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## UNDERSTANDING AND BUILDING CURRICULUM

Much is known about curricula that engage, inspire, and transfer. The Quakers and Mennonites have been practicing pacifism for generations. During every war in the U.S., groups re-emerge to teach about the conscientious objector status. On the other side, the various military forces continue to research and develop their own training so that troops can adapt to challenges in the field. Curriculum is in our schools, colleges and universities; it is also in our faith and nonprofit organizations, governmental agencies, businesses, and industries. With that said, there is need for a transformative curriculum to build peace and reconciliation in every organization.

### 1. Understand Curriculum Development

Elise Boulding (2000) reminds us of how unbalanced the teaching of history typically is, how our curricula too often define eras by the wars that were waged, and how little attention is paid to the curricula of peace, reconciliation, and nonviolent conflict resolution. Kenneth Henson (2006) overviews the history of curriculum development and then lays out the basics from identification of *aims, goals and objectives* to the creation of a meaningful *activity*, to the *evaluation* of both *products* (projects, exam results, papers, etc.) and *processes* (communication, teamwork, creativity). When addressing various issues and conflicts that have plagued the U.S., Henson notes the central role that educators and curriculum can play: “Historically, teachers have been poorly prepared to address the increasingly diverse nature of our society. Textbooks not only have failed to address this issue, but they have actually contributed to the problem by promoting unacceptable stereotypes and prejudices” (363).

Examine an article, school or college text for controversies, problems, conflicts and/or tensions that are neglected or poorly addressed. Outline a “lesson” that would raise awareness about this issue. Follow the following guidelines:

- ❖ Set a clear *goal*, a general *aim*, and a learning *objective*, i.e., “those involved will be able to...”
- ❖ Identify an *activity* that might be relevant and meaningful.
- ❖ Determine how this could be *evaluated* for both *product* (knowledge and skills) and *process* (thinking, creating, and cooperating).
- ❖ If possible, trial your “lesson,” solicit feedback and refine your ideas further.

### 2. Deepen Learning within the Cognitive Domain

Understanding how our values and actions build from beliefs and knowledge can help deepen learning about peace and reconciliation. In *Curriculum Planning*, Henson (2006) describes how instructors can make use of what Benjamin Bloom and his colleagues (1956) described as an *educational taxonomy*, putting learning within a hierarchy of difficulty or challenge.

- ❖ At level 1 is *knowledge*, the “mastery of facts and concepts” as a “prerequisite for performing higher mental operations.”
- ❖ At level 2 is *comprehension*, “requiring students to do more than memorize, . . . to translate, interpret, or predict a continuation of trends.”
- ❖ At level 3 is *application*, requiring students to “use principles or generalizations to solve a concrete problem.”
- ❖ At level 4 is *analysis*, requiring students to “work with principles, concepts, and broad generalizations.”
- ❖ At level 5 is *synthesis*, requiring students to “take principles apart, . . . to take several parts of something and put them together to make whole.”
- ❖ And at level 6 is *evaluation*, requiring students to “make judgments based on definite criteria, not just opinions” (Hansen, 2006, 186-189).

Apply these levels from the cognitive domain to the study of a passage from an important peacemaker. For example, examine Martin Luther King, Jr.’s writings on the *interdependence* that holds us all together, that we can recognize and appreciate if we understand more about our daily tasks. “All (people) are interdependent. Every nation is an heir of a vast treasury of ideas and labor to which both the living and the dead of all nations have contributed. Whether we realize it or not, each of us lives eternally ‘in the red.’ We are everlasting debtors to known and unknown men and women. When we arise in the morning, we go into the bathroom where we reach for the sponge which is provided for us by a Pacific Islander. We reach for soap which is created for us by a European. Then at the table we drink coffee which is provided for us by a South American, or tea by a Chinese, or cocoa by a West African. Before we leave for our jobs we are already beholden to more than half the world” (King 1984, 18).

What knowledge is important in this passage? What understanding? How does King apply the concept of interdependence? What does his analysis reveal? What other sources does he draw upon? How does he evaluate the importance of *interdependence*?

