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Peace education and childhood

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Peace studies and peace education are multifaceted processes focusing on diverse audiences from children in elementary grades to those involved in political negotiations at the highest levels. This paper addresses the foundational importance of including conflict embedded in adult-child relationships in peace education. It conceptually grounds assignments for university level courses designed to teach concepts linked to peace education through the vehicle of understanding violence against children. Such learning is designed to liberate students from the hegemony of adultism, the colonial relationship between adults and children and in turn to contribute to the advancement of peace education. Such pedagogy reflects the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child's call for educational measures to protect and support children's human dignity. Such an approach is especially relevant for peace education, as a large body of research across disciplines has provided substantial evidence of a significant relationship between childhood experiences of violence and subsequent juvenile and adult behavioral and social problems including conflict and violence. The approach and assignments described in this paper reflect insights about the use of narratives of childhood experiences, the etiology and effects of violence against children and the reproduction of conflict and violence across generations.

Keywords: transformative learning; education/learning; human rights; peacemaking practices; teacher professional development; children's rights; violence against children

Introduction

> No more sweeping over the centuries. No more going back and forth as in the past. Now I think only day-to-day.
>
> My heroes are no longer warriors and kings, but the things of peace, each equally good. The drying onions being equal to the tree trunk that glides through the marsh. But so far no one has succeeded in singing an epic of peace. What is it about peace that keeps its inspiration from enduring and makes it almost untellable?
>
> Should I now give up?
>
> If I do give up, mankind will lose its storyteller, then it will have lost its childhood!

A quote from the Storyteller in Wim Wenders film 'Wings of Desire.'

This quote from Wim Winders' 1987 film 'Wings of Desire' links the search for peace to the maintenance of the story of childhood. Peace studies and peace

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education are multifaceted processes focusing on a wide range of audiences from children in elementary grades to those involved in political negotiations at the highest levels (Salomon and Cairns 2010). However, often missing from peace studies education is what is experienced and learned about peace and conflict during individual childhoods and in childhood as a general human experience. These are things the adults we become often deny and ignore. Indeed, *childhood is the time when the seeds of peace and conflict are sown.*

This quote also reflects Cervantes' (2009) concept of 'odious comparison'[1] a process that prevents us from respecting the diversity of experiences, each with its intrinsic value. As we are taught to value and emulate the 'warrior and king,' we reduce our own value and the value of those who do not employ violence and power to control. In doing so, we set the framework for conflict and violence when identifying those who are different from and of lesser value than ourselves as appropriate targets (see Fuller 2004; Lindner 2006).

In the case of child maltreatment, the 'odious comparison' is found in the adult's relationship with his or her own childhood and with children in general. For both, on average, children are seen as inferior to adults (morally and intellectually); childhood experiences are unimportant except as they relate to adult political or personal agendas; children are denied access to basic human rights and protections granted adults such as legal protection from violence (Lombardo and Polonko 2005a); and most critically for peace studies, assaults to children's authenticity and dignity (one's own or others) are denied, minimized or justified – 'for their own good.' Winder's Storyteller sees the story of peace in the story of childhood. Peace comes in the liberation from warriors and kings and their use of power to control. Peace is found in the reconnection with childhood maltreatment and the support of enlightened witnesses, allowing for the transformation of conflict, violence and trauma to peace within one's self, with others and in the larger society. The assignments described below help students develop the narratives of their own childhoods supporting them in developing important stories whose telling can provide a new perspective on childhood and help support peace education.

Peace education: the foundational importance of childhood

While violence and conflicts relating to race, ethnicity, religion, gender and social class are often topics in human rights and peace education programs, violence relating to children and childhood is not. This is critical to address not only for the sake of children but also for advancing peace studies. Over the past fifty years, our understanding of violence against children and childhood has moved inexorably, from a hegemonic model based in adultism to one on human rights. Previous shifts in understanding the violence and discrimination that minorities and women faced emphasized minority-centric and woman-centric perspectives. Similarly, an understanding of the violence and discrimination that children face increasingly has been anchored in a child-centered or child-centric perspective both in the international human rights movements and scientific community. Internationally, advances in scientific theory and research have demonstrated the need for and utility of framing data on adult-child relations within the context of children as a social group experiencing social inequality, prejudice and discrimination. These advances can be integrated within international models of human rights (John 2003) and the nearly universal ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) that has supported this

approach since its adoption in 1989. Human rights as a topic to be studied and behavior to be practiced are often linked to the foundations of peace education (Andreopoulos and Claude 1997; Virens 2010). Focusing on early childhood development, foundations such as the Bernard Van Leer Foundation (see http://www.bernardvanleer.org) and the Raising of America Project (see http://www.raisingofamerica.org/project) emphasize the importance of understanding how childhood experiences and social contexts involving rights, violence and conflict, dignity and peace shape the lives of children and the adults they become. They emphasize that childhood matters.

Reardon (1997, 22) brings together two central themes related to violence against children and human rights and peace education when she observes:

> The conceptual core of peace education is violence, its control, reduction and elimination. The conceptual core of human rights education is human dignity, its recognition, fulfillment and universalization.

Danesh (2008, 167) is one of the few in peace studies to acknowledge that 'children from the very beginning of their lives have intimate and frequent exposure to conflict' which in turn impacts the development of 'worldviews with conflict as their foundational theme and with violence as an expected outcome of struggle in the battlefield of life.' Bringing the situation of children into focus through the lenses of violence against children and violations of human dignity provides a possibility of both reducing violence and its generational transmission and enhancing the dignity of all across generations.

In the tradition of the United Nations (UN) conventions on the bill of rights for and the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW 1979; UNICEF 2013) and the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination (CERD 1965), the CRC outlines rights children have as members of the human community. The CRC seeks to eliminate many forms of violence, discrimination and violations of human dignity that children as a social group suffer (Lombardo and Polonko 2010). In recognizing the singular importance of eliminating violence in the process of ensuring human rights, the CRC extends to children the right to protection from all forms of violence (UNICEF 1998, 237; Committee on the Rights of the Child, *General Comment No. 13*, 2012). As stated in CRC Article 19.1:

> States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and *educational measures* (emphasis added) to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.

