How Adult Educators can Forge a Peaceful World

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Abstract: The purpose of this presentation is to explore some practical ways that adult educators can help to promote peace by including three less-discussed categories of adult education: popular education for critical citizenship, for nonviolence and constructive programs, and for holistic spirituality.

Though critical adult education addresses social justice, crucial to both societal and individual peace, peace discourse itself has been scant in the field. As one of the pivotal long-term solutions to forge a peaceful world, education needs to be "people-centered" (to use Folkman's phrase, 2006, p. 79), and integrative, with wholistic components promoting the development of a whole person and an increasingly democratic society. However, it rarely achieves this even in adult educators' education. Integration and wholeness are missing in current adult educators' development, affecting the direction and outcomes of their practices. In addition, adult education practice has largely remained confined to higher education settings and does not extend sufficiently into the broader society. It is widely recognized that more educated populations have greater capacity and resources to access continuing education (Mott, 2006). Those who are at the bottom of the society socially and economically have fewer resources and are frequently excluded from access to continuing education. Adult educators around the world should investigate their local situations to identify in how education resources can better reach those who are marginalized or disfranchised. Inspired by the writings of Paulo Freire, Mahatma Gandhi, and Thich Nhat Hanh, whose basic ideas have been discussed in my previous AERC presentation, my purpose in this presentation is to explore some practical ways that adult educators can help to promote peace by including three less-discussed categories of adult education: popular education for critical citizenship, for nonviolence and constructive programs, and for wholistic spirituality. Because these three inter-related categories represent elements conducive to a more peaceful society, they need to be addressed wholistically. Popular peace education can be conducted in the broader society through participatory action research and can take place in all the settings of our lives: in churches and communities, in the workplace, in the mass media, and in families.

Critical Citizenship Education

Freire's concept of criticality is fundamental to education in general and to peace research and action in particular. Following this critical tradition, adult education can expand popular citizenship education. The way that the executive administration of the United States spear-headed the invasion of Iraq--manufacturing allegations and consensus to promote an agenda by ignoring facts (Select Committee on Intelligence United States Senate, 2003, 2004a, 2004b)--led the American congress and public to support the war, illustrating the crucial need for critical citizenship education. Traditional civic education teaches citizens as well as immigrants about existing laws. But critical citizenship education emphasizes "the development of critical consciousness," promotes "public dialogue" about issues or policies, and encourages citizens'

participation in actions that promote change (Schugurensky, 2000). Being critical requires awareness of how government and other powers can manipulate political, socio-economic, and cultural policies. Cunningham (2003) encourages adult educators to engage "individuals in social teaming, in community building, in becoming critically reflective learners," producing knowledge and developing a strong and healthy civil society. Adult educators can facilitate the formation of "cultural circles" or discussion groups within communities, churches, grassroots organizations, the workplace, and among colleagues and friends. By posing critical questions about issues that concern group members, by promoting research, and exchanging insights, group members can sharpen their analysis of issues and educate themselves. Schugurensky (2000) encourages citizens to develop their "political capital" by influencing policies through local democratic participation, the best way to learn citizenship. He and others have documented practical strategies, such as the citizen participation in municipal budgeting that has been tried out in many countries (2004a). Citizenship learning and local democracy are mutually nourishing (Schugurensky, 2004b). Freire was insightful in pointing out the necessity of collective efforts in transforming a culture. Only when a majority of the public is able to think critically, act wisely, and be watchdogs for peace, can citizens make sound judgments and meet our collective challenges.

Critical media literacy, an emerging area of research and practice, is crucial in such an education and for wise participation in democracy. Critical media literacy involves an understanding of how the media operates and how media ownership is intertwined in "political orientation and economic connection" of major American industries that "have become a coalition of power on an international scale" (Bagdikian, 2004, p. 136). Few debate the overarching influence of the mass media on people's lives and the capacity that the media owners have to control and manipulate the message broadcasted (Bagdikian, 2004; Guy, 2006; Torres & Mercado, 2006). Talmadge Guy points out the fact that the mass media has become a system of informal education; he is concerned with educational bodies' uncritical adoption of the mass media as a pedagogical tool. For him, the mass media is a threat to diversity and democracy. He argues that critical media literacy should address issues of "control, homogenization, and conformity" (2006, p. 74). For their part, Tisdell, Stukey, and Tompson (2007) examine the "entertainment media['s]" depiction of "race, gender, class, and sexual orientation" to focus on diversity and equity (p. 607). Critical media literacy should also take on political and economic issues. For instance, when a Fairness and Accuracy In Reporting (FAIR) study shows that during the first three weeks of Iraq War, evening news reports on it relied heavily on American and official military sources, and that peace activists were treated as by-standers or people without names (Rendall & Broughel, 2003), it is clear that critical media literacy might reveal alternative sources of truth and, if possible, engage in alternative media development, as Torres and Mercado (2006) suggest.

