
Peace education in a broader perspective

Sumita Chaudhuri

Pailan College of Education (Affiliated to the University of Calcutta), Pailan Group, Joka, Kolkata

Email address:

sumitac529@gmail.com

To cite this article:

Sumita Chaudhuri. Peace Education in a Broader Perspective. *Education Journal*. Special Issue: Gender, Peace and Education. Vol. 4, No. 1-1, 2015, pp. 6-9. doi: 10.11648/j.edu.s.2015040101.12

Abstract: The study aims to introduce those who are unaware about the field of peace education and provide an overview of the history, central concepts, scholarship, and practices within the field. We will survey the human and social dimensions of peace education, such as gender perspectives in peace education and human rights education. Significant time will be spent on profiling key thinkers, theories, and movements in the field, with a particular focus on case-studies of peace education in practice worldwide. Throughout this study, we will distinguish between two core concepts in peace education, namely “negative peace” and “positive peace.” Negative peace is defined as the absence of direct, organized, physical violence; efforts to promote negative peace include disarmament and peacekeeping initiatives. Positive peace requires the absence of structural violence and emphasizes the promotion of human rights to ensure a comprehensive notion of social justice. Human rights education and attempts to reduce social inequality are examples of efforts to promote positive peace.

Keywords: Peace, Education, Transition, Theories

1. Introduction

“In a period of transition and accelerated change marked by the expression of intolerance, manifestations of racial and ethnic hatred, the upsurge of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, discrimination, war and violence towards those regarded as 'other' and the growing disparities between rich and poor, at international and national levels alike, action strategies must aim both at ensuring fundamental freedoms, peace, human rights, and democracy and at promoting sustainable and equitable economic and social development all of which have an essential part to play in building a culture of peace. This calls for a transformation of the traditional styles of educational action.”

~ From the UNESCO Integrated Framework of Action on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Democracy.

Peace studies aims for a critical analysis of war, armed conflict and political violence as deeply-rooted phenomena that affect the daily lives of millions of people around the world. The purpose of this analysis is not merely to improve our intellectual understanding of the sources or causes of these phenomena, but also to provide us with an informed basis for effective action to end or resolve them. Peace studies involves a dynamic relationship between theory and practice, and between peace research, peace education and

peace activism.

This relationship between theory and practice reveals some critical issues for peace studies, such as the on-going tension between its academic or theoretical dimension and its engagement with current issues of war and armed conflict that have huge, immediate significance at the local, national and global levels. As with cognate areas such as development studies, however, these two dimensions of peace studies are also inextricably connected, in the sense, for instance, that effective intervention around specific issues requires a sound theoretical framework and understanding for action.

At the level of theory, one issue for peace studies is the essentially contested nature of its core concept, ‘peace’, and the relative underdevelopment of its theoretical framework and methodology. The connection between peace studies and political activism also raises questions about the normative assumptions of peace studies and often provides a rationale for its marginalisation within academia and formal systems of education.

This article examines both these issues, the underdevelopment of peace theory and the normative dimension of peace studies. It begins with a critical analysis of Johan Galtung’s three categories of violence (direct, structural and cultural) and the corresponding concepts of peace (negative and positive) that have formed the basis of efforts to provide a more sophisticated understanding and

theory of peace. These concepts are important because they connect a narrow or specific concern with war, armed conflict and political violence with wider social phenomena such as poverty and inequality through a much broader understanding of the different elements of peace. When we expand the range of concerns relevant to peace studies in this way, the complementarity between peace education and development education becomes obvious, even if their entry point to issues such as global poverty and human development (or human security) can be different.

The article then moves on to discuss a second critical issue for peace studies, its normative or ethical dimension, through examining human agency and the possibilities for social change. The article concludes by suggesting that the normative dimension of peace studies, rather than being a weakness, can contribute to strengthening its theoretical basis through examining the requirements or constituent elements of social and political change. Furthermore, peace education (like development education) can provide an awareness of the significance of human agency in challenging the status quo, a critical analysis of the need for such change, and the skills and understanding required to achieve it.

2. Theories of Peace

The contested nature of 'peace' as a concept is demonstrated by the description of peace studies in the opening paragraph. Peace studies is defined in negative terms, by the central problems with which it is concerned: war, armed conflict and political violence. By implication, peace itself is understood primarily or initially as a negative, or as the absence of these phenomena.

It is this characterisation of peace as a negative phenomenon that prompted Johan Galtung to make his famous distinction between negative and positive peace in his article 'Violence, Peace and Peace Research' (1969). This distinction has since entered the lexicon of peace researchers and peace activists.

'Negative peace' is negative not because it is an undesirable goal, but because it is characterised by the absence or lack of these destructive social and political phenomena. 'Positive peace', on the other hand, is characterised by the presence of positive social and political phenomena such as justice, human rights, equality and well-being. Furthermore, it is suggested that positive peace provides the essential conditions of negative peace, because war, armed conflict and political violence result from the absence of positive peace. According to Ian Harris, '*Positive peace is a condition where non-violence, ecological sustainability and social justice remove the causes of violence*'.