This human rights charge is consistent with the objectives of higher education to serve as a vehicle for enhancing personal and social responsibility; attending not only to intellectual growth but also to the development of adults committed to ethical standards, integrity, responsibility toward others and leadership in their communities (Kezar, Chambers, and Burkhardt 2005; Polonko et al. 2009). These objectives are also a central mission of peace education.

Scientific research in the US and internationally indicating that '… the sheer frequency and kinds of ways in which children's rights are violated across the globe every day is staggering' (Fernando 2001, 9) buttresses perspectives on violence against children within a model of human rights and dignity. The most recent *UN World Report on Violence against Children* details how adults continue to perpetrate multiple forms of violence against children – physical, sexual, emotional violence

throughout the world (Pinheiro 2006). In the US, research indicates that over one-third of adults report having experienced the severe levels of physical, sexual, emotional violence/abuse and/or neglect as a child (Scher et al. 2004; Hussey et al. 2006). If the legally sanctioned, less severe levels of violence are included, the vast majority of children (70–85%) have been yelled at, humiliated and/or hit, slapped, spanked. Of particular relevance to peace studies, research is clear that both the less severe and the more severe levels of violence against young children (both primarily perpetrated by parents/adult caretakers) are associated with enduring negative consequences for the child and the larger society. Adverse consequences of child maltreatment include for example, increased risks of impaired moral reasoning and less empathy; lower self-esteem and greater alienation; greater violence in relationships (e.g. more likely to bully and assault other children and later to abuse their spouse and children); more violent and non-violent crime as a teenager and adult (both as a victim and perpetrator); and mental health problems (e.g. higher rates of depression, anger, anxiety, PTSD) (see Straus 2001; Gershoff 2002; Anda et al. 2006; Pinheiro 2006; Lombardo and Polonko 2010; Straus, Douglas, and Medeiros 2013).

Moreover, victims of childhood violence are more likely to continue to justify and perpetrate violence and resist efforts to change when older due to the singularly powerful effects of violence in the earliest developmental years. For example, child maltreatment is associated with physiological changes/defects in the child's brain and nervous system's structure and function; malformation of the structure of the deepest layer of the child's personality; impaired sense of self and internalization of a core belief system supportive of mistrust and violence; defense mechanisms that the child must develop, from denial and repression to self-blame, to find meaning and cope with humiliation and fear (see Herman 1997; Perry 1997; Straus 2001; Miller 2005; Anda et al. 2006; Anda and Felitti 2013).

As such, in addition to the profound human rights issue, violence/maltreatment in childhood not only increases the risk of adverse consequences which would be antithetical to peace, including violence in every type of relationship, but also increases resistance to change or 'transformation' to non-violence or peace for self and others. Thus, childhood and violence against children, at all levels, are critical to address in peace education and peace studies for groups of all ages.

Peace education: pedagogy relating child maltreatment to change

Given the above, the paramount questions then are exactly how does one use the education process as a tool to prevent something that should be on its face unthinkable: the various forms of assaults to dignity and violence that adults inflict on children? How do we integrate child maltreatment prevention – peace education strategies into university level courses? What obstacles, often based in childhood experiences of students, does the pedagogical process need to overcome in order to prevent violence against children, develop positive approaches to children and, in the process, support and integrate broader peace education goals?

This paper provides a description and discussion of some pedagogical practices (writing exercises) that can be adapted for social and behavioral sciences and humanities courses at the university level that are designed to teach concepts and perspectives linked to *promoting peace through understanding and preventing violence against children*. They also provide opportunities for self-discovery and developing dignity enhancing, violence-reducing strategies that can be put into

practice in interactions with children and others. The extensive body of research briefly referred to above linking childhood experiences and environments of violence with juvenile and adult behavioral and social problems, which are often related to the general human experience of conflict, makes such an approach especially relevant to social and behavioral science programs (Widom and Ames 1994; Widom 2000; Straus 2001; Widom and Maxfield 2001; Gershoff 2002, 2010; Wigg, Spatz-Widom, and Tuell 2003; Anda et al. 2006). These exercises also emphasize the importance of 'personal narratives' linking them with approaches of peace studies education (Kester 2007, 2009; Staub, Pearlman, and Bilali 2010; Meintjes 1997) and are useful in many humanities courses as well.

The exercises described below have been used for over 20 years in a team developed and taught senior-level course 'Violence in the World of Children.' This course is cross-listed as both Sociology and Criminal Justice and is part of the 'Children's Rights Interdisciplinary Minor' at our university. Students from a variety of disciplines enroll in the course: Criminal Justice, Sociology, Human Services Counseling, Psychology, Communications, Nursing, Philosophy, English, Women's Studies and Teacher Education. With students from such a wide variety of disciplines electing this course, it becomes a 'pocket of peace' (Carter), offering an opportunity for students to study concepts linked to peace education in curricula that otherwise would not provide such an option. This course has been taught in face-to-face classroom and distance-learning environments (live interactive television) and as an on-line asynchronous course.

The four exercises discussed below are not exhaustive, but selected to cover the key concepts as they build on each other. All four are completed during the first half of a 14-week course structure. These particular exercises are theoretically grounded in insights about the etiology and effects of violence against children and violations of dignity provided by Miller (1990a, 2001, 2005); Coles (1997); Perry (1997); and Garbarino (1999). Students are required to read the work of these scholars who provide interdisciplinary perspectives that challenge many of the assumptions students bring to their studies of violence and children (see Lombardo and Polonko 2010).