### **3. Understand Engagement, Values and the Affective Domain**

Violence arouses strong reactions and feelings—aggression, anger, revenge, sorrow, remorse. In our schools and colleges, in particular, there are emotional and value components to learning that are often overlooked when we focus too much on tested

outcomes. We need to care about a topic at the very outset or learning becomes drudgery, a routine, something to survive. Kenneth Henson (2006) draws on the work of Krathwohl et al. (1964) to describe the *affective domain* that underlies learning.

- ❖ Level 1 is *receiving*, which describes someone’s “awareness of new information or experiences.”
- ❖ Level 2 is *responding*, where a student “reacts to whatever has attracted his or her attention.”
- ❖ Level 3 is *valuing*, which is “demonstrated when someone prizes a behavior enough to be willing to perform it even in the face of alternatives.”
- ❖ Level 4 is *organizing*, requiring “individuals to bring together different values to build a value system.”
- ❖ Level 5 is *characterizing*, where people also “demonstrate a degree of individuality and self-reliance” (Hansen, 2006, 196-197).

We can apply these levels from the affective domain to some written work on peace and reconciliation. For example, read through some of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s writings on *alienation*, those feelings that arise when we believe that our basic values are under assault or unreflective of current political, social, and cultural norms. “When an individual is no longer a true participant, . . . (when) culture is degraded, . . . when the social system does not build security but induces peril, inexorably the individual is impelled to pull away from a soulless society. This process produces alienation—perhaps the most pervasive and insidious development in contemporary society” (King 1984, 19).

How do you *receive* this passage? Are you aware of alienation? How do you *respond*? What is your reaction? How does King show his *value* for peace and reconciliation by analyzing alienation? How does he draw on various values to build his case against alienation? How does he *characterize* his understanding of alienation? How does he demonstrate his own individuality?

#### 4. Be Mindful about Action

From role plays to simulations to meditations, there are many activities and exercises that can deepen and extend learning about peace and reconciliation. In *Curriculum Planning*, Kenneth Henson (2006) draws on the work of Simpson (1972) to describe a useful hierarchy for the potential role of activity.

- ❖ At level 1 is *perception* where “phenomena act as guides to motor activity. The individual must first become aware of a stimulus, pick up on cues for action, and then act upon these cues.”
- ❖ At level 2, *set* refers to an “individual’s readiness to act.”

- ❖ At level 3, a *guided response* may be needed in the beginning when students must use complex skills.
- ❖ At level 4, *mechanism* means that we can perform an act “somewhat automatically without having to pause to think through each separate step.”
- ❖ At level 5, *complex overt responses* involve “more complicated tasks.”
- ❖ At level 6, *adaptation* requires individuals to “adjust performance as different situations dictate.”
- ❖ And at level 7, *organization* means that someone can “create new movement patterns to fit the particular situation” (Henson 2006, 198-199).

As instructors or group leaders, we can use these levels to think through our goals and objectives, when and how we want people to practice the skills of peace-keeping, peace-making and peace-building. For example, consider the writings on mindfulness by noted Vietnamese Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hahn (2000), “I think the most important precept of all is to live in awareness, to know what is going on—not only here but there. For instance, when we eat a piece of bread, we may choose to be aware of how our farmers grow the wheat. It seems that chemical poisons are used a bit too much. And while we eat the bread, we are somehow co-responsible for the destruction of our ecology. When we eat a piece of meat, we may become aware that eating meat is not a good way to reconcile oneself with millions of children in the world. Forty thousand children die each day in the Third World for lack of food. And in order to produce meat, you have to feed the cow or the chicken with a lot of cereal... What we are, what we do every day, has much to do with world peace. If we are aware of our lifestyle, our way of consuming and looking at things, then we know how to make peace right at the present moment. If we are very aware, we will do something to change the course of things” (156).

How do you perceive food differently after reading this passage? Are you ready to respond (i.e., set)? Does this passage provide enough of a guided response for you? If not, what more will you need? Does the concept of mechanism mean that you are so automatic in your eating habits that this kind of mindfulness would take some effort to develop? What complex overt responses would increase your mindfulness about food? What adaptations would allow you to take this mindfulness about food to every meal and snack? What organization would you need in your life to have this mindfulness about food ever present?

