life that children are developing their social and cognitive capacities to become active and productive members of society. Early childhood educators and others working with young children have the opportunity to integrate capacities for peace into the young child's growing sense of the world.

In viewing early childhood education through the four early childhood peace pillars discussed here, I propose a curriculum for young children that fully embraces peace. Each pillar as important as the next, these four components will guide an early childhood teacher towards a curriculum which will support the building of peaceful children giving them the great potential to grow into peaceful adults, societal members who contribute to creating a peaceful world.

The proposed framework here seeks to help teachers of young children understand how peace education can be integrated into early childhood. Helping children develop value and respect for self, appreciation of diversity, a sense of fairness and justice, and an awareness of interconnectedness will give them the ability to become global citizens who engage in patterns of thought and possess world views that are built on an understanding of peace and a peaceable world.

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