Where students start

Many students argue that they may have been spanked, physically abused or maltreated in other ways as children, but that they are ok, if not better because of the beatings. Miller (1990a, 1990b, 2001) helps us understand why adults minimize and deny the hurtful effects of the violence parents and other adults inflicted on them as children 'for their own good.' This denial occurs in part because the child's authentic feelings of anger and shame must be repressed and thus transformed into hatred against self or other substitute which manifest in adulthood in the form of justifying and perpetrating violence against children in the next generation as well as violence against others (Miller 1990a, 61). In addition, *students often start from a position that holds that children are simply passive empty vessels that adults must discipline and fill children with knowledge*. Coles (*Listening to Children* video) emphasizes the importance of understanding children as actively engaged in their worlds attempting to make sense of and moral judgments about their experiences. *Many students come to the study of children and violence with the idea that children are too young to understand or be affected by what happens to and around them.* Perry's research (See *The Boy who was Raised as a Dog*), however, helps us see

how violence against children affects brain development (as brain development is use-dependent) in ways that promote overly aggressive or withdrawing behavior (coping with abuse) or prevent the development of positive personal or pro-social behaviors (coping with neglect). *Additionally, students often start with the idea that their experiences are the same as others.* Garbarino (See *Raising Children in Socially Toxic Environments*) informs student understanding of the socially toxic ecology of childhood, how structural opportunities related to time, place, race and gender and class influence behavioral experiences and challenge children on their path to adulthood. Here the concept of 'social map' provides a tool students can use to understand differences in opportunity and risk patterns in shaping life paths. All four of these scholars support the idea that children are not resilient; they are malleable. While social forces and experiences with child maltreatment and violence have profoundly negative consequences for children and the adults they become, these are ultimately preventable experiences. The exercises described are designed to challenge the above noted student assumptions that reflect and support their own oppression and the oppression of children in general.

As teachers, we start with the understanding of children as an oppressed class, a class to which all students once belonged. This reflects pedagogical principles which build on the foundational work of Freire (1998a, 1998b, 2000) who emphasized the linkages between teaching, learning, political consciousness and political action. According to Freire (2000, 39): 'an act is oppressive only when it prevents people from being more fully human.' This is what research shows violence does to children. Violence prevents children from engaging in 'children's work' (Coles, Perry, Miller). Freire's 'pedagogy of the oppressed' is particularly relevant to the students since as children and now as college students studying violence in the world of children, they were and are 'oppressed' as members of the social class, children, and this experience can become a part of their study. As Freire (2000, 30) describes it, the pedagogy of the oppressed is:

> A pedagogy which must be forged with, not for, the oppressed (whether individuals or peoples) in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity. This pedagogy makes oppression and its causes objects of reflection by the oppressed, and from that reflection will come their necessary engagement in the struggle for their liberation.

While the CRC calls for government action, the pedagogy related to the place of violence in the world of children described here attempts to engage and empower students to (1) become active learners; (2) become familiar with the research relating to violence and children; (3) explore the place and meaning of violence in their own childhoods and to place their experiences within the research; (4) gain an understanding of power and the politics of childhood that reproduces the oppression, exploitations and maltreatment of children, and (5) develop alternative child-centered child–adult relationships based in an understanding of human dignity that have the potential to end the cycle of violence, thus supporting the goals of peace education.

Important to achieving these goals are pedagogical exercises/assignments that involve: (1) using writing and self-reflection (narratives) to concretize student learning experiences, (2) sharing self-reflections (to break isolation and build connections), and (3) taking action on behalf of children (practicing the politics of empowerment).

We believe that writing responses and sharing them with others help students 'commit' to a perspective, to adopt this perspective as a personal belief not just an academic point. Writing provides an opportunity for 'thoughtful' self- reflection and self-critique that supports the 'application' of new understandings provided in the 'child-centered' approach (see Coles 1989; Maynes, Piece, and Laslet 2007).

Specific pedagogical exercises described involve: (1) developing a child-centered perspective and exploring the place of childhood experiences in adult lives, (2) reflecting on the place and experience of human dignity in childhood, (3) learning and practicing listening to children and (4) learning to apply the concept of social maps to understand variations in childhood challenges and opportunities.

Traditional pedagogy and violence in the world of children: research as a necessary starting point

Freire (2000, 31) writes,

> In order for oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation they must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform.

This means for students to be able to stop the reproduction of violence against children with whom they interact and children more broadly as they become engaged in social action on behalf of children, a knowledge of the scientific research on the causes and consequences of violence against children as well as human rights models situating this violence within the reality of oppression is needed. Such an assessment supports the objective and rigorous, disciplined study upon which the foundation for the understanding of their 'limiting situation' develops.

There are substantial obstacles to the study of violence against children, and efforts to reduce and eliminate it. These obstacles go beyond the extent to which social groups such as women and minorities experience prejudice and discrimination (including lack of access to resources). To begin with, similar to the early conceptualization of violence against women, violence against children is often justified within concepts such as 'privacy of the family' which ignores differential power relations between husbands and wives, and parents and children within 'the family.' For women, this changed as they organized and gained power as social group over time – starting with right to vote and greater protection from violence (Cowan and Schwartz 2004). In addition, a problem unique to the study of violence against children as opposed to the study of violence against women or minorities is that violence occurs early in life when the development of the brain, personality, belief systems and defense mechanisms make this violence singularly resistant to scientific scrutiny or objectivity. An additional problem is that this research on child maltreatment is typically ignored, and if covered, situated within an adult-centric model rather than the larger theoretical context of the social inequality that children face vis-a-vis adults, i.e. the oppression of children. As such, the promise of educational practices focused on research as a mechanism of change is often lost. Indeed, a non-critical assessment of research and theory and their underlying assumptions can reinforce the cycle of abuse. For example, research on child abuse that focuses on the characteristics of the children who are beaten (blaming the victims) or assumptions that it is always best to keep the victim with the perpetrator (i.e. abused child with the perpetrating parent) collude in the denial of abuse.

While the wealth of methodologically sophisticated research on violence against children must be shared, Freire makes clear that pedagogy of the oppressed must also integrate the experiences of the oppressed in the learning process. Both are necessary in the 'change making process' aimed at preventing and reducing violence against any group, including children. In this case, this means that the childhood of the student taking the class must be part of the learning process.

