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UNDERSTANDING PEACE EDUCATION

We need a blending of the old and the new, the proven and the possible in the field of peace education. We need to understand what scholars, activists, and leaders have said about peace education. However, we also need to hear from those who are developing new ideas and forging connections with curricula in other disciplines. Accordingly, we call for the integration of theory, research, practice, and vision. In order to bridge the historic fault lines of conflict and violence with contemporary concerns of injustice and inequality, we must challenge privilege, counter oppression, appreciate diversity, and promote inclusiveness. Finally, we must develop transformative leadership at every level of society.

1. Rethink the War and Dominance Paradigms

The telling of history from limited, violence-based perspectives constructs social memory in ways that help to perpetuate violence as inherent, natural, and a human absolute—in short, ‘just the way things are.’ The telling of violent histories saturates collective memory with violent images and struggles of the past; these violent narratives can serve to impact the power of present transformative action toward actualizing nonviolent futures. In *Cultures of Peace: The Hidden Side of History*, Elise Boulding (2000) writes of the war-steeped telling of history as related to western civilization, that history is often written as stories about the rise and fall of empires, a description of the rulers, their armies, navies and air power, their wars and battles, i.e., the history of power—who controls whom.

In this provocative book, Boulding critiques the telling of history from violent, power-dominated, and patriarchal viewpoints. She furthers her argument by providing historical examples of groups and societies who lived relatively peaceful and harmonious lives, solving conflict in nonviolent ways.

Examine how you and participants are/were “told” stories in history books and various media. What explicit and implicit messages are reinforced through these narratives? Brainstorm a list of examples of nonviolent historic responses to conflict situations. Who were the key players, leaders, and ‘behind the scenes’ people and groups involved in these conflicts? What methods, besides violence, were used to actualize change? Reflect on how peaceful, nonviolent, and cooperative paradigms might alternatively transform present community, societal, national, and global conflicts into mutually beneficial outcomes for humanity and our fellow planetary inhabitants.

2. Create Concentric Circles for Positive Peace

Johan Galtung (1969, 1988) infused peace theory, or a set of principles that guide peace thinking and peace education practices, with the concepts of negative peace and positive peace. Negative peace can be understood as the absence of direct physical violence—war, domestic violence, etc. Positive peace can be understood as conditions without indirect violence—both a lack of trust, intimidation, the presence of fear, bullying, and conditions without structural violence. Educative efforts toward positive peace seek to build new macro-structural alignments that promote capacity, prosperity and happiness for all, as well as trust in peace, trust in relationships, hope, and reflection on positive conditions that create peace.

The activity provides an opportunity for people to reflect on past, present, and future conditions of peace, thus generating positive memories, present mindfulness, and future possibilities. Outside or in a large room, ask a group to form two circles with even numbers—one inner circle, one outer circle. People should stand face to face. Ask them to introduce themselves to their partner. Use the following series of questions and time each question (about 3 minutes each) and then rotate. “Describe a peaceful time in your life.” After 3 minutes of back and forth discussion, ask the inner or outer circle to move one, two, or three people to the left or to the right; this promotes interaction with multiple members of the circle. Then ask: “Describe a time when there was peace in your community, your nation, or the world?” Then ask them to fill in the blank: “I currently find peace when ____; my community finds peace when ____; the nation ____; the world ____.” Finally, ask them to fill in the blanks: “I will find peace when ____; my community will find peace when ____; the nation ____; the world ____.” Debrief by identifying the conditions for peace from the personal to the global level; write them on a chart.

3. Enhance Holistic Peace Thinking

Linda Groff (2002) positions the need for “peace thinking” on multiple, interdependent levels in order to actualize a peaceful world. This model includes Galtung’s (1969, 1988) distinction of negative and positive peace. It also adds the level of integrated peace—holistic and systemic conceptions of what peace could look like among cultural groups, between the human and non-human world, and peace that holistically integrates outer forms of peace and inner forms of peace. The benefit of using Groff’s conceptual model for thinking about peace is that it adds the more complex “integrated peace” dimension and it includes vital foci on feminist, intercultural, planetary, and inner peace.