Forty to fifty years ago, using mass media to promote adult education was an often-discussed topic in adult education publications. It is no longer. Though we use the media to disseminate adult education, we have in no way taken advantage of all its possibilities. Prudently working with existing mass media is one option, as Dyson (1991) suggests; creating alternative media is another. Can we imagine an international adult education TV network that would provide alternative education for adults? One prime example of such alternative mass media is the Taiwanese Buddhist TV station Da-Ai ("Great Love"), founded by a "home-grown" Tzu-Chi Foundation which has five million supporters internationally and conducts charity on five continents. Its news is global and oriented toward humanistic concerns. It dramatizes the

life of their volunteers, often featuring stories about how they overcame personal adversity and became involved in the care of others. The station's advertisements are culturally oriented, with no noise, no unrealistic boastful claims. It provides abundant documentaries on ordinary people who are doing extraordinary things for themselves, for others, and for the earth. I believe the station has contributed significantly to the spiritual education of its members and other Taiwanese. Such stations truly are fresh air in the midst of capitalistic media operations. Though the mass media is now used more to influence violence than nonviolence, more to transmit propaganda than to evoke a critical stance, and more to promote sectarian perspectives than wholistic ones, its wise use by adult educators could cultivate cultures of nonviolence for a vast audience.

Popular Education for Nonviolence and Constructive Programs

Dedicated to nonviolent social change, Gandhi used "constructive programs" rather than destruction to improve social conditions, such as the abolition of untouchability and the promotion of women's political and economic participation (Gandhi, 1936, p. 228). In addition to using his nonviolent strategies (boycotts or strikes) to resist undesirable political and socio-economic conditions, adult educators, who often come from diverse backgrounds, should be encouraged to use their broadest expertise to initiate constructive programs in their local, national, or international communities. For instance, American educator Molly Melching, who had learned the main local language, initiated a women's program in Senegal and founded Tostan ("breakthrough") in 1991, a nongovernmental-organization promoting "wholistic and integrated" community-led development through 30 months of basic education--in the spirit of participatory action research and encompassing literacy, life skills, health, democracy, and human rights. The Tostan program resulted in a 1999 law against the traditional practice of female genital cutting in Senegal (Diarra, 2004; Dugan, 2002). The movement has also expanded to five other neighboring countries (Easton & Molyneaux, 2006).

Facing the global issues of violence, hunger, poverty, epidemics, and environmental degradation, adult educators around the world can work proactively, independently or with other specialists, in agriculture, economics, health care, or environmental studies to alleviate these problems. Economist Jeffrey Sachs (2007), the co-founder of the Millennium Promise Alliance, describes how the group helps farmers in impoverished villages, such as Mbola in Tanzania, increase their harvest, prevent diseases, build schools and clinics, and pave roads so they can start a "wholistic community-driven" economic development (p. 54). Adult educators can proactively contribute to bettering political and ethnic strife and discrimination of all stripes by using appropriate opportunities to address them or by facilitating related programs. For instance, parents are the best peace educators of their children; To encourage the teaching of nonviolence at home we can start by raising parents' awareness through the initiation of focus groups, such as "nonviolent parenting," in the church, the community, and other appropriate settings. By providing forums for discussing issues and exploring alternatives, adult educators can help parents promote nonviolence at home.

Popular Education for Spirituality

Critical theory is built on the assumption that rationality and knowledge are agents of change. To an extent, they are. However, rationality and knowledge alone cannot facilitate change in all circumstances. Our spiritual strength plays a crucial role. Both Gandhi and Hanh emphasized the importance of spirituality. Internally, spirituality is about how we treat ourselves,

how we deal with the unknown, with difficulties and suffering, and how we relate to the divine. Externally, spirituality is about our concern for democracy, social justice, racial and gender equality, and environmental ethics (Miller, 1999). Inspired by Gandhi and Hanh, education for spirituality includes recognizing its centrality, forging spirituality through active and contemplative practice, and proactively promoting interfaith understanding.

Our modern scientific and technological mode of thinking has gradually blinded us to our spiritual nature. While our specific racial, gender, and cultural identities are important to who we are, our ultimate spiritual/soul identity is universal, transcending race, gender, and cultural boundaries. Mistakenly identifying spirituality with religion, our formal education, including adult education, is afraid to teach spirituality. But spirituality is not tantamount to religion; it is a central "life force" that permeates all aspects of our lives (Lisa, pseudonym, in Tisdell, 2000, p. 319). Many writers and educators (Dallaire, 2001; Glazer, 1999; Neville, 1989; Wilson, 1989) have acknowledged the centrality of spirituality and see one essential role of formal education as facilitating spiritual development. In addition, some adult educators, such as Glenn Smith, John Dirks (1997), Elisabeth J. Tisdell (2000, 2003), Cheryl Hunt and Linden West (2007), and others, have begun education or research on spirituality. Phyllis Cunningham and Richard Tapia offered a course focusing on Native American Spirituality at Rockford-NIU (personal conversation, June 11, 2007). But we need to address the need explicitly and provide opportunities to shape the practice. For instance, by including spirituality-related courses in adult education programs for adult educators and for their clientele, adult education can make spirituality a visible subject and facilitate its development to build a solid foundation for peace.