Unfortunately, the experiences of the students themselves are not part of the process as typically taught in courses covering violence against children. The traditional model of pedagogy reflects what Paulo Freire (2000, 52–67) calls the 'banking model.' Banking knowledge involves the teacher as the depositor and the student, the depository. This model alone does not engage the reality of the experience of the student. This form of pedagogy importantly provides the student with necessary knowledge, but it is not sufficient alone to address the human and political contexts within which the problem of violence against children exists and within which children live. The banking model has the potential to mirror the oppression that violence in the world of children represents. The teacher/expert is still controlling knowledge. The knowledge and experience of the individual student has little relevance. Neither has the experience of the instructor. However important the student's and instructor's childhood experiences with violence might be to the process of using knowledge and teaching to prevent violence against children, they are generally missing from the pedagogical process. As a starting point, in the hands of a creative instructor the research literature takes on greater importance when viewed from the perspective of the oppression of children. Building on the objective 'social reality' described in the social and behavioral science research on child maltreatment and the 'personal realities' described in biographies and autobiographies of maltreated children, students can now move to 'dialoguing' with this material in a way that allows them to be active learners. They can start to ask where their personal experiences fall within the research and start to understand how children with whom they interact are reflected in the research findings. Without knowledge of the academic research and theoretical linkages, student experience is simply anecdotal and not connected to the world of other experiences represented in the research.

Liberation pedagogy and violence in the lives of children: expanding the 'banking model'

While the 'traditional/banking' pedagogy involves only other children the student will have in their lives and/or advocate for, the approach we take involves many more children and childhoods. For us, the childhoods of the students, now adults in the university classroom, are also central to the learning process. They are a source of experiences and perspectives which students must come to recognize, understand and attempt to cope with, if they are to understand the humanity of the experiences of the children with whom they interact. The experiences of the children currently in the lives of the students are also important, for it is in interaction with these children that violence prevention and peace making will be applied and that lessons of positive adult-child interactions can be put into practice. In addition to working with student experiences, the childhood experiences of the instructor enter into the pedagogical process. For us, the childhood and experiences of the teacher are relevant, for they are one source of experience that brings humanity to the problem studied. If the instructor is able to share, analyze and contextualize his or her own experiences

within research and theory, this becomes a model for students and demonstrates the 'liberated learning' that bringing disciplined, objective, research-driven study to one's life experience can provide.

For liberation pedagogy, a 'problem-posing' educational process becomes important. It helps students understand, demythologize and eventually overcome the experiences of our own childhoods and the oppressive character of traditional adult-child relationships, while traditional relationships produce and reproduce the various forms of violence that exist in the lives of children.

In broad terms, we intend the exercises described below to provide the individual students in the class with perspectives and tools that will help them become (1) adults who view their own childhood experiences with courage and compassion, facilitating inner peace; (2) parents/caretakers who will not use violence in dealing with their children; (3) teachers, counselors, social workers or 'adults' who will be able to understand the place and impact of violence in the lives of children; and (4) students who become advocates for non-violent alternatives in the practice of child discipline and children's rights. As parents, practitioners, advocates and non-violent actors they have to the potential to alter cultural norms that support children's oppressed status and as such, reduce violence not only in children's lives and subsequent relations but also in the larger society. *Thus, the liberation pedagogy we describe sees the teacher as what Freire calls* 'a cultural worker'*: one that challenges norms that support social injustice and works to support a culture of peace* (Freire 1998b, 58). To the extent that these students are or will be parents or will have opportunities to interact with parents and children in their human services or teaching or criminal justice roles, the pedagogical practices described here provide the students with conceptual tools when they have an opportunity to create greater peace in families and society in general (Darder, Baltodano, and Torres 2002).

Pedagogical process to support peace and dignity through child maltreatment prevention

Starting situation

In this section, we outline four of the exercises we use in conjunction with the readings and other work, to accomplish the objectives listed above. These exercises permit students to develop their personal narratives regarding their views of childhood vs. adulthood, their experiences where dignity was affirmed or violated in childhood; their experiences listening to children and the differences and similarities in social maps across generations.

Together these exercises permit students to develop a child-centered framework for studying violence and children in the context of families, schools, communities, labor and sexual exploitation and war.

Exercise 1: 'Un-freezing': developing and valuing a child-centered perspective

One of the most difficult things about understanding violence in the world of children is being able to understand it from the perspective of children. For adults this is particularly difficult. As they move from children to adults, *our students move from a condition of being oppressed* (*as children*) *to being the oppressors of children* (*as adults*). Adult attempts to understand children's experience from a child's

perspective is problematic for many reasons. Adults tend to put their childhoods behind them. They look at *rites of passage* such as graduating from high school, getting a driver's license, going to college as symbolically marking the transformation from childhood to adulthood. They now *value* adulthood and fail to see any value in the things of childhood. Such things are 'childish' or of little lasting value. This devaluing of our own childhoods prevents us from understanding the value and importance of what the children around us are experiencing, learning and understanding about the world, day after day as they live their childhoods. Sometimes childhood experiences were difficult. Suffering at the hands of teachers, parents and other adults is not something we want to be reminded of or remember. Indeed, as Miller (1990b) and Herman (1997) and others explain, in order to survive the violence experienced in our childhood (e.g. find meaning where there was none, maintain attachments to parents who were not safe), we had to learn to deny, minimize, self-blame. As adults we often cannot face the negative experiences of our childhoods so we deny we have suffered any negative impacts. We want to feel 'in control' and do not want to appear 'flawed.' Acknowledging that these negative experiences may have impacted us in some way reduces our adult sense of empowerment. We want to grow up, mature and have 'power.' We want to experience and focus on the respect that our new status as adults seems to confer. This *respect* is something our 'child status' never gave us.

In order to get adult learners started on the process of understanding and acting on a new understanding of child / adult relationships that can emphasize non-oppressive and non-violent actions toward children and prevent violence, students must start to challenge long personally held and culturally reinforced assumptions that support children's oppression. This reflects Freire's 'invitation' to adult students to 'look at themselves as persons living and producing in a given society' (Freire 1998b, xi).

To begin the unfreezing process students are asked the following question: 'Which is the longer period of your life: Childhood or Adulthood?' Almost all students initially answer: 'adulthood.' After all, when we turn 18, 21, 16 or whatever age we pick to mark the transformation, we stop being children and become adults. For the rest of our lives, 50, 60, 70 years, we are adults. So clearly, adulthood is longer. This adult-centered view implies the experiences of childhood are behind us, somewhere where they don't matter. They almost become excluded from our lives. We can comfortably live as if we believe our childhood experiences have no relevance to our adult lives, which after all, are more important.