Groff’s model (2002) delineates seven central concepts in peace thinking:

1. War Prevention (Negative Peace)
 - a. Peace as Absence of War
 - b. Peace as Balance of Forces in the International System
2. Structural Conditions for Peace (Positive Peace)
 - a. Peace as no war and no structural violence on macro levels

- b. Peace as no war and no structural violence on micro levels (Community, Family, Feminist Peace)
3. Peace Thinking that Stresses Holistic, Complex Systems (Integrated Peace)
- a. Intercultural Peace (peace among cultural groups)
 - b. Holistic Gaia Peace (Peace within the human world and with the environment).
 - c. Holistic Inner and Outer Peace (Includes all 6 types of peace and adds inner peace as essential condition) (7-8).

Facilitate a group brainstorm about specific actions that would contribute to peace at each level of Groff's model. Guide a conversation about how these various levels of peace thinking are interconnected and also unique. Then have a conversation about how one can work to promote peace on various levels.

4. Create a Violence Tree: Track Everyday Acts of Indirect and Direct Violence

Nonviolent activist Arun Gandhi, grandson of the great Mahatma Gandhi of India, and co-founder with his wife Sunanda of the M. K. Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence, shares personal stories with audiences in the United States and around the world of his childhood growing up under the tutelage of the Mahatma at his ashram in Gujarat, India (Gandhi 2003). One of the stories that he shares is M. K. Gandhi's use of a violence tree, similar to a family tree, to help trace acts of both direct and indirect violence committed by an individual on a daily basis.

Start with the terms direct and indirect violence at the top of their violence trees. Trace all acts of direct violence for the day: e.g., "I stepped on an ant; I killed a mosquito; I punched a friend in the shoulder for saying the wrong thing."

Then trace all acts of indirect violence: e.g., "I wished that somebody would suffer for their pride; I intimidated a co-worker; I felt jealousy for someone else's success."

Examine how certain acts of violence lead to others and how different forms of violence are related. Reflect on these acts of direct or indirect violence and how they harm others. Vow to make changes the following day. Record those changes and other acts of violence committed as time moves on.

5. Map Peace and Violence Toward Local Change

Everyday understandings of peace and non-peace can vary from one socio-cultural context to another given the unique realities and dynamics of those contexts. Mapping everyday understandings of peace and violence is a research technique that can be used to determine both conceptions of peace and non-peace; it can be used to identify peaceful and non-peaceful attitudes and behaviors in local contexts. These conceptions and identifications can then be used to engage local, cultural actors in transformative change processes (Brantmeier 2007).

As a warm up, make a list on a sheet of paper of words that “go with peace” and then words that “go with non-peace.” Circle the two most important words. Identify peaceful attitudes and behaviors in everyday life (classroom, school, community, church, city, etc...). Now identify non-peaceful attitudes and behaviors. Circle the two most important. If you are leading a group, record the most important responses on a flip chart or chalk board. You can also share stories, either your own or what you’ve observed, both peaceful and non-peaceful. Take notes or record the stories that are shared. Ask some of the following questions: How can peaceful attitudes and behaviors multiply in this context? How can non-peaceful attitudes and behaviors be changed? From this list, create action plans to enhance what is peaceful and change what’s not.

6. Conduct a Webbing Exercise: Know that Violence Impacts Us All

BRANTMEIER? Understanding the interdependence of all life through experiencing connection is helpful for living peacefully/nonviolently. M. K. Gandhi wrote, “I believe in non-duality (*advaita*), I believe in the essential unity of man and, for that matter, of all that lives... The rock bottom foundation of the technique for achieving the power of nonviolence is belief in the essential oneness of all life” (Young India, December 4, 1924, in *Collected Works*, 25: 390). Cultivating an experience of interdependence provides an emotive ground for non-violent action and peaceful relationships among group members.

