

## EDUCATING FOR PEACE

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Four years ago, at the turn of the new millennium, there was the anticipation that the world was about to enter a truly new age. Alongside those who awaited the event with anxiety, expecting catastrophe, there were many others who felt that the 21<sup>st</sup> century might truly augur a time when we might look at the end of human history of war, needless suffering and torment. Of course, one might argue that there was nothing especially rational about either expectation. The level of human suffering changes with the transforming of the conditions that produce pain, not the movement of a calendar. Still, it was hard not to feel something was stirring. For me the most memorable aspect of this event was simply how it created a sense of common connection across so many of the world's peoples. The innovations of communication technology made it possible for us to follow on live television the inauguration of the new century from time zone to time zone, and from continent to continent. We could watch, and share, with people all across our planet this common event. There was something, I felt, wonderful about this celebration that was inclusive of people all across our world, focusing on our *common* human destiny rather than the differences that separated us. Through the immediacy of television we could witness, and share vicariously, in our living rooms the joyful celebrations of human beings in the rich diversity of their physical appearance, and in the extraordinary multiplicity of their cultural and spiritual expression. Yet unlike most shared global events today, such as the Olympic Games or the World Soccer Cup, we rejoiced not in our victories over one another as individuals and nations, but in the pleasure of a shared renewal of time, and with the sense of new possibility.

The events of four years ago now seem like a very long time ago. The hardheaded realists were right that all of this celebration would mean little in hindsight since not much really changed in the human condition. Poverty, malnutrition, disease, unemployment, war, greed, racism, ethnic hatred, environmental despoliation etc., were still with us even after the advent of the new millennium. These things cannot be denied, so what do we expect? But, perhaps, some of us can be forgiven if, for a moment it was as if the heavens had opened and we were just given a glimpse of a world that shared common sense of joy and hope; in which we experienced a feeling of our common humanity, while relishing the

multiple and devised ways that this humanity expressed itself. For a moment one could be forgiven if we imagined a world that had seen beyond those often lethal markers of difference—race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, and could recognize the value and wonder of our shared *humanness*.

Few of us then anticipated that less than two years from the start of the new millennium this country would find itself confronting a rage that would unleash unprecedented terror on thousands of innocent people in the greatest city. Few anticipated that's the world would be plunged into a new spiral of violence and war. This new war pointed to the complex, even intractable, dimensions of violence in the world. In particular, it made horribly evident the fear and hatred that is spawned by political arrogance, economic power and cultural domination. In the face of this, ancient religious faiths turn rabid, intolerant and violent as they absorbed, and became a vehicle to mediate, humiliation, insecurity, powerlessness and social injustice. And, on all sides, people become convinced that right, even God, is on their side, and the enemy comprises not flesh and blood human beings, demonic force that must be swiftly annihilated.

And so we were awakened from our tantalizing dream of peace, and the possibility of a world without the bloody death, maiming and physical suffering that encroaches on so many lives. Today, it seems, violence names our lives. Wars continue to rage all over the world; countries threaten one another with nuclear annihilation; brutality and violence, especially against women, knows no borders; terrorists treat their own bodies, and that of their hapless victims with horrifying indifference; racism, ethnocentricity and homophobia provide reasons to inflict emotional and physical pain on one's neighbors; tribalism gives license to mutilate and annihilate parents and children. Across the globe, recent surveys by the United Nations have shown the appalling number of children (estimated at over two million) now actively mobilized as combatants in wars. And there is the *structural* violence that is less immediately visible as a form of violence, but builds human suffering into the very means by which a social system operates.

Nor can we ignore the culture of violence that so influences everyday life in this country. The number of firearms in circulation in the United States is estimated to be at over 190 million. It sometimes produces the horrifying outbursts of school violence which, from time to time, focuses a nation's shocked attention. But less visible are the thousands of other

victims of violence. Homicide is now the third leading cause of death among children 5 to 14 years old and the second leading cause of death among youth and young adults<sup>(1)</sup>. The dangers faced by women both, in their homes or on the streets are well documented. Violence and terror directed at gay people and migrant workers, or out of racist and anti-Semitic motivation, continues. And there are the everyday forms of violent intimidation such as bullying in schools, and abuse of children by adults, that may not produce permanent physical consequences, but scars the soul in ways that can be equally long term in their effects. Behind this is a culture that endlessly celebrates war, guns, violence and aggressive behavior. While it is far too simple to blame Hollywood, with its ceaseless outpouring of movies that graphically portray killings, torture, and murders, we may assume it contributes to our culture's addiction to violence. Hollywood has always celebrated the gun, now it provides, for our viewing pleasure, a vivid exposure to a whole new range of murderous technologies. Can we doubt that young people's constant exposure to such images produces what Zygmunt Bauman has termed the disease-like state of *adiaphorization*—desensitization to the reality of human pain and loss<sup>(2)</sup>. Movies that graphically depict mutilation, rape and torture are meant to evoke a cool detachment among young people. The latter are invited to enjoy the terror as entertainment and release. Elsewhere, gangland brutality and rap music exist in a symbiotic relationship, each goading the other towards greater excesses of aggressive posturing, misogyny, and ultimately, violence. Heroic depictions of the Mafia underworld have jumped from the screen versions of Italian-American culture to the real world of poor urban Blacks and Latinos.