How can we think that childhood is the longer of these two periods? If we realize that the experiences of childhood stay with us, if we understand that we are the persons we were then, only older, we can began to see that childhood extends into adulthood and that it travels with us our entire lives (see Miller 2005). We start to see that childhood matters to the adult the child becomes. This is a child-centered perspective. It allows us to *value childhood* experiences, *to see their importance*. This perspective allows us to know that they will shape the lives of the adult-time/lifespan that follows.

After our discussion, students are asked to write about their responses and their reactions to our discussions and to share their observations with the class. This assignment is*: Exercise #1: In class you were asked a simple question* "*Which is the longer period of our lives: childhood or adulthood?*" *We discussed the implications of our typical answer* (*adulthood*) *and a different answer* (*childhood*.) *How did you*

answer? How did you react to the different views on this question? As one student responded:

> Before reading the instructor's answer as to why childhood is longer I would have answered that adulthood is longer. I've always known that childhood experiences can affect a person's entire life. However, I didn't think about it being longer since you're only a child for a short period of time. Adulthood is when you enter a career, try to obtain your goals, start a family. I guess in a sense I thought that it was more important as well. Adulthood feels like the longest period of our lives because that's when we essentially become who were are.
>
> After reading the class notes, I had a different view on the question. It made me realize how often people reflect on their childhood and how that affects the person that we become in adulthood. We learn from our childhood experiences, in regards to what we like and what we don't like. We observe the adults around us and they may help determine our behavior. Our childhood is a part of our lives forever even if we try to forget. We may not be physically living it longer, but it does stay in our minds through our entire life.

As this response illustrates, this perspective leads students to start thinking about the 'value' of childhood experiences in adulthood. What was a passing phase, something to leave behind, suddenly becomes something very important. Here, the research of Bruce Perry (2009) on the adverse impacts of childhood trauma and neglect on brain development, and Anda et al. (2006) linking the negative impacts of exposure to adverse childhood experiences and violence to subsequent adolescent and adult physical and mental health, substance abuse, risky sex, criminal activities, etc., reinforce valuing childhood experience/child-centered perspective. Once they see the importance of childhood, students are encouraged to see children differently.

Exercise 2: listening to children

As Freire says about the 'oppressed' learning to value their experience, if we value the importance of childhood in our adult lives and see the value of the experiences of today's children, now as children and as tomorrow's adolescents and adults, then we must begin to listen to children and come to terms with their experience of their and our adult world. By listening to children we see children as *active agents* who are working hard to make sense out of what is going on around them, of giving that experience meaning. All children, whether we realize it or not, are actively integrating their everyday experiences into their lives. They are learning ways of seeing, understanding and living in their worlds**.** This is the work of childhood. Children are not simply passive. They are not empty vessels that adults are to fill, as Freire describes as the 'banking model' of pedagogy. Children are actively filling the vessels of their lives. During these early years, they are constructing meanings, attitudes toward themselves, others and the world about them, making decisions, life choices, adopting values and learning lessons, including those relating to conflict, violence and peace within and outside of the family, that they will carry for years. This is 'children's work.'

In order to provide students with a model of listening to children they watch the video, *Listening to Children: A Moral Journey with Robert Coles* (Squires 1995). In this video children from different backgrounds and experiences discuss their lives with Coles. We see and hear how children experience and cope with a variety of

issues including violence in the community and family, affluence and alcoholism, migrant worker life, AIDS, racism and riots. These children also reflect on positive experiences with adults and how they have helped shape their perspectives.

Students are asked to write responses to the following questions on the video: *Exercise #2:* (1) *What surprised you about the children in this video?* (2) *Describe where you think the lives of these children will take them in 15 years? What will shape their lives from childhood?* (3) *After watching the video, do you see the children in your world differently? Give some examples from watching children that you encounter?*

Student responses to the video reflect surprise at the thoughtfulness and insight of the children in the video. Students are amazed that the children Coles interviews show a deep awareness and understanding of family and community situations, a questioning of why things are as they are, a sense of moral judgment about the behavior of adults in their world and hopefulness in the face of difficult experiences. Students often report that they are starting to watch the children in their lives differently and seeing that they too are struggling and coping with their worlds. They also reflect on their own experiences as children and start to bring the children's work they did into their understanding of the children in their lives. One student's response illustrates these points:

> The things that I found the most surprising about the video *Listening to Children* were the awareness of the children of their situations, the determination of the children to get out of a bad situation they may be in, and the fact that, even at such an early age, they were capable of processing and fully understanding the situations that they faced. The children's awareness of their situations caught me off guard a little bit. Many of these children were young but they knew of the troubles that their families faced. Haley knew about her father's alcoholism and what it meant to be an alcoholic and to live with an alcoholic. Scott knew about his uncle's struggle with AIDS and what it meant for him to go through such a terrible disease and was fully aware of the responsibilities it took to have a sister with a mental handicap. Erin and Erica were fully aware of the violence and hate that they were surrounded by in their neighborhood. In the beginning of the video, Robert spoke about becoming a basketball star so that he could escape his neighborhood and have a better life for himself. San Juanita spoke about going to college, or at least getting to the twelfth grade because she did not want to be like her parents and farm for a living. Erin and Erica knew the value of education and what it could mean for their future. These children were all very aware of their surroundings; many of their parents did not hide anything from them. A few of them knew that they would have a rough time getting through school because of the neighborhoods they lived in and others struggled with personal issues such as death and a family being torn apart by alcohol or violence in the home. These things all surprised me because I see children as innocent and not always aware of what is happening around them. These children were all extremely aware of what was going on and were already planning on how to make their lives better.