Ask a few individuals in a group to represent non-human life (wolves, fish, bugs, plants, reptiles etc...). Give them a sign with the name or picture of this animal or plant. Assemble the group into a circle in a large space. Start with a colorful ball of yarn, pick someone, state a positive comment about that person, and pass the ball of yarn to him or her. That person does the same for someone else until all are connected via the ball of yarn. When everyone is connected, ask the group what this web represents. Have one individual drop the yarn, turn away from the group, or tense or loosen the web. Discuss how this impacts the whole. What if an animal or plant becomes extinct? Ask how an individual act of violence impacts us all; what about an act of kindness? Ask what this web might represent in everyday life.

7. Make Meaningful Contact and Reduce Conflict

In conflict-ridden societies much investment is often made in educational contact schemes designed to bring young people from the divided groups together in short- and long-term encounters with the aim of reducing prejudice towards the ‘other’ and hopefully thus ameliorating conflict. This approach draws on contact theory (Allport 1954), the notion that working together on a common goal will do the most to reduce hostile feelings and build appreciation, and a subsequent litany of conditions for success. In Northern Ireland, for example, contact theory underpins much peace education endeavour, both in the formal and informal education sectors.

After many years of extensive empirical research into the efficacy of inter-group contact in Israel and elsewhere, Gavriel Salomon (2007) concluded that there are two

fundamental success criteria. Firstly there must be a very important common goal for the two groups to work towards together and secondly there must be the opportunity for sustainable friendships to emerge from the contact.

Consider the work that you do in bringing together people with little experience of the 'other'. How might Salomon's main criteria influence the way in which you design educational policy and practice with regards to reducing inter-group prejudice. What kind of common goals would be appropriate in your educational environment and how, as an educator, can you support the development of inter-group friendships? Can you think of further success criteria that could help maximise the success of educational contact experiences in your institution or organization?

8. Understand How Oppression Sparks Violence

In his seminal book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire (1970) argues that dehumanization marks out not only those whose humanity has been stolen, but also those who steal it, that is, the oppressors. To Freire, dehumanization distorts any growth towards becoming more fully human and sooner or later, this loss of humanity leads the oppressed to struggle for humanization, emancipation, and affirmation as persons, and to overcome their feelings of alienation. Only the oppressed can truly liberate both themselves and their oppressors. The latter, who are dehumanized because their oppressing dehumanizes others, do not have the power to transform the situation. However the oppressed must resist, in turn, oppressing their oppressors during the search to regain their humanity.

Consider a number of examples of dehumanization of the 'other' in former and recent conflicts around the world and critically analyze to what extent you think that Freire's concept of dehumanization is appropriate. Debate the role that formal and informal education might play in supporting the oppressed in their efforts to restore their humanity. How might an educational institution and its practices act as an oppressor? What kind of transformative peace education pedagogy might teachers adopt in order to re-humanize those whose humanity has been withheld from them?

9. Learn Lessons about Peaceful Coexistence from Integrated Schools

Northern Ireland, despite the recent transformation to a more peaceful society, remains a society largely segregated with regard to schooling, residential housing, and social activities. In 1981 the first integrated (mixed Catholic and Protestant) school, Lagan College, was established and since then a further sixty-one integrated schools have opened. In a study of the impact of integrated education on two cohorts of former pupils, Claire McGlynn (2001) found a significant long term positive impact on cross-community friendships, respect for diversity, confidence in plural settings, and an enhancement of the ability to empathize with alternative perspectives. Integrated education also appeared to facilitate student exploration of personal and group identities in a non-threatening environment with a subsequent range of impacts on past pupils' perceptions of their social, religious and political identities. Some former students

reported that they were ‘more’ Catholic or Protestant as a result of attending an integrated school, others that they were ‘less’ so. Another group again reported that they no longer wished to be classified in this way. However a super ordinate ‘integrated identity’ was claimed by the majority of these former students and was characterized by respect for diversity, broadmindedness, understanding, and tolerance.

What role do you think that education plays in the development of student identity? How might this role compete with other socializing influences such as family, community, and the media? Rob Reich (2002) suggests that schools should not script for a certain identity, but rather develop student autonomy. How can this be reconciled with a policy of respecting the religious and cultural background of students? Can education help construct a supraordinate peaceful identity? What does all of this say about the way in which we conceptualize identity—is it a tangible entity, a social construct, an ever-evolving and fluid notion, something which has multiple facets, or something else?