It is challenging to teach spirituality, because spiritual practice is essentially a voluntary internal action. Knowing spiritual concepts without incorporating them into action, one cannot develop spiritual capacity. After reading writings on spirituality, for instance, Gandhi's or Hanh's, classes could follow up with experiential learning, experimenting on what has been read, may help learners get to the heart of the reading, to get to an understanding that goes beyond the not merely rational. For instance, reading about fasting, a typical form of Gandhian penance and purification, the class or group may decide to experiment by fasting for one meal or for an entire day; to observe the physical and spiritual effects of fasting; and to then report on their observations. Out of subsequent discussion, the class can collectively produce a document, collective research on the strategy of fasting, to shed light on its implications. Participating in nonviolent action also forges spiritual force. The class may also decide to participate in a peace protest or another form of civil disobedience, thereby experiencing the challenges of nonviolent action and how they cope with them.

To promote healthy and wholistic spirituality, adult spiritual education should integrate both the active and contemplative aspects of our lives. One major method of doing this is practicing mindfulness as Hanh suggests and praxis as Freire illustrates. Similarly, Dallaire (2001) proposes a "contemplation-in-liberating praxis," fusing contemplation and Freirean critical praxis, as a method for today's spiritual education (p. 45). Contemplation, like Hanh's mindfulness, is a method through which we realize reality: the wholeness of ourselves, of all cosmic existence and the interconnectedness of all (Dallaire, 2001). Liberating praxis is our critical engagement in political and social action to improve our societies. Through an integration of both internal and external practices, our spirituality grows and is enriched. Many, such as Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Hanh, and others, see the "reciprocity" and complementarities between active and contemplative life (Dallaire, 2001, p. 102). However, people active in political and social action are not necessarily inclined to contemplation; people interested in

contemplation often hesitate to participate in political and social action. Specifically inviting people who are active in social action but not contemplation to events where they can experience contemplation may be helpful in this regard. More and more peace activist groups are beginning to include contemplation in their activities (for example, on the International Day of Peace in 2006, a day-long meditation on peace was held at Chicago's Grant Park).   Of course, participation in any such situation should be voluntary; people should not be compelled to do anything against their will.

The continuous religious strife in our world calls for proactive endeavors to promote interfaith understanding. As long as we confine ourselves to our own circles, ignorance or misunderstanding of other faiths continues. Creating space for interfaith dialogue can improve mutual understanding and help people see that many of the differences are nominal and conceptual, that experience derived from practice reveals actual connections, as Hanh suggests, and that interfaith dialogue often helps to enrich one's own faith, as Diana Eck and others testify. Eck (1993) proposes "pluralism" (p. 190) as a response to the religious plurality of our world and as a commitment to interfaith dialogue to promote "mutual understanding and transformation" of our world (p. xiii). Committed to their own faith community but "not afraid" of encountering other faith's specificities, pluralists intend to build "real relationship" or "friendship" with other faiths through "constant communication" (p. 197). Starting from the multi-cultural or multi-religious background that a group or a class may have, or seeking out diverse groups that are willing to come together, Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindu, and Buddhists can share the core beliefs of their faiths and at the same time understand those of others. Collective comparison and contrast may further develop understanding of common ground and differences that need respect. Collective documentation of such endeavors can be published to advance understanding and research. Interfaith understanding can be approached not only intellectually but also experientially by participating in other faiths' services or religious celebrations when opportunities are available. The World Social Forum, an annual meeting of grassroots groups that together strategize against globalization, takes a different approach for interfaith unity. Instead of discussing faith issues, they have people of different faiths work together to solve such problems of common human concern (Sheila Kinsey, speech, April 4, 2007). Both approaches have merits and should be utilized.

Conclusion

As we can see, the three categories of education are interlocking in their theory and practice. Citizenship education should address the idea and practice of nonviolence as well as wholistic perspectives; education on nonviolence and constructive programs should also be concerned with criticality and wholistic perspectives; and education for spirituality cannot be detached from critical thinking and nonviolent practice. A peaceful world becomes more possible when education commits to a long-term integration of these three approaches, helping adult students learn to analyze critically political and socio-economic affairs, to participate actively in policy-making decisions, and, as their spirituality grows, to respect others sincerely and thereby reject violence as a solution to personal and political conflicts. Bacani (2004) notes, "the wholistic character of peace education requires comprehensive programs in education, advocacy, action, and research on diverse fronts and levels" (p. 510). In response to local, national, and international political, socio-economic, and environmental issues, adult educators can facilitate the collective process of understanding issues, choosing alternatives, and taking

action. Working with community organizations, voluntary groups, or mass media targeting different audiences, adult educators can promote peace education within local communities and in larger societies.

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