Exercise 3: looking at one's own childhood: the experience of human dignity in childhood – interacting with power

The objective of the first pedagogical practice was to provide validation and value to experiences of childhood that were previously undervalued in a general way and the second was to enable students to pay attention to how children interact with their world and the lesson children draw from their experiences. Our next pedagogical objective is to provide an opportunity for students to explore particular experiences

and feelings from their own childhoods in this new light. Human Dignity, a concept central to the CRC provides a tool for this exploration. As the Preamble to the CRC states:

> … In accordance with the principles proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations, recognition of the inherent dignity and equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family in the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.
>
> … The child should be brought up … in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, equality and solidarity …

As a strategy to get students to recognize the human dignity of children with whom they interact, they must first start to understand how human dignity experiences of their own childhoods played a part in their own lives. To do this students complete and we discuss the following: *EXERCISE #3: Write your definition of 'human dignity.' Describe at least 2 examples where you felt your human dignity was supported when you were a child. For each example, give as many details as you can and describe how you felt. Describe at least 2 examples where you felt your human dignity was violated when you were a child. For each example, give as many details as you can and describe how you felt.*

This is a challenging exercise, for in describing violations of human dignity it often requires students to confront directly (in the context of the exercise, not in person, though sometimes it leads to that) powerful people who exercised power over them when they were children (Lombardo and Polonko 2005b). They need to confront the feelings associated with violations of their human dignity. They often have to criticize (now from their position as adults) those adults who violated their human dignity as children. Without facing their own oppressors it is difficult to recognize the oppression in one's own action towards children (see Miller 2001).

It is also important that students have an opportunity to identify those experiences in their childhoods where their human dignity was supported. In this they are given opportunities to see how positive interactions provide opportunities for children to be empowered and to experience strategies of empowerment that are available to adults. Here, they have an opportunity to discover the benefits in their own childhoods of interacting with what Miller (1990b, 172) calls 'enlightened witnesses' or people who will become

> … *conscious* (emphasis in original) witnesses and advocates of children. Wherever they live, they will become aware of the suffering of children more quickly and deeply than others who must deny it. They will try to uncover child abuse that occurs unconsciously and is taken for granted by others. In doing so, they will change public awareness, and even the most relentless supporters of punishment will be forced to notice that much of what they had so far regarded as right and proper is life destroying.

'Liberation pedagogy' related to child maltreatment can help students become 'enlightened witnesses' for the children with whom they interact. The following description of human dignity violations from a student paper illustrates the depth of the experiences tapped in the exercise:

> While I remember other examples of when human dignity was supported in my childhood, unfortunately, the memories of violations to my human dignity during that same time are much more preeminent in my mind. A time that still brings strong memories was during a five-year period in my childhood (from age 8 to 12) that I attended a boarding school. My mother had lost our home and was dealing with my drug-addicted sister, both a result of my dad walking out on our family. To get me away from a very

> unhealthy environment, my mom thought sending me to a boarding school would be better. In hindsight, it wasn't. Many painful memories come from that time in my life. I was often spanked with a switch, that I got to go pick out, or a paddle, by dorm parents for things I didn't do. Because I was scared and confused, I retreated inward and found it hard to speak out – even to defend myself. Silence was tantamount to an admission of guilt. I would tell my mom about those times when we would speak by phone, but since that was such an infrequent occurrence; I would have often long buried the experiences deep in my mind as a way to escape them. Many never came out until later in my adult life. My most horrid memory of that time in my life was of being molested over a 1½–2 year period by a man who was my piano teacher. When I was finally able to verbalize to my mother what had been going on, she quit her travelling advertising executive job, pulled me out of the school and moved us both back to the location where I live today. The memories of those beatings and molestation will never leave me, but they have in a way acted as the fuel that has driven me as a father in how I raise my children.

Exercise 4: childhood in historical and social context of experience: the social maps of childhood

One of the key principles reflected in the CRC is the 'indivisibility of rights,' where the denial of any right is an impediment to the enjoyment of all rights. This principle reflects an understanding of the context of child maltreatment and its prevention embedded in the economic, social and cultural contexts that surround it. These contexts provide the challenges and opportunities that shape the paths that individuals may take. Learning to see this in the case of one's own childhood and in the childhoods of others helps students gain sensitivity to and critique the assumptions of 'individual' choice' and 'personal responsibility' for one's condition that is often reflected in our understanding of the behavior of children and adults. Here the diverse backgrounds of children interviewed in the 'Listening to Children' video, in terms of class, race, ethnicity and gender, provide a model for understanding social maps.

Prior to exploring their own experiences, their teacher provides them with a description of her/his own social map and the experiences of growing up. This provides students with a model for their discussion. In *Raising Children in a Socially Toxic Environment* (a book which students read) James Garbarino (1999) discusses the concept of a 'social map' Social maps are the pathways provided by our linkages and experiences with the world around us. As Garbarino (23) puts it:

> Life draws the child's social map; each child sees the world through the lenses of culture, temperament and experience. The child proceeds with the drawing of this social map in response to experiences that arise from the social systems of the family, school, neighborhood, church, community, society, and culture.

Garbarino draws our attention to the 'cycle of violence' when he points out: 'The child's social map is first primarily the result of experience, but increasingly it becomes the cause [of later behavior].' (24) This exercise adds the 'social ecology of childhood' to the 'child-centered,' 'personal human dignity' and listening to children tools for understanding violence in the world of children provided in earlier exercises.

In order to provide students with an opportunity to learn this concept they complete an exercise which asks them to explore social maps in the context of their own lives and in the life of someone at least 20 years different in age. To do this they are instructed as follows: *Exercise #4:* (1) *Interview yourself and the other*

person focusing on the types of interactions, relationships, experiences, and influences each of the above contexts (*family, neighborhood, peer group, school, etc.*) *had in your and the other person's lives.* (2) *Once you gather the information and examples, discuss how the social maps differ / are the same for you and the other person. Note how social class, gender, race, and ethnicity might have played a role in social map development and the challenges and opportunities faced as children.* Finally, students are asked to write up the results of their study in a 3–5 page paper focusing on the title 'Our Social Maps: Generational Differences and Similarities.'

In this exercise, students are given the opportunity to hear from others and to explore and assess the impact of childhood interactions with multiple contexts on a child's path to the future. This exercise links students back to their explorations of violations of and supports for their human dignity. These occur in the context of the family, peer group, and school. This exercise also links forward to analyzing the lives of children in diverse international contexts (war, extremes of poverty) that are studied in a later part of the course.

As Freire (1998a, 55) observes:

> I like being a human person because even though I know that the material, social, political, cultural and ideological conditions in which we find ourselves almost always generate divisions that make difficult the construction of our ideals of change and transformation, I know that the obstacles are not eternal.