10. Promote Peace Leadership: Adopt Transformative Values and Capacities

Betty Reardon (1999) describes a helpful system of peace values and capacities that need to be fostered in future teachers; it could be argued that these values and capacities are also needed in all peace leaders. The framework includes the value of environmental responsibility, cultural diversity, human solidarity, social responsibility, and gender equality (14). Corresponding to these values are capacities for transforming societies into cultures of peace: ecological awareness, cultural competency, conflict proficiency, and gender sensitivity (15).

Individually or in groups, you can begin with self-examination. Write the values of environmental responsibility, cultural diversity, human solidarity, social responsibility, and gender equality on a flip chart, board, or piece of paper. Think of specific behaviors that you or others do that are related to each of the listed values. Identify everyone’s strengths as peace leaders according to this value framework. Identify areas for improvement. Discuss the possibilities and constraints for improvement. Complete the above exercise in the context of ecological awareness, cultural competency, conflict proficiency, and gender sensitivity. What behaviors correlate with these capacities? Strengths? Areas of improvement? Develop action plans for peace leadership.

11. Understand the Role of Peace Education

In their seminal book *Peace Education*, Harris and Morrison (2004) describe an exercise devised by peace scholar Elise Boulding. This exercise is suitable for both adults and children. Establish a “two hundred year present,” that is, think back one hundred years to what life was like and think forward one hundred years into the future. What changes have taken place or will take place? Have peace activities been successful; which will be successful? Explore why. This exercise transforms peace educators into action researchers by pushing theory into practice; hopefully, those involved become, as Gandhi exhorted, the changes that they wish to see.

Harris and Morrison propose that peace educators should play a critical role in futures education, helping students imagine a better future and uncover the steps needed to get there. The above exercise requires people to imagine a point on the future and then come back ten years and identify the changes needed to realize that future. By going back in intervals of ten years, they are finally brought back to the present, having constructed a series of ten-year plans for progress towards a more peaceful future. In such a way, according to Harris and Morrison, peace education should fundamentally change the way in which people look at the world. This exercise has the possibility of modifying perceptions of the role that individuals can play in transforming the future. Above all, this exercise offers hope.

Try out this kind of futures exercise. Afterwards explore the barriers that would limit progress and ask for suggestions on how these might be overcome. To what extent might such an exercise discourage people who suffer from inequalities and other forms of structural violence in their daily lives? How can we keep such visioning activities grounded in realism rather than idealism but also retain the life-giving hope that they offer?

12. Search for Forgiveness as Part of Reconciliation

One critical element of reconciliation deals with the notion of forgiveness, which, at its core, acknowledges the wrongs committed and those harmed while asking perpetrators to examine their actions and be held accountable. Bishop Desmond Tutu's (1999) *No Future without Forgiveness* describes the central role for forgiveness within South Africa as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission sought to begin healing the deep wounds left by apartheid and help pave the way for a functioning democracy to take hold.

Junior high school teacher Sonia Modesti writes: "In order to begin discussing the topic of forgiveness in an English course, I could ask students to engage in a search for examples of forgiveness in major literary works (prose, poetry, plays, etc.). So often, literature focuses on the drama of revenge. Know that this kind of search may prove challenging yet richly rewarding." Find themes of forgiveness in your favorite novels, films and plays. Have others do the same and discuss your insights.

13. Redefine the Purposes of School and Emphasize Universal Love, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation

Peace scholar and professor Jing Lin (2006) advocates for a global ethic of universal love, forgiveness, and reconciliation; she provides a constructive, optimistic critique of the very purposes of education in the United States and around the world. In her new co-edited book, *Transforming Education for Peace*, Lin (2008) argues for a paradigm shift where the teaching of love comprises the central purpose of education. Lin maintains, "I envision our future schools will shift from a mechanical, functionalistic perspective that primarily emphasizes tests and efficiency, to a constructive, transformative paradigm where students' intellectual, moral, emotional, spiritual, and ecological abilities are

developed in order to promote understanding of the world and help nurture love and respect for all human beings and nature. In all, constructing a loving world should be the central purpose of education in the twenty-first century” (315).

