

Peace as a Way of Life: Discovery, Change, Transformation.

“ If you want peace, prepare for peace. ”

The motto of the University for Peace¹

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Returning to Taiwan after finishing school in 1996, I found the society was in flux from the aftershock of the Chinese missile exercise not long ago – a smearing fear of war and a sense of powerlessness still in the air. On the other hand, even within a higher education environment where people are assumed to be properly educated, I could see the young rubbing against each other's shoulders or cutting into the way just to get a little bit ahead without showing any slightest apology. All these seem to be a satire to what I thought we pride ourselves on as “ a nation of manners and justice ” (li-yi-chih-pang) with an ideal of World at Peace (shih-chieh-ta-t'ung). I decided, in stead of lamenting, to do something for the hope of living in peace – if I really want peace, I should prepare myself as well as others for it—right from where I am. Since I believe that through education would peace be ultimately and comprehensively practiced in time, I would teach an introductory level course concerning peace in the university that I am affiliated with.

I understood that I do not have any background in the political science or the international relations, and the training I received from the Peace and the Conflict Resolution Studies program in the States might be far from enough. Yet I knew my speech communication background would definitely be a plus in helping students to live more peacefully in their daily lives, once they realize that peace is nothing abstract or anything faraway beyond their reach since we have to fulfill our survival needs on the basis of peaceful interaction with others in which communication and cooperation are essential. In addition to the practical purpose, I also hoped to introduce and translate recent findings of the Peace Studies research to students so they could get to not only the know-how's but the know-why's, and some of them may engage themselves in the study of peace in the future. Materials for both purposes in the literature should not be difficult to locate at all, I thought², since all branches of Peace Studies have more or less educational implications in their ultimate aim – to contribute to a just and peaceful world which can be produced and sustained by human beings in time³. Therefore, in the spring semester of the academic year of 1997, I offered a course entitled “ Communication for Harmony: An Introduction to Peace Studies ” in National Taiwan University, a two-credit, two-hour-per-week⁴, semester-long general education course.

¹ The University for Peace was established by the United Nations in 1980. Located in Costa Rica, the international institution of higher learning of peace seeks to develop a world curriculum for global responsibility on interdisciplinary, multicultural and multi-ideological bases.

² In fact, to find a textbook suitable for the double-fold purpose was much more difficult than I thought. Almost all the textbooks available at the time focused either on war and international conflict or solely on conflict resolution skills. The textbook I finally chose was *Realizing peace: An introduction to peace studies*. by Thomas Keefe, a sociologist specializing in empathy and reciprocity, and Ron E. Robberts, a sociologist of non-violent social movement. It was hoped that their diverse backgrounds would duly, or at least partially, reflect the interdisciplinary nature of Peace Studies.

³ Hurst, J. (1986). “A Pedagogy for Peace,” *World Encyclopedia of Peace*. New York: Pergamon Press.

⁴ In 1997, it was originally designed as a three-credit, three-hour course. Then it was changed to the present format in accordance with other general education courses in the university.

The objectives of my course could be summarized in three words: discovery, change, and transformation. Students are to realize that peace is indispensable to our lives since all inter-connect with and inter-depend upon each other and to discover their own potentials of living in peace in this complex and diverse world. With this realization, they are to utilize their capacity and inclination to pursue justice in a non-violent manner – they would expand the affective, attitudinal, and behavioral repertoire of making peace with self, others, and nature. With adequate tools at hand, they would be able to create mutually positive interpersonal relationships and together with others' efforts, to strive for and finally bring about a non-violent and just social order in the world. I hope the course would provide a reality check to students, therefore vision, motivation, and means for a better world which we all are part of.