In analyzing their own experiences as they explore 'social maps' and compare them to social science research findings and those of others, students can experience how the variety of contexts within which they (and all children) live, shape life opportunities and life-paths.

One student provided this analysis of the different communities in which she and her grandmother grew up.

> In researching my Grandmother's generations, and mine I noticed that hers was a much more positive environment than mine. I grew up on the West coast, where many people would describe as a 'Ghetto' town. I have been through a lot in my life; it has been filled with many traumatizing events most people could never imagine. I lived with my mother, two brothers and a sister. I witnessed a lot of abuse, verbally, emotionally and physically. My mother had many different men around us and would often expose her drug use to us. There were many times when we would be out late at night and my mother would not know where we were, because she was too busy partying. I cannot recall a time when my mother ever hugged us and told us she loved us. My mother segregated us from the rest of our family because she did not want them to know her business. During my teenage years I started observing more drug use by my mother. I grew to hate life and everyone around me. I knew that what I was observing was not right but I could not get away from it. I felt stuck in a home where I did not feel comfortable. My mother always pushed me to the side. I was the only child that was assigned chores and the only child to ever get hit. Every night I would cry myself to sleep because all I wanted was for my mother to accept me.
>
> I was stuck in a home where I felt I was a stranger. My family life was starting to affect my schoolwork. I could not get much rest because my mother would wake me up in the middle of the night to wash dishes. This made it hard for me to focus the next day at school. I started to hang out with the wrong crowd and was on the verge of dropping out of high school. My mother kicked me out of her house once she found out I was pregnant. I moved in with my now husband and we relocated to another state. I have three gorgeous boys and have been married seven years. We have created a stable environment for my children and I can honestly say I broke my mother's cycle. I will be the first generation within our family to graduate college/university.

> My Grandmother grew up in a good stable environment. She lived with her mother and father, her four sisters and one brother. They were a very close loving family. They never witnessed any abuse or any negative impact on their life. The only obstacle she had to overcome was the death of her father. She was twelve years old and her father died of a heart attack. Her mother never remarried and never brought another man around them. They went to Catholic Church every Sunday and always looked forward to their family dinnertime. Everything in her life was positive and she had a very loving family and they all respected each other.

Seeing this social map process in action in their own life narratives and in the lives of others sharpens student insights into what is needed to turn negative paths into positive paths. With this 'ecological' approach, students can gain an appreciation for the ways children are actively interacting with their worlds, learning from and balancing their environments. They also learn that many environmental factors within which individual children and children as a social class live are beyond the control of individuals. When they compare this with their own situation they can see that the opportunities and challenges faced in one generation are not the same as another. Exposure to violence in families, neighborhoods and communities sometimes differs across generations, while forms of the intergenerational transmission of violence are often observed.

Moving toward agents of peace and supporters of human dignity: student Praxis

For Freire, learning and reflection about ones conditions must be linked to actions that alter ones previous situations. After students have had the opportunity to read, discuss and write about their experiences with the child-centered perspective on human dignity, listening to children and social maps, they are then asked to write about how what they have learned about the value of childhood has found its way into their everyday experiences; and how what they have learned has changed the ways that they perceive and experience conflict and dignity in the lives of children they observe and with whom they interact. Specifically they are asked to respond to the following question:

> How has your 'watching of children' changed as you have progressed through this class? Give examples of how *three things that you learned* in class (from readings, films, notes) have helped you see children in a different way or have sharpened your watching of children?

Not all students experience a change of perspective. They maintain the position that children's oppression in their specific cases was appropriate and that they benefited from these experiences, particularly when their parents beat them. In addition, they still support the use of physical punishment of children as a way to 'maintain discipline' for their current or future children and children in general. This perspective testifies to the power of exposure to violence in childhood, the power of social norms relating to the appropriateness of adult power over children, children's powerlessness and the strength of their commitment to not seeing anything wrong in their parents' use of verbal and physical punishment/violence.

However, many students do report that their views regarding children have changed and their understanding and application of a child-centered perspective has helped give them a new appreciation for 'children's work.' They also see the contribution of childhood experiences to the adults they have become. Many also

see the value in the empowering children and involving children in decisions and inquiring about and listening to their views. They note how these child-centered interactions have made interactions with children in their lives less stressful and more beneficial for the children and for themselves. Finally, some students point out that the perspectives they have learned are useful with other family members, friends and co-workers.

Some student responses illustrate how these exercises and this class 'Violence in the World of Children' can provide a foundation for breaking the cycle of violence, promoting peace, and enhancing human dignity.

> *Student Response 1*: I have, overall, developed a more compassionate view of the individuals in my life, and people in general, as I have been reminded that every single person has a story, and that story very often involves trauma, neglect, abuse, or at least one or more adverse childhood experience. I have begun to realize that the nonsensical, hurtful, hateful, spiteful, selfish or other various distasteful actions of others are often rooted in these experiences.
>
> As I have gone through this class, I try to look at children in social settings through a more child-centered perspective. When a child is crying in the grocery store, I look at their parent's reactions to them; usually they ignore them. If I see a child asking for their parent's attention or asking for a specific toy or candy bar, I try to listen to the child's argument for wanting it. I have noticed that most adults do not even take the time to look at their child while telling them no, let alone give them the attention to explain their story.
>
> *Student Response 2*: My watching of children has changed greatly as this class has progressed. Due to the notes, readings, and films that we have done I have begun see children in a very different manner.
>
> One thing that I have learned that has helped me see children in a different way was in module 2 when it talked about seeing things from child-centered perspective. I never saw my childhood as being that important to my thinking. However, after going over this module I began to see how my experiences as a child has shaped the person I am today. Also, I see my littler brother's experiences are being more important, and I respect how he interprets experiences. Before, I would just brush off how he made sense of his experiences because I wasn't looking at things from the perspective of a child.
>
> Reading the Adverse Childhood Experiences Research also has helped changed (*sic*) the way I see children. It has done this in that whenever I saw a troubled child I would think it was that child's fault for not acting the right way. However, after reading that article it made it very clear to me that when it comes to troubled children it is usually because of the environment they were raised in. They could have possibly been around domestic violence, or alcohol and drug abusive parents.