This distinction between negative peace and positive peace did not originate with Galtung. Martin Luther King, for example, also employed it and said that, 'True peace is not merely the absence of some negative force--tension, confusion or war; it is the presence of some positive force--justice, good will and brotherhood'.

3. Different Categories of Violence

Galtung famously characterises peace with reference to multiple categories of violence. The best known and most used of these categories are direct, structural and cultural violence, which are intimately linked to one another. Direct or personal violence involves an immediate relationship between the perpetrator and the recipient of violence, most obviously in the form of physical violence. Examples of direct violence include specific armed conflicts between combatant groups or human rights abuses aimed at civilians by state security forces or other armed groups.

Structural violence, on the other hand, is built into structures or systems of social, economic or political relationships at the local, national and international level. These structures result in harm to the recipients of such violence through poverty, inequality, lack of access to medical care and education, and so on. There is no direct relationship between the perpetrators and the recipients of structural violence, as there is with direct (or physical) violence. The violence or harm results instead from structures of inequality such as huge disparities of income or wealth, or highly unequal patterns of land ownership.

For Galtung, the distinction between direct (or personal) violence and structural violence revolves around the issue of deliberate or intentional action. In the case of direct or personal violence, according to Galtung, there is an actor or an agent who commits the violence (1969:170). In the case of structural violence, however, no person directly harms another person. The violence or harm is built into the structures of a society. Examples of direct violence might be armed conflict, terrorism, genocide, or gross human rights abuses such as torture. An example of structural violence might be famine or malnutrition resulting from developing country debt, unfair trading relationships or unequal access to natural resources, including land.

In this case, no one sets out deliberately to starve a section of the population, although this may result from economic and social policies aimed at debt repayment, for example. The violence or harm results from unjust or unfair economic relations between developed and developing countries, rather than the intended consequences of action.

Peter Prontzos refers to structural violence as harmful conditions 'that derive from economic and political structures of power, created and maintained by human actions and institutions'. He refers to this as 'collateral damage' because it is 'an unintentional side-effect of specific policies' aimed at increasing the wealth or economic resources of specific groups or institutions.

Furthermore, structural violence can result from ordinary people (in their role as consumers, for example) going about their ordinary lives, if this involves participating in or perpetuating unjust social or economic structures. Consumer campaigns around fairly-traded tea or coffee can be seen as attempts to redress this sort of participation in or support for structural injustices.

An important implication of Galtung's argument is that it

is not enough to focus on or deal with direct violence. We must also deal with structural violence, for at least two reasons. Firstly, structural violence can be just as harmful as direct violence. The human suffering resulting from global poverty, for example, is as important and of a similar 'order of magnitude' as the suffering and destruction resulting directly from war. The United Nations estimates, for instance, that as many as six million children under the age of five die each year from lack of food, and as many as 10 million die from preventable diseases, because of the conditions of absolute poverty under which they live. One estimate of the number of deaths each year from structural causes is 50 million, 'the total in almost six years of combat in the Second World War'.

Secondly, structural violence often depends on and perpetuates direct violence. One example might be the role of state security forces, 'death squads' and so on in enforcing the unequal distribution of land and other resources within a society. In other words, direct violence cannot be deterred or prevented unless the structural violence that engenders it is removed. Galtung claims that, 'Much direct violence can be traced back to vertical structural violence, such as exploitation and repression, for liberation, or to prevent liberation'. Galtung added a third major category to this original dichotomy in the form of cultural violence some years later (1990). One of the functions of cultural violence is to legitimise both direct and structural violence, through the values and attitudes of the members of particular societies.

Cultural violence includes the norms or values, attitudes and beliefs within a society that allow or facilitate the use of direct violence or the perpetuation of structural violence. It includes widespread racist or discriminatory attitudes or beliefs that characterise one social, ethnic or racial group as inferior to another. Such beliefs support oppressive practices such as slavery, apartheid or the caste system in South Asia, which incorporate the subjugation and exploitation of one group by another into the basic social, economic, legal and political structures of a society. Similarly, norms or beliefs about the use of coercive physical violence or institutionalised armed force to deal with conflict between social groups or political entities such as states can promote or justify the use of direct violence. An example of the 'deep culture' of militarism might be the Western belief in the efficacy of, and justification for, direct violence as the ultimate sanction, for purposes of punishment or deterrence.

Thus, the relationship between direct, structural and cultural violence within any society is one of interdependence and mutual support. Structural violence can provoke direct violence on the part of oppressed groups as a form of resistance and an attempt to achieve social and political change. Beneficiary or elite groups can also depend upon direct violence to maintain their position of power or dominance in highly unequal social and political structures. In Galtung's view, it does seem that cultural violence, or the ideologies justifying widespread poverty and inequality and the use of armed force, is fundamental to the persistence of

both direct and structural violence as basic characteristics of so many societies around the world today. This is the case in so-called developed as well as developing countries, and as part of the relationship between these countries at the global level.