Ask everyone to envision the ideal school, community, nation, or world where love serves as the foundational means and ends of education. Describe the curriculum, how teaching is conducted, how people are assessed on their capacities for love, and how the policy context and rule of law shape the containers in which cultural actors engage in everyday loving behaviors.

14. Move Toward a Critical Peace Education

In the *Encyclopedia of Peace Education*, Monisha Bajaj (2008) argues for the reclamation of critical peace education that engages current scholars in efforts toward structural analysis, interrogation of asymmetrical power dynamics, a contextualized understanding of conflict and “historicized knowledge,” emancipatory action toward change; she also advocates for bolstering and complexifying discourses surrounding human rights. Bajaj (2008) maintains, “Moving away from a one-size-fits-all approach toward a contextualized and situated perspective on peace education can only further enhance the legitimacy and validity of the knowledge generated in the field” (143). Her chapter, entitled “Critical Peace Education,” situates her current advocacy upon the shoulders of the past praxis scholarship (i.e., theory into practice) of Galtung, Freire, Giroux, Diaz-Soto, Kincheloe, and the like.

Peace education scholar Ed Brantmeier (2007) elaborates on various stages of critical peace education: “Critical peace education, informed by the work of Freire (1970), includes various stages: raising consciousness about various forms of violence (direct, indirect, structural, cultural); imagining nonviolent alternatives (from social, economic, and political structures to psychological and spiritual methods for attaining inner peace); providing specific modes of empowerment (conflict resolution skills, critical thinking, political participation and mobilization, global perspectives and opportunities). . . (Critical) peace education includes enacted plans to move toward a more peaceful and just world through social transformation. The main focus of critical peace education is transformation via consciousness raising, vision, and action. Thus, critical peace education is action-oriented by promoting social and cultural change toward a nonviolent, sustainable, and renewable future” (5-6).

Examine a problem, obstacle, challenge, or conflict that prevents deeper peace at the community, national, or global level. Think about the structural and power dynamics, the historical-contextual underpinnings of the situation, the key players and their spheres of influence, the policy that enables and/or constrains transformative change. Develop an alternative vision toward reconciliation and peace. Create action plans and then engage in local and wider action toward changing the situation.

15. Join the Dance of Diversity and Unity for Peace

In an effort toward building a robust, and integrative theoretical framework for peace education, H. B. Danesh (2006) advocates for a unity paradigm and provides a typology of worldviews, conceptually defined as “our view of (1) reality, (2) human nature, (3) the purpose of life, and (4) approach to human relationships” (66). Danesh maintains that our worldviews are shaped by our individual life experiences as well as our historically bound, cultural histories—in other words, our worldviews are comprised of individual subjectivities as well as our experiences in groups, communities and particular contexts. But there is more to the picture. Danesh also posits that there are more universal dimensions of the human experience—“unity, development, creativity” (66)—that transcend social categories of culture, language, race, religions, creed, or ideological conditioning.

The first level in Danesh’s typology of worldviews is the *survival-based worldview* characterized by hierarchical power structures, authoritarianism, and relationships where “power over” people by ruling elite constitutes conditions that are not conducive to sustainable peace. *Identity-based worldviews* are the second level of evolution—adversarial power structures, extreme competition, and a “survival of the fittest” mentality govern this stage of worldview development. This stage might be encapsulated by the phrase “power over and against in the competition to win.” Quite differently, the *unity-based worldview* “requires the application of universal ethical principles at all levels of government and leadership. It ensures that the basic human needs and rights—survival and security; justice, equality and freedom in all human associations; and the opportunity for a meaningful, generative life—are met within the framework of the rule of law and moral/ethical principles” (68). Cooperative power structures, caring relationships, and universal principles govern this “power with” orientation.

Analyze and categorize the power structures, quality of relationships, and governing principles of your school, college, university, organization, community, or country according to Danesh’s worldview typology. Also, discuss the tension between forging unity and affirming diversity in your organization, community, or country. How can you build common or transcendent ground while simultaneously ensuring that processes of assimilation do not squelch the cultural, linguistic, and creative diversity that exists? What are the benefits of unity, the potential pitfalls? What are the benefits of diversity, the potential pitfalls? How can they be harmonized to actualize a sustainable peace?

