Pathways to Building and Educating for a Culture of Peace

Toh Swee-Hin (S.H.Toh)
U.N.-mandated University for Peace, Costa Rica
Laureate, UNESCO Prize for Peace Education (2000)

Amidst the pain, suffering and hardships endured by billions of human beings on planet Earth today, we still hear countless voices and witness many inspiring actions that collectively reflect a global yearning for peace. Exemplars in recent times include:

- the patient but courageous efforts of ordinary peoples to create zones of peace free from armed conflicts between the Government and armed opposition groups;
- the building of grassroots communities among rural and urban poor to promote alternative, reliant, just and sustainable development;
- women struggling worldwide for their human rights and for development that overcomes traditional and/or modernization-imposed gendered inequities;
- teachers, parents, citizens and students in North and South contexts advocating and building school environments free from violence ;
- indigenous peoples struggling through active nonviolence for their rights to self-determination and cultural survival in the face of development aggression;
- the collaboration of North and South citizens to transform the policies and practices of states, intergovernmental agencies (e.g. IMF, World Bank) and private sector institutions (e.g. transnational corporations) so that free-trade and global investment regimes do not violate human rights and sustainability principles ;
- the efforts of combatant groups including states and opposition movements to resolve conflicts and civil wars through peace accords;
- the increasingly common gatherings of civil society groups and movements proposing alternative visions of people-centered development, sustainability, global democracy, human rights, intercultural respect, and a voluntary simple quality of life

These exemplars clearly show that the human spirit remains undiminished in the face of multiple conflicts and challenges steeped in all forms of violence and peacelessness. Despite the ending of the "Cold War, there is widespread consensus that we are still living within a deep-rooted culture of violence. It was therefore very meaningful and vital that 2000 was designated as the International Year for the Culture of Peace, and the first decade of this century as the International Decade for Peace and Nonviolence for the Children of the World. However, in these declarations, the United Nations is not reminding the world community only of the scourge of wars, the continuing nuclear threat, and other manifestations of direct physical violence. We are also being called to acknowledge and to overcome violence in all its multiple physical and non-physical forms and levels. Most importantly, there is a wide consensus that education plays an indispensable role in building a culture of peace and a peaceful world.

However, educating for a culture of peace, or peace education, should not be viewed only in its modern or recent manifestations. In ancient times. philosophical , faith or spirituality worldviews of diverse civilizations have called on their followers or believers to practice values and relationships of nonviolence, compassion, kindness, respect and harmony. As modern education expanded in the "Age of Enlightenment" and the industrial revolution, educators such as Comenius in Europe was questioning modes of education based on rote teaching and learning, and proposing experiential and holistic pedagogical processes. Another major influence in innovative schooling for peace was inspired by Montessori, whose method rests on self-constructed and directed learning in a flexible mode according to children's natural development and growth. During the period before and during the great World Wars, peace education focused on the goal of international understanding

and avoiding the resort to war to "settle" disputes and conflicts. Later, the terrible use of atomic weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki catalyzed the nuclear disarmament movement. This remains a major focus of attention among peace educators, but nowadays it is considered as part of a broader challenge to overcome all forms of militarization and armed conflicts.

In many regions, especially in advanced industrialized societies, peace education has also developed in tandem with the expanding interest in the field of conflict management, conflict prevention, conflict resolution and conflict transformation. Children, youth and adults are empowered with values, attitudes, knowledge and skills for resolving conflicts constructively and nonviolently. In a growing number of schools, programs in peer mediation have also been implemented, so that students are able to resolve their interpersonal conflicts through dialogue, negotiation and mediation.

While acknowledging the vital role of such disarmament education and education for conflict resolution in building a peaceful world, a widening community of peace educators has argued that a holistic, multidimensional framework for peace education is necessary, given the multiple and complex realities of conflicts and peacelessness facing humanity and our planet.

In essence, the goals of peace education in such a holistc framework can be frmaed as two interrelated questions:

- How can education contribute to a critical understanding of the root causes of conflicts, violence and peacelessness at the personal, interpersonal, community, national, regional and global levels?
- How can education simultaneously cultivate values and attitudes that will encourage individual and social action for building more peaceful selves, families, communities, societies and ultimately a more peaceful world?

Consequently, many pathways can be conceived for educating toward a culture of peace, as shown in a flower metaphor below. Each of these pathways is also very broad - a pathway towards peace is not just one narrow straight road; it has many tracks linked to each other. In clarifying the pathways for a culture of peace, reference is made to both the international and global realities.