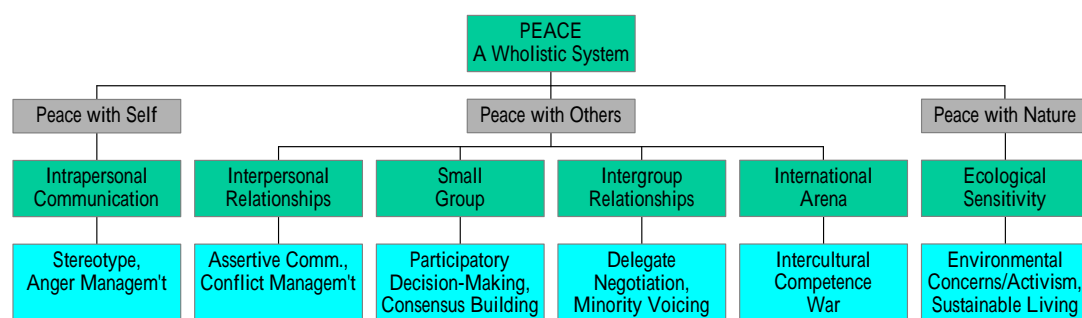
The Structure of the Course

Since not all peace courses are created the same, many scholars distinguish between Education for Peace and Education about Peace. The former is mainly concerned with theories and skills for analyzing, managing, reducing, and/or resolving conflicts, while the latter focuses on the causes and consequences of conflicts and wars, and the values, attitudes, and institutions necessary for building a peaceful world⁵. What I tried to do, due to the fact that there was no other courses of similar nature at the time, was to combine the two in a balance that students could maximize their learning about peace and engage in action for peace via the course.

Since I believe in the continuum of fear-anger-hatred-aggression-violence-war, the theme module of the course starts with intrapersonal peace issues and gradually expands the context of peaceful living to the global level (Figure 1). Each theme module would be covered in two weeks (four hours together).

Figure 1: The Theme Structure of the Course

Communication for Harmony: An Introduction to Peace Studies



Each (2-hour) class session consists of three parts: lecture, students' presentation, and experiential activities. Lecture, though short (15 - 25 minutes), is very important in setting the tone of the whole session. I do not consider myself up there to convince students of any particular viewpoint, or to transmit a body of knowledge, but, rather, I would try to present

⁵ For example, Reardon, B. A. (1988). *Comprehensive peace education*. New York: Columbia University; and Thomas, D. C., & Klare, M. T. (1989). (Eds.) *Peace and world order studies: A curriculum guide*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

concepts and data from a range of sources with different perspectives. I would call students' attention to the philosophies and positions underpinning the information presented, and ask them to examine and challenge mine as well as their own. By doing this, I hope to create an open and supportive classroom climate encouraging all students to present their own views on the issue.

In almost each session (except for the first three), there would be a group briefing or group project report to start the second hour (for details see the attached assignment specifications). The group briefing is designed to help students to better absorb the content of the readings since most of them were written in English. Students would present a summary in Chinese and would prepare questions for the class discussion. Usually students and I would get together going through their briefing outline and discussion questions at least two days before the class. The group project report comes at the end of the semester for students to share with each other what they have been researching for the whole semester.

The experiential learning activities are used in every class session for students to have a hand-on experience of their own. At the beginning of each class, we do a short (1-2 minute) relaxation/concentration exercise⁶ to prepare for the class. After the lecture or the group briefing, there are communication activities varied in each session. For example, in the intercultural communication session, I use a cross cultural simulation game adapted from Bafa-Bafa⁷, to sensitize students to their pre-existing worldviews underpinning their own communication, and to the impact of those worldviews as barriers in communication with people from other cultures. Another well-received activity is "The Council of All Beings"⁸ in the ecological peace session, in which each student speaks for one entity in the environment, be it wind, stream, train, or garbage can. Hearing those voices enables me and students to reflect upon our usually careless yet influential behaviors toward the environment.

Some Pedagogical Challenges

After the course being offered for three semesters to date, not in consecutive years, I always found ways that I could have done it better and I always tried something a little different each time. Yet, several issues have emerged as all-time challenges that all instructors, I suppose, might have to face if they are to offer such a course in the future.

The introductory course that I teach, though starting more of a reformist nature, emphasizes not only the behavioral change but also the attitudinal and value change. The latter is quite difficult to achieve in one semester-long course. I tried to initiate changes in attitudes and values via an array of experiential activities such as simulations, role plays, and vision making exercises. The group work (constituting 60% of the final grade) is to motivate them to strive collaboratively instead of competitively for good grades. However, students considered the assignments to be much more than they expected for a two-credit course (especially a general education course). Some expressed a strong suspicion of the communal effort as adequate representation of their individual hard working. Others regretted that the class time was not enough for all the issues

⁶ Most of the time I use the non-denominational guided meditation techniques in Thich Hnat Hanh's books, which do not contain religious implications.