### **5. Use Film for Multi-Sensory Representations of Peace and Reconciliation**

In *Teaching and Learning Peace*, Bill Timpson (2002) describes the value he sees in showing sections from the 1982 film, *Gandhi*, as models for peace, reconciliation, and

nonviolent conflict resolution. “At a time in history when violence can take on a horrific life of its own, too often escalating into a death struggle of revenge and retaliation, Gandhi’s legacy of nonviolent thought and action remain an enduring foundation for the pursuit of peace. Images of British ordered brutality toward unarmed Indian people are juxtaposed throughout the film with Gandhi’s own repeated commitment to the moral high ground of nonviolent non-cooperation. These visual and auditory memories seem to last, much more than print, and can serve as competing images to what we have all seen on television of the high-jacked airliners hitting New York’s World Trade Center” (114).

Working in Belfast, Northern Ireland in the summer of 2008, Timpson interviewed a youth worker, Dave Magee, who was using the exact same scenes from this film to illustrate the alternatives to retaliation to which Gandhi and his followers were committed. Magee’s audiences included former and current members of loyalist paramilitary groups who were quick to say that they never heard about these events in India or these alternatives to violence but that they could see the relevance to their own situation. “Why were we never told about these before?” they asked.

Watch this now classic film and list the new insights you get into the role of nonviolence, peace, and reconciliation. Identify particular scenes and show them to others to spark a discussion about alternatives to retaliation.

## 6. Include Diverse Voices and Social Action

In his book chapter, “Approaches to Multicultural Curriculum Reform,” James Banks (2001) articulates and critiques common approaches to multicultural curriculum reform and advocates for transformation and social action approaches—deeper approaches that include “reconsidering the goals, structure, and nature of the curriculum” as well as adding non-mainstream, diverse voices and experiential, socially engaged, and transformative learning to help resolve social problems (240-241). These mechanisms for integrating multicultural content are summarized below:

1. Contributions Approach: Heroes, cultural components, holidays, and other discrete elements related to ethnic groups are added to the curriculum on special days, occasions, and celebrations.
2. Additive Approach: This approach consists of the addition of content, concepts, and themes, and perspectives to the curriculum without changing its structure.
3. Transformation Approach: The basic goals, structure, and nature of the curriculum are changed to enable students to view concepts, events, issues, problems, and themes from the perspectives of diverse, cultural, ethnic, and racial groups.
4. Social Action Approach: In this approach, students identify important social problems and issues, gather pertinent data, clarify their values on the issues, make

decisions, and take reflective actions to help resolve the issue or problem (240-241).

Analyze your school or organization's current approach to diversity or multicultural content integration. Decide if you want to move toward a deeper approach that goes beyond the contributions and additive approaches. How can this work extend into peacemaking and reconciliation?

## **7. Transform the Canon**

Philosopher Jane Kneller (2003) writes about the challenges she has faced in transforming her courses to include more diverse voices without sacrificing the core of the canon of philosophy that traditionally has comprised her field. The same challenges face anyone teaching about peace and reconciliation—how to include the seminal figures of the field while continuing to explore what new voices might add.

Kneller writes: “As for the problem of squeezing more content into a crowded course, I am still struggling, and no doubt always will, to justify every paragraph I choose to have (students) read, knowing that it means cutting out some other text from an era that deserves a year-long class to cover. . . For that matter, if we are doing our jobs properly, it can only get worse. The more we research other historical periods, the more material we will find that needs to be added to the canon or forces us to rethink what is canonical in the first place. Indeed, something would be wrong if, over time, it did *not* get harder to teach all this material in one semester. In this respect, good scholarship, be it feminist, multicultural, or other, will always make our task as teachers more challenging” (225).

Re-examine the content of your teachings or learning about peace and reconciliation. What new could be added? Explored? What old could be taken out? Know that this process will help drive your understanding of the field deeper.