As Figure 1 shows, the pathways are: ***Educating for dismantling the culture of war; Educating for living with justice and compassion; Educating for promoting human rights and responsibilities; Educating for building cultural respect, reconciliation, and solidarity; Educating for living in harmony with the earth; and Educating for cultivating inner peace.*** The themes are represented by the metaphor of a flower to emphasize their interconnectedness as "petals" to form an organic whole.

In summary, the pathways each encompass some key issues and themes that need to addressed in terms of root causes and possible solution. First is *militarization,* whether expressed in wars, armed conflicts or domestic and community violence, that needs to be dismantled and transformed through active non-violence. A second theme is *structural violence* rooted in unjust national/global structures and relationships, which calls for social/economic justice locally, nationally and globally. A third theme is *human rights*, whose continued violations deprive peoples of their freedoms and dignities, and whose promotion remains urgent, more than fifty years after the Universal Declaration. Fourth involves the need for *cultural solidarity* to overcome injustices and conflicts between diverse cultures and build understanding and harmony. Fifth, *environmental care* is necessary to stop the ecological destruction deepened by unsustainable development paradigms. A sixth theme focuses on *inner peace* necessary to recover peaceful values and other dimensions of spirituality in an increasingly competitive and consumer-centered world.
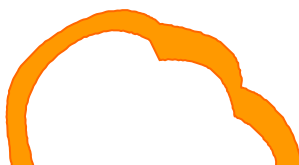
Figure 1: A Holistic Framework for Peace Education

The journey along the six possible pathways will not be an easy, short or smooth journey. It will demand commitment, courage and above all patience. It also calls for a process of education, which then empowers, and hopefully leads to transformation. Hence peace education and acting to build a culture of peace, no matter which pathway you are walking on, is not only about cognitive understanding of the root causes of conflicts and violence in all its forms. Equally vital is how we educate for peace . In this regard, four pedagogical principles may be identified: holism, dialogue, values formation and critical empowerment.

First, we have the principle of holism. We need to be holistic. A holistic framework always tries to clarify possible inter-relationships between and among different problems of peacelessness, conflict and violence in terms of root causes and resolutions. Holism also applies in not isolating various levels and modes of peace education as being more superior or inferior. All modes and levels are equitably valuable (e.g. formal, nonformal, children to adults, social, economic and cultural groups) and most importantly, complement, sustain and support each other

Secondly, educating for a culture of peace emphasizes the crucial role of values Recognizing that all knowledge is never free of values, the peace educator constantly encourages learners to surface innermost values that shape their understanding of realities and their actions in the world. Clearly, peace education needs to be very explicit about its preferred values, such as compassion, justice, equity; gender-fairness, caring for life, sharing, reconciliation, integrity, hope and active nonviolence. Commitment to nonviolence needs to be active, not passive, so that we are indeed moved to transform a culture of violence. Hope is vital; otherwise we can begin to feel overwhelmed into a sense of helplessness or powerlessness as we confront the massive problems of peacelessness and violence.

A third important pedagogical principle of peace education rests on the value and strategy of dialogue. It would be a contradiction if educating for peace becomes an exercise in "banking", as teachers assume the role of authoritarian "experts" and learners become passive recipients of peace knowledge. A dialogical strategy however cultivates a more horizontal teacher-learner relationship in which both educate and learn from each other. Creative and participatory pedagogical activities are integrated in the classroom, whether elementary or

tertiary. The realities and voices of learners yield essential inputs into the learning process and collaborative analysis between and among teachers and learners create opportunities for critical reflection leading to a self-reliant political position in relation to transformation.

A fourth vital principle for practicing peace education is critical empowerment or what the Brazilian adult educator Paulo Freire has called conscientization. While dialogical, participatory and non-banking pedagogies and methodologies are crucial, they are not sufficient. Peace education must move not just our minds but also our hearts and spirits into personal and social action for peace-building. In short, educating for peace is educating for critical empowerment through which we develop a critical consciousness that actively seeks to transform the realities of a culture of war and violence into a culture of peace and nonviolence. While the non-formal community sector is often seen as the "natural" sites for critical empowerment, the formal education institutions should also challenge learners towards transformation, as in projects for human rights, nonviolence and environmental care; schools as zones of peace; UNESCO Clubs and Associated Schools projects; and petitioning Government and other powerful sectors.

Since 1998, I have had numerous opportunities to visit South Korea to engage in various activities related to peace education and peacebuilding. In particular, I have contributed to the work of the UNESCO-affiliated Asia-Pacific Centre of Education for International understanding (APCEIU) , whose vision of EIU towards a culture of peace is synonymous with a holistic and multi-dimensional framework of peace education. Through APCEIU programs , many educators from across the Asia-Pacific region have gained some knowledge and pedagogical skills in integrating peace-related themes and issues in their formal and nonformal curricula and educational institutions, communities and systems. On a number of occasions, I have also interacted meaningfully with and learned many insights on conflicts and the peace process in Korean society from local and national NGOs and movements in peacebuilding, including the Korea Peace Forum , Nonviolent Peace Force and most recently the YMCA.

