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DOING WHAT WE TEACH

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“As an academic, I have no business thinking of solutions to problems. That is not our concern.”

“The problem with you is you are in the academe, therefore, in an ivory tower. It is naive of you to call on us to say kinder words to each other and propose that we think of solutions instead.”

The first quotation was from a professor-guest in a conference on an arms trade treaty attended by government officials and members of civil society organizations from Asia-Pacific, and the second was from a co-alumnus in a peace institute who was obviously irate when I suggested to the e-group to take the discussion on the Israeli-Palestine conflict to a higher level after a barrelful exchange of ugly words.

The comments made above left me in disbelief. Sadly, this is how academe is perceived by many. It is an institution where theories are the name of the game, alienated from what is happening on the ground.

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But we are peace educators. We are different. Toh Swee -Hin and Virginia Cawagas posited that peace education “requires both understanding and practice, both reflection and action. It is insufficient to merely understand why conflicts and violence abound in the world; one must also act to create more peace”¹. Hence, peace educators are concerned not only with theories, but also on building awareness on the roots and effects of violence and on cultivating values and attitudes compatible to the building of a culture of peace. We are not in an ivory tower. With our students, we envision alternatives to existing structures that harm people and take action to get to our vision of a better world.

As peace educators, we try our best to do what we teach. At the Center for Peace Education in Miriam College, Philippines, where I am based, we call attention to the fact that many “women have suffered indignities and inequalities on the basis of their sex...and have been hampered from the full enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms”². To concretely do something about this situation, we are helping draft a national action plan to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325 which aims to increase women’s participation in conflict prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding processes; and UN Security Council resolution 1820 which aims to protect women from sexual violence in situations of armed conflict. I go around the country, far-flung areas, included, to remind women and men of women’s rights and to seek their views on how these resolutions can be implemented.

We do not simply tell our students that “people who are not taking part in armed hostilities should be protected”³. We are part of *Sulong CARHRIHL*, a third party network that monitors the agreement between our government and the members of the National Democratic Front to respect human rights and the international humanitarian law. We go around the country, yes including armed conflict zones, to inform non-combatants of their rights in situations of war. We lobby for legislation to be filed and approved in the parliament on the issues of landmines and small arms that civilians may be protected from the proliferation of these weapons.

We do more than telling our students that “the earth’s resources should be justly shared. “ We hold an annual fundraising campaign dubbed “Rice porridge for a Cause” that helps bring economically-disadvantaged students to schools. We help in the construction of facilities and purchase of equipment for a partner-school in Mindanao. When wars break out in southern Philippines, we mobilize our students to solicit goods for people trapped in evacuation centers.

¹ Toh Swee-hin and V. Cawagas, *Peace education: a framework for the Philippines*, Quezon City, 1987, p. 2.

² L. Castro and J. Galace, *Peace education: a pathway to a culture of peace*, Quezon City, 2008, p. 53.

³ International Committee of the Red Cross, *Summary of the Geneva conventions of August 12, 1949 and their additional protocols*.

Social action and service learning, as Betty Reardon wrote, are very effective approaches that can help develop social responsibility and the capacity of global engagement and agency.⁴

e tell our students that “all humans are brothers and sisters, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sex and socio-economic status”. Beyond words, we organized a Twinning Project with a school attended by Muslims in war-torn Mindanao, which theme is “building bridges of understanding and peace.” The 40-year old war in Mindanao has created deep animosities between Christians and Muslims. Our Twinning project aims to challenge stereotypes and prejudices between these groups. Gordon Allport explained in his contact theory that opportunities to interact with the different other may help reduce prejudice.⁵ Miriam College is attended mostly by members of the Catholic faithful and is located in Metro Manila. The Twinning Project gives opportunities to both groups of students to communicate via snail mail and meet each other in person, thanks to support from groups like the Australian Embassy in Manila. Students from both camps have expressed gratefulness for the project, bearing witness to the efficacy of communication and contact in dismantling biases. The project has a publication called “Pag-asa” or “hope”. In this newsletter, one student wrote: “Although the two schools are far apart and they are believers of different religions, friendships...have blossomed. Whatever antagonism between us disappeared. It was replaced by understanding and unity”⁶.