Summary

In this description of our approach to peace education pedagogy and exercises aimed at supporting values of peace education and human dignity of children we have highlighted several themes.

Specifically, this pedagogy

- Develops a child-centered perspective: important in changing the 'oppressive' character of adult-child relationships that foster child abuse and neglect and indeed, all violence in the world of children.

- Is multi-layered: it engages the student and instructor at the cognitive and emotional levels; it engages students in a critical analysis of research into the lives of 'other children;' it builds and integrates an exploration of the students' own experiences and the relationship of these experiences to the research.
- Provides the instructor an opportunity not only to share with students 'objectively' produced research that challenges oppression, but also to serve as a model of an 'enlightened witness' in relation to the childhoods present in the lives of the students with whom the instructor interacts.

We have tried to present an example of pedagogy of prevention of violence in the world of children that provides opportunities for students not only to learn about violence against children, but also to discover, confront and find ways of altering the oppressive nature of adult-child relationships so 'taken for granted' in nearly every culture.

These themes reflect various observations made in the literature on pedagogical practices related to developing compassion and knowledge and attitudes supportive of peace (see Darder, Baltodano, and Torres 2002). Whang and Peralta Nash (2005) discuss the importance of developing mindfulness to reclaim compassion both for the instructor and for the student. Mindfulness helps us become open to multiple perspectives, avoid ritualistic thinking, and break down the walls that shield us from our fears and pain. The exercises described above provide opportunities to bring mindfulness to childhoods. In addition, these exercises provide opportunities to challenge normative expectations (adult-centeredness) relating to violence and oppression of children. They provide 'critical educational spaces' (Goldstein 2005) around themes related to child maltreatment and violence. The exercises let students give voice to their life experiences. Seeing their life narratives within the context of knowledge of the symbolic and institutional oppression of children found in family, school, community contexts students can then develop alternative, supportive, and mutually respectful behavioral strategies to the 'new normal' of peace and cooperation (Carter 2004).

Danesh (2008, 157) argues that peace education is most successful when change occurs at the *individual and societal levels*; at that point, transformation 'leads to various modes of interpersonal and group relationships that are conducive to healing the physical, psychological, social and moral wounds resulting from the impact of prolonged conflict and experiences of violence.' Regarding prolonged experiences of conflict and violence, Herman (1997, 3) in her seminal work on trauma and recovery draws commonalities 'between battered women and political prisoners, between the survivors of vast concentration camps created by tyrants who rule nations and the survivors of small, hidden concentration camps created by tyrants who rule their homes.' She argues similarly that healing trauma, which involves *holding traumatic reality in consciousness* requires a social context that protects the victims – at the *individual level*, supportive interpersonal relations, and at the *societal level*, human rights movements that give voice to the disempowered (9). Exercises that we have offered have as their objective to bring traumatic reality to consciousness, to provide a supportive environment that facilitates transformation and healing and anchors these efforts in a larger context of human rights.

Through learning to value childhood, through confronting the experience of human dignity in childhood, through contextualizing childhood experience in time and place, students gain a set of tools with which they can see experientially the

importance of the research they study, of supporting children and the consequences and difficulties faced when violence and violations fill their worlds.

The pedagogy we describe brings together multiple childhoods: that of the teacher and the student, of the children (or childhood of the adolescents and adults) research describes and of children with whom the students interact. All of these are recognized as being components of the teaching-learning process linked through writing personal narrative and discussion.

The pedagogy we describe also brings together ways of knowing and understanding. As Paulo Freire (2000, 11–12) describes it, this is pedagogy for those who dare to teach.

> We must dare, in the full sense of the word, love without fear of being called ridiculous, mawkish, or unscientific, if not anti-scientific. We must dare in order to say scientifically, and not as blah-blah-blah, that we study, we learn, we teach, we know with our entire body. We do all these things with feeling, with emotion, with wishes, with fear, with doubts, with passion, and also with critical reasoning. However, we must never study, learn, teach, or know with the last only. We must dare so as never to dichotomize cognition and emotion.

Finally, because it deals with childhood and violence against children, the pedagogy we describe holds the promise of reducing and eliminating violence in a way that profoundly impacts the level of violence in society. Miller's (1990a, Afterword) observation about the connections of the childhood experiences and behaviors reflecting war and peace describes what might happen when dignity and physical integrity in childhood is valued and respected:

> People whose integrity has not been damaged in childhood, who were protected, respected, and treated with honesty by their parents, will be – both in their youth and in adulthood – intelligent, responsive, empathic, and highly sensitive. They will take pleasure in life and will not feel any need to kill or even hurt others or themselves. They will use their power to defend themselves, not to attack others. They will not be able to do otherwise than respect and protect those weaker than themselves, including their children, because this is what they have learned from their own experience and because it is this knowledge (and not the experience of cruelty) that has been stored up inside them from the beginning. It will be inconceivable to such people that earlier generations had to build up a gigantic war industry in order to feel comfortable and safe in this world. Since it will not be their unconscious drive in life to ward off intimidation experienced at a very early age, they will be able to deal with attempts at intimidation in their adult life more rationally and more creatively.

Thus, we have tried to demonstrate that bringing the exploration of childhood to peace and human rights education can provide students with intellectual and personal insights and conceptual tools that challenge the culture of violence peace education seeks to overcome.

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Note

1. Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote,* Part II, Chapter 23, 609: "'Hold hard!" said I at this, "tell your story as you ought, Senor Don Montesinos, for you know very well *that all comparisons are odious* (emphasis added), and there is no occasion to compare one

person with another; the peerless Dulcinea del Toboso is what she is, and the lady Dona Belerma is what she is and has been, and that's enough." To which he made answer, "Forgive me, Senor Don Quixote; I own I was wrong and spoke unadvisedly in saying that the lady Dulcinea could scarcely come up to the lady Belerma; for it were enough for me to have learned, by what means I know not, that you are her knight, to make me bite my tongue out before I compared her to anything save heaven itself." After this apology which the great Montesinos made me, my heart recovered itself from the shock I had received in hearing my lady compared with Belerma.'

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