16. Identify Role Models of Peaceful Right Action

Scott and Helen Nearing’s lives personified the path of peaceful right action. Having been released from two major universities for his activism for social justice including child labor laws, Scott Nearing and his wife Helen moved to Vermont, and later to Maine, to homestead. Building their own homes out of stone, well into their 70’s and 80’s, Helen and Scott continued to write and speak for social causes their entire lives. How they lived their lives on a daily basis, however, said as much about their beliefs as their writings. Living very simply off the land and keeping peace with the planet gave them the freedom to choose how they spent their time each day. This independent spirit carried on even to the end of life.

In her book, *Loving and Leaving the Good Life*, Helen describes the choices Scott made at the end of his life. A month before his 100th birthday, Scott told a group of friends he would no longer be taking food. Although not sick, he felt his body was ready to begin its final transition. Six weeks later, with Helen attending to his needs and his process, Scott passed peacefully from his body in the living room of their home. Scott and Helen Nearing serve as amazing examples of taking responsibility for one's life, including all choices and actions, right up until the very end.

Reflect on these questions: What do you think of Scott's decision to make peace with his own life's journey and stop eating? How would you have felt if you were Helen? How are you living out your beliefs about peace and reconciliation on a daily basis? How does this connect to your being a role model for right action?

17. Research Female Role Models of Peace

Many of the traditional role models for peace in our curricula have been males, such as Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Presenting female role models who are living their values and ideals of peace on a daily basis is important for all of our students, female and male. Jane Goodall and Aung San Suu Kyi are just two of the current female peace pilgrims that Nathalie Kees likes to discuss in her university counseling classes.

"I share Jane Goodall's story through her video *Reason for Hope: A Spiritual Journey*. By viewing this video, students see a woman in her 70's, who is still traveling and speaking close to 300 days per year, sharing with students her belief that we can all make a difference in the condition of our planet and its inhabitants, human and animal. She discusses her pain as she witnessed the periods of violence between groups of chimpanzees, having hoped that the chimps were a more peaceful and innocent version of ourselves. She also outlines concrete ways for students to become involved in improving conditions for animals and humans through her 'Roots and Shoots' projects in schools and shares a variety of success stories from all over the world. Her indefatigable energy and daily mission to create a non-violent world where resources are shared make her a truly inspiring role model.

"Aung San Suu Kyi, the democratically elected leader of Burma (Myanmar) and recipient of the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize, has been living under surveillance and/or house arrest for almost two decades. Although the government has told her she is free to leave the country, she knows that she will not be allowed to return. Therefore, she stays and works for a peaceful and democratic solution to the military takeover of Burma, even during the illness and death of her husband in England in 1999. Her conversations with Alan Clements have been recorded in the audiocassette *The Voice of Hope: Conversations with Aung San Suu Kyi*."

What do these two women have in common with other women you know? How are they similar or different from you? What steps might their actions inspire you to take on

behalf of peace?

18. Learn about the Peace Pilgrim (1908-1981)

So often in our educational systems, the canon of women's history has to be recovered by each new generation of scholars. Nathalie Kees insists that this has "definitely been true for me as I have searched for female role models of peace. I have only recently been introduced to one of the founding mothers of the peace movement, Peace Pilgrim. Born Mildred Norman on July 18, 1908, she took the name Peace Pilgrim in her mid forties. After many years of physical, spiritual, and emotional preparation, she began walking across the United States in 1953, without possessions or money, 'until mankind learns the way of peace.' From 1953 until her death in 1981, she walked across the United States seven times on pilgrimages for peace. She chose not to eat until food was offered to her or sleep until shelter was provided. Her message was simple, 'Here is the way of peace: Overcome evil with good, falsehood with truth, and hatred with love'" (Peace Pilgrim, *Steps Toward Inner Peace*).