Galtung uses the dichotomy between direct violence and structural violence in particular to support his distinction between negative peace and positive peace. According to Galtung, if we extend our concept of violence to include structural issues as well as direct violence, this leads to a corresponding extension of our concept of peace. Negative peace involves the absence of direct or personal violence, while positive peace involves the absence of structural violence. The absence of direct or personal violence refers merely to the elimination or lack of a certain type of behaviour, referred to as 'negative peace'. 'Negative peace by averting war or stopping violence implies the absence of direct, personal violence'. Positive peace is the absence of structural violence, but this implies or requires the presence of positively-defined social conditions such as social justice, equality and human well-being. 'Positive peace requires...the presence of social institutions that provide for an equitable distribution of resources and peaceful resolution of conflicts'. Thus, for Galtung the role of peace studies is to help us examine the two aspects of peace (negative and positive), and the inescapable connection between direct violence and social injustice, or structural violence.

4. The Normative Dimension of Peace Studies

Another significant issue for peace studies that affects its status within academia and also its political vulnerability is its normative or ethical dimension. This is partly connected to its core concept, 'peace', which in addition to being somewhat broad or vague and contested, is also inescapably value-laden. This normative dimension is brought out, for instance, in Galtung's emphasis on the significance of cultural violence in his typology of violence and peace. Thus, peace is seen as almost incontrovertibly good, however we define it, and war and armed conflict as bad. Peace studies has an explicit agenda, the achievement of peace as a distinct social and political objective. Such an agenda inevitably involves challenges to the status quo, whether one is concerned about direct violence or structural violence or both. This normative dimension is one of the distinctive features and strengths of peace studies, however. The explicit acknowledgement of the role of values and ethics in the study of social and political phenomena such as war and armed violence can be one of the particular contributions of peace studies. The acknowledgement of this ethical dimension can take several forms, in peace studies and elsewhere. It can involve a recognition of the significance of human agency and choice, even when confronting vast and seemingly intractable or unchangeable social and political structures and forces.

Furthermore, the ideas and concepts, including norms and values, that create and contain our understanding of the social order also result from human agency and choice, even if they are so pervasive as to be almost invisible or to appear as unquestionable features of the social and political world in which we live. Such all-pervasive ideas and norms, affecting or influencing human social behaviour, concern attitudes towards or beliefs about social hierarchy or gender or the use of violence, for example. McSweeney refers to 'a basic sociological assumption that the facts and institutions of the social order are socially constructed, cognitive artefacts, which must therefore be unpacked, deconstructed, in terms of the interests, values and ideas which constitute them'. It is this dependence of the social world upon 'the standards and values of human individuals who constitute it [that means that] all social theory is normative'. The important point here is that just as human beings can transform and change their material surroundings, they can also alter their social surroundings and also the conceptual framework and the ideas through which they understand the social order and what is possible within it. To an extent, this emphasis on the material, the social and the conceptual mirrors Galtung's concern with direct violence or material forces in the form of weapons systems for instance, structural violence and cultural violence. It goes beyond Galtung's somewhat deterministic account of the relationship between different categories of violence, however, to identify the role of human agency at multiple levels - conceptual, structural and material in achieving social change.

The importance of human agency and moral choice penetrates to a deeper level, beyond merely the assessment of the consequences of particular actions or policies. It also concerns our understanding of the meaning and significance of basic concepts that shape our understanding of the social and political world in which we live, such as community, society, the state and security. This normative dimension is

an inescapable feature of our relationship with any social order, and one task of any social or political theory (including those that inform peace studies) is to acknowledge this and make it explicit. Such an understanding, achieved through transformational processes of education as Freire suggests, makes social and political change possible. While we must not underestimate the importance of achieving change at the institutional or structural level if we want to challenge the persistence of war, armed conflict and political violence, we cannot ignore the need and the possibility for change at the normative, cognitive and cultural level.

References

- [1] Boulding, KE (1977) 'Twelve Friendly Quarrels with Johan Galtung' in *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 14, 1, pp. 75-86.
- [2] Freire, P (1972) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth.
- [3] Galtung, J (1969) 'Violence, Peace and Peace Research' in *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 6, 3, pp. 167-191.
- [4] Galtung, J (1990) 'Cultural Violence' in *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 27, 3, pp. 291-305.
- [5] Harris, IM (2004) 'Peace education theory' in *Journal of Peace Education*, Vol. 1, 1, pp. 5-20.
- [6] King, ML (1957) 'Non-Violence and Racial Justice' in *Christian Century*, 6 February 1957.
- [7] McSweeney, B (1998) 'Introduction: Comments on Morality and Peace Research' in McSweeney, B (ed.) *Moral Issues in International Affairs: Problems of European Integration*, Macmillan Press, London, pp. 1-12.
- [8] Prontzos, PG (2004) 'Collateral Damage: The Human Cost of Structural Violence' in Jones, A (ed.) *Genocide, War Crimes and the West: History and Complicity*, Zed Books, London and New York, pp. 299-324.