An anti-discrimination bill is currently filed in the Philippine Parliament. We have sent letters to our Senators to express support for the bill that seeks to protect Muslims and indigenous peoples from discrimination in employment and education.

We remind our students that war is not inevitable. We echo what the Seville Statement of 1986 proposed that “the species that are capable of waging war are also capable of waging peace”⁷. But beyond teaching that, we organize our students to join mass demonstrations and prayer rallies to call for the cessation of hostilities and respect for ceasefire agreements, whether in the Philippines or in other parts of the world. We teach our students that weapons, being instruments of war and crime, must be controlled. Hence, we frequent the Firearms and Explosives Division of our Philippine National Police to dialogue, research and lobby on the issue of arms control. Many of our students know by heart that “a thousand people die every day

⁴ B. Reardon, *Educating for a culture of peace in a gender perspective*, Paris, 2001, p. 172.

⁵ G. Allport, 1958, cited in L. Castro and J. Galace, *Peace education: a pathway to a culture of peace*, Quezon City, 2008, p. 73.

⁶ L. Castro, *Building bridges of understanding and peace: a twinning project between Muslim and Christian youth*, Quezon City, 2009, p. 9.

⁷ Adams, D. (ed), *The 1986 Seville statement on violence*. Paris, 1991.

by gunshots”⁸ Hence, they have gone to the parliament to seek our parliamentarians’ support for an Arms Trade Treaty. We visit offices of parliamentarians to request support for legislation controlling the proliferation of arms. We have organized a demonstration in front of the Commission on Elections to call on the agency to implement a total gun control during election period which is often marred by gun violence. We join our Philippine National Police in activities of gun destruction. We go to television and radio stations, as well as schools and other venues, to speak about the ill causes of gun proliferation.

We tell our students that conflicts can be managed and resolved non-violently. But beyond words, we train them to become peer mediators. Our high school classes have elected peacekeepers whose main function is to help keep the peace and create more peaceable classrooms. Student leaders in our college go through peer mediation sessions. Every year, our first year college students are trained on how to resolve conflicts constructively. We assessed the impact of our conflict resolution program among our first year college students a few years ago and 81.1% reported that their attitudes on conflict resolution were positively changed and/or maintained. 87.5% of our students who went through mediation training reported a positive change in attitudes. 66.1% of those trained had the opportunity to practice their mediation skills and 94.6% of those who practiced it succeeded in their mediation efforts⁹.

We tell our students that education can be a pathway to peace, that raising consciousness about the causes and effects of violence can help cultivate values of concern and compassion and prod people to action. To make sure that peace education is brought to as many people as possible in my country, our Center brought together kindred spirits from different educational institutions and civil society organizations and established the Peace Education Network. Members of this network helped draft a policy mainstreaming peace education in the curriculum. The result of the drafting and lobbying was an executive order signed by the President of the Philippines institutionalizing peace education in basic education and teacher education. And believing that peace education is an effective pathway to peace, we have brought it to other sectors beyond the academe: the religious, police, military, government workers, parents, out-of-school youth and members of street gangs, among others.

The teacher of peace, according to Betty Reardon, needs to be a responsible global citizen, an intentional agent of a culture of peace, a person of vision, capable of hope, and the imaging of positive change.¹⁰ As peace educators, we at the CPE, dream of a world that is free from war; where justice and equality prevail; where rights of every human being are promoted;

⁸ International Action Network on Small Arms, *Gun violence: the global crisis*, London, 2007.

⁹ Castro, L., Galace, J and Lesaca, K., *Peace education initiatives in Metro Manila, Quezon City, 2005*, pp. 56-59.

¹⁰ B. Reardon, *Educating for a culture of peace in a gender perspective*, Paris, 2001, p.139.

where diversity is respected; where development trickles down to the last, the least and the lost; and where environmental resources are nurtured and sustained.

But we do not stop at dreaming. As Betty Reardon wrote, the teacher of peace is a practitioner of peace¹¹. Hence, we do our share in making this vision come true.

¹¹ B. Reardon, *Educating for a culture of peace in a gender perspective*, Paris, 2001, p. 140.