Peace Pilgrim's writings have been maintained by the "Friends of Peace Pilgrim" and are available free of charge from this group. A documentary of her life entitled, *Peace Pilgrim: An American Sage Who Walked Her Talk*, provides an excellent 60 minute introduction to her life and work and is also available, along with other videos and books of her life's work, from the Friends of Peace Pilgrim, P.O Box 2207, Shelton, CT 06484, (203) 926-1581, or at www.peacepilgrim.org.

After viewing these materials, reflect on the following: What world events happened during Peace Pilgrim's formative years between 1908 and 1953 that influenced her decision to walk for peace? What kinds of physical, spiritual, and emotional preparations did it take for her to get ready to walk?

One decision Peace Pilgrim made was to completely balance her needs and wants. She believed there was nothing she needed that she didn't have and that you couldn't give her anything she didn't need. If you gave her anything, even something as small as a postage stamp, that she didn't need, she felt that it would be a burden to her. She decided to "live simply so that others could simply live." Ask yourself: How balanced are the wants and needs of your life? How do our choices affect the lives of others in the world? How is everyone interconnected? Although Peace Pilgrim's life may seem extraordinary, she considered herself a very ordinary person. How might her actions inspire you?

19. Understand How Memories Can Undermine Reconciliation

In December 1983 in a small town in Northern Ireland sectarian tensions between Protestants and Catholics were running high. It was a time when loss of life through bombing and shooting was a sadly routine event. That December the local Catholic church was burned in an arson attack by loyalist (Protestant) sympathisers and in a brave gesture of reconciliation, a local Protestant minister walked across to what was left of the Catholic church and held out his hand to wish the Catholic priest a "Merry Christmas." A

very small but significant reaching out to show support and solidarity to a fellow human being, you might think. What the minister did not anticipate was the wave of fury that ensued. Vilified by loyalists as a traitor, the minister and his young family were subjected to a prolonged campaign of intimidation, despite the unwavering support of the Catholic priest. In real danger of his life and after receiving a coffin with his name on, the Protestant minister was forced out of the area by the sectarian bigots.

Twenty five years later, in September 2008, a local councillor put forward a motion to honour the minister (and his Catholic counterpart) with the freedom of the town, stating that he was a ‘man ahead of his time’ in terms of peace-building in Northern Ireland. That motion was unanimously defeated by fellow councillors who argued, not of course on sectarian grounds, but on the rather shaky assertion that this was unfair as they would need to honour all clergy and not single out individuals. Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose...

What does this real life story teach us about the challenges for reconciliation in deeply divided societies? What does it teach us about how bias and bigotry are transmitted across the generations? What kinds of peace-making interventions might interrupt these processes?

20. Teach about Threat and Challenge

Teaching about peace and reconciliation can upset those who are quick to see disloyalty in dissent. Others see themselves fulfilling their patriotic duty when they challenge an authority they see going wrong. There are parallels in other areas. In *Teaching Diversity*, for example, Silvia Canetto and Evelinn Borrayo (2003) describe the challenges and threats for students who look at issues of power and powerlessness, privilege and prejudice, those places where society in general struggles to untangle emotions and ideas from historic oppressions, injustices, and biases. As with teaching about peace and reconciliation, expertise and skilled facilitation are essential.

Canetto and Borrayo write: “Teaching about human diversity is exciting. It engages students and instructors with scientifically rich and personally meaningful issues such as gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or social class. It involves participating in a journey that can be intellectually and personally transforming. At the same time, teaching about human diversity is challenging. . . (However, for) many students, learning about social stratification and inequalities is threatening because it challenges their assumptions about other people and about themselves, as well as their reasons for their places in the world. For example, for some students it may be personally challenging to consider that achievement is not simply a function of merit. Some react to threatening content through denial and resistance. Feelings of shame, guilt, anxiety, and anger also maybe triggered. In some instances, students turn their negative feelings against the instructor who becomes the target of hostility” (189-190).

Reflect on moments when you have felt threatened or challenged in the classroom. What feelings have you had when you’ve learned or taught some aspect of peace and

reconciliation that was deeply uncomfortable and challenged your worldview? When was it most challenging? Threatening to you or others? What has helped channel strong feelings into growth and development?