⁷ Shirk, G. (1973). *BAFA BAFA: A cross-cultural simulation*. Delmar, CA, Simile II.

⁸ Macy, J. R. (1986). *Despair and empowerment in a nuclear age*. New York: Random House.

covered in the course. It seems, consequently, that a series of peace issue-related courses, rather than a one-shot deal, would make a better service to both instructors and students. Hence, it would cover issues in depth, allow time for students to savor the meaning of all assignments, and gradually produce the designated changes in attitudes and values in time. We need a curriculum, not just a course, to actualize peace education. And I believe this can only be done if we can call more scholars and experts in varied disciplines into the task.

Just by looking at the nature of the discipline and the structure of the course, it is obvious that a general peace education course taught by one person can hardly deal with all the numerous strands of thinking and practice on her own. Realizing the limited background that I have from the very beginning of the conception of the course, I have tried to invite experts in many fields to come to the class as guest speakers. The list includes a campus councilor on anger-control techniques, a medication instructor on relaxation techniques and step-by-step meditation procedures, a navy admiral on the military perspective of deterrence as part of national defense, and a political science professor on prevention and intervention measures for international peacekeeping. Students can also contribute to the guest speaker forum – they either make suggestions on whom to invite or actually find the expert for the class from their own networks. For example, one semester, a panel of religious professionals on the concepts and practice of peace was arranged completely by students who went to their own religious communities and invited the speakers. These guest speakers have brought into the class not only their expertise and insights, but different perspectives that evoke, sometimes heated, discussions. Even so, many issues have not been touched yet – such as development, human rights, philosophical base of conceptualization of peace, and feminist approach to peace. After making efforts for three semesters, I realize that it could be a mission impossible – if I keep doing it alone. We need team teaching, collaborative course planning to approximate the interdisciplinary nature of the field as well as the wide array of issues to be studied. With the recent teaching technology at hand, we could organize distance education courses available to students in several universities and bring in scholars and experts to address different aspects of the discipline. Since there might not be enough time for all issues to be covered in just one semester-long course, I propose we have one umbrella-type of course in the fall semester as a general introduction to the discipline; then we could offer a more advanced level course with different emphasis every spring such as international peacekeeping, human rights and peace, or ecological peace (with the introductory course as the prerequisite). Gradually I hope it will grow into a series of courses or even an inter-college program with certificates issued to those who complete it. Hence we could integrate the existent human resources and offer students the best we have right now; moreover, the coherent effort might call more attention to peace education in the academia and in the society, and eventually to our ultimate cause -- peace.

Finally, the western perspective of the current peace studies, in particular conflict management literature (e.g., mediation and negotiation), might merit a cautionary note here. If negotiation and mediation skills are viewed as tools to achieve a certain goal, it inevitably would instrumentalize the mode of communication that one develops to adopt on their path to peace. Moreover, the attributes of honesty, open-mindedness, trust, friendliness, and etc. become desirable solely in service of achieving a cost-efficient substantive outcome. This overbearing toward the utilitarian purpose of the values and attitudes would hurt the ultimate transformation to living out peace as a way of life, which is one of the objectives of peace education.

Another assumption in the current conceptualization of the process of managing conflicts is

the rational approach to strategies and tactics in the west. Emotions (e.g., anger) are considered disruptive in the rational thinking process (e.g., at the negotiation table) in which all parties involved should remain objective and cool-headed, using all the techniques to achieve mutually beneficial solutions. Unfortunately this ideal episode is not, as we have observed, always the case in reality. While emotional responses are natural in conflict situations, dismiss or defuse of them might mislead the disputants to ignore or overlook the important information implied in those messages and their ramifications. For instance, what really matters in a dispute is sometimes deeply buried below the rage, or more typical of our culture, behind all those excuses and procrastination in action. When trying to adopt the current model of peace education curriculum, we, as peace educators, need to be aware of the mono-cultural bias inherent within. In addition, we need to modify the skill and tactic repertoire in the literature with a cross-cultural twist so that it could be more appropriately applied in our own culture that is in so much need of peace at the time. If we really want peace for ourselves and the future generations, I believe this is the time starting educational efforts to prepare for peace.