Through these experiences, I can see many implications for peace education for Korean society and indeed the Korean peninsula, still tragically divided and in a state of unresolved "war" and deep political tensions. Waking along the pathways of a holistic framework of peace educstion, some of these implications deserve to be explored and practised:

Dismantling a culture of war: A major challenge for peace education is clearly to help overcome a culture of fear, insecurity and even hatred left by the legacy of the bitter and bloody partition of the Koprean peninsula into North and South. Can citizens be empowered to see that a cycle of continuing unresolved war and tensions only serves the vested interests of powerful sectors, including the military industrial complex and external actors, whereas moving toward dialogue, greater understanding, reconciliation and perhaps even reunification, which will need demilitarization , will enhance the well-being of all Korean peoples? At micro-levels of life, such disarmament education and conflict resolution education will also help to build nonviolence in homes and schools, where bullying is now a growing problem, leading even some victims to commit suicide.

Living with justice and compassion: Although South Korea has been able to attain advanced industrialization status through a dominant model of development based on rapid growth, free market expansion and integration in the globalized economy, there are contradictions and conflicts that need addressing. Are there growing gaps between rich and poor that can generate increased social and political conflicts? Does the deep dependence of the Korean economy on the global capitalist system engender hardships and injustices due to the cycle of boom and bust and recurring global financial crises? Who benefits from Korea's role in the economics of the global South - Korean investors and TNCs; South elite sectors; marginalized peoples? Peace education needs to raise the awareness of Korean peoples that their nation can also help create structural

violence. Within Korean society, peace educators also have a key role in transforming a growing culture of over-consumerism with its negative consequences for peace in offices, homes and within individuals.

Promoting human rights and responsibilities: Peace educators and human rights educators are agreed on the vital need to educate all peoples to understand what human rights mean, and how their rights should be promoted rather than violated.   Korean society, after a long period of dictatorial and authoritarian politics and governance, has made steps towards a culture of human rights.   However, many challenges still remain to create deep democracy in institutions and relationships between citizens and governments and other powerful sectors or organizations.   The intersection between gender and human rights also deserve considerable attention in a culture of patriarchy.   Education for human rights hence need to be institutionalized, although in peace education, learners also need to be oriented to their responsibilities to uphold human rights for all.

Building intercultural understanding, respect and solidarity: The gradual movement of South Korea from a largely "monocultural" to a more "multicultural" society due to the inflow of migrant workers and women who come to marry Korean men, has major implications for the pathway of intercultural or multicultural education. In peace education, however, the development of intercultural understanding needs to go beyond external indicators of cultural identity and reach the roots of values and philosophies . Also, it needs to overcome stereotyping, racism and all forms of cultural discrimination, and makes links to issues of justice (e.g. working conditions) and violence (e.g. domestic violence, gender-based violence). Increasingly too, with the presence of diverse faiths and religions in Korea, peace education also promotes interfaith and intra-faith dialogue and the dialogue of cvilizations.

Living in harmony with the Earth: In peace education, caring for nature and the environment holds major implications for building a peaceful world. Ecological destruction and environmental-based competition and conflicts undermines the sustainability of all life . South Korea's adoption of rapid industrial growth and high mass consumption inevitable generates environmental imbalances, and contributes to the global crisis of climate change. Through education for sustainable futures, citizens will hopefully rethink their over-consumerist lifestyles, challenge dominant economic policies of local, national and international development, and engage in saving the Korean and global environment. In the case of the controversial jeju island naval base construction, there is clearly also a link between disarmament education and education for sustainable futures.

Cultivating inner peace: Worldwide, there is an emerging concern among peoples from all cultures and societies of the importance to be as mindful of inner peace as much as social peace. Despite economic growth, affluence and advanced technologies, human being can often be subject to various forms and levels of alienation, addictions, anxieties and unhappiness, that can even lead to increasing suicide levels . These are crucial issues which I think also face Korean society. Through various strategies, including meditation and contemplation, peace education can be helpful for individuals and communities to regain their sense of inner balance and inner peace , and to develop their spirituality to overcome the over-materialistic, self-centred and sometimes dehumanizing dimensions of a culture of violence, injustice and unsustainability.

I look forward to further dialogue with Korean peace educators and peacebuilders on these possibilities and indeed increasing implementation of peace education through multiple but interrelated pathways . Through my interactions and collaboration with many visionary and dedicated individuals, communities and movements, I will continue to greatly appreciate the inspiration and insights I will learn from them to build a truly more peaceful Korea and world.