Of course the violence we are talking about here belongs overwhelmingly to the world of boys and men. It is sometimes easy to forget that the vast preponderance of violent acts are committed by males. Violent crimes committed by women are an insignificant proportion of the total. Shootings, bombings and mayhem are the focus of many, if not most, of the popular video games (almost always played at by males), with their ever more realistic simulations of violent and life-threatening behavior. And we should not forget here the role of the professional sport in constituting a popular culture that so much emphasizes and celebrates testosterone-driven aggression. Hockey, football, basketball, baseball provide only the most visible vehicles for a culture of intimidation, threats and physical attacks. The value of the aggressive will to win at all costs is something that is relentlessly glorified in our culture, and permeates now not just the highest levels of professional sport, but increas-

ingly college athletics, and even athletic leagues for adolescents and children.

Yet, as we enter the 21st century, it is surely time to question the inevitability of violence in our world. Can it really be true that human brutality, war, indiscriminate terrorism and torture are the *inevitable* fate of humankind—the unavoidable products of human frustration or conflict? Must we regard violence as an unalterable dimension of human—especially male—behavior? Whatever kinds of progress we have made as a species, the world continues to be awash in violence and bloodshed. And the new millennium that began with so much hope, now, already, looks very much like the old one—through our capacity to inflict harm on others grows dangerously with our technological sophistication.

The answer to all these questions can, and should be, no. Despite all the awful events that seem to surround us, it is also possible to see an emerging consciousness that points to the possibility of transcending such behavior: international courts that hold torturers and war criminals accountable; global treaties that renounce genocide, or the use of inhuman means of combat; an increasing cognizance of the terrible emotional and physical consequences on children of adult violence; and public resistance and denunciation of the brutality and coercion directed at women. All these suggest a growing counter consciousness to the usual human behavior. Despite continuing wars there is good reason to believe that there is increasing public revulsion to the use of violence in dealing with human difference and conflict. We can look at the unprecedented world wide mass protests at the use of military means to resolve the crisis in Iraq. *But, in the broadest sense, our greatest human challenge—to end the violent nature of our existence, is an educational one.* The growth of a counter consciousness to the acceptance of violence needs to be the result of a deliberate human effort to develop an understanding of, and sensitivity towards, its destructive and futile consequences. Educating for a more peaceful world must, I believe, be placed at the center of our educational vision. Of course, this educational challenge is quite unlike the ones that our politicians and their bureaucratic henchmen now insist are central to the current agenda for education. Peace education is certainly very far removed from the compulsive quest for higher test scores, or the concern for technical competencies which has emptied educational experience of meaningful intellectual, emotional, or spiritual purpose. Despite what our political and corporate leaders would like us to believe, the quality of life in this new millennium will depend much more on the capacity of human beings to find

ways to resist the draw of victimizing and brutalizing their fellows, and the seduction of joining those who build their sense of identity and value on the indignity or pain of others. Rather than increasing competitive pressures and stressing individual differences, as our current education does, peace education aims to transform our culture and our consciousness. Peace educators make the point that ending violence is ultimately not a pragmatic matter of containing, or enacting laws, against violence, but a matter of creating a *culture of peace*—one rooted in respect for life, social justice, humility towards one's own truth, empathy for the other, and a commitment to addressing differences and conflict among us through democratic processes of dialogue and reciprocal understanding.

We can see more clearly than ever, that peaceful understanding and co-existence between human beings depends on something more than deal-making or grudging toleration of the other. It requires a transformative process more deeply rooted; a profound change in our cultural attitudes, beliefs and behavior, as well as a change in the psychological dispositions that shape how human beings react and relate to those others who share our world. Political agreements and treaties are necessary but not sufficient dimensions in the making of a world where difference is respected and valued, and violence gives way to an appreciation by all of life's incalculable preciousness. The latter can only be achieved through an educational process that seeks to influence the way our children think about, and treat, others who share this earth with them. And, I believe, we can learn from the terrible barbarism, callousness, and insensitivity of human experience, so as to begin to construct an education for our children that might lead them away from our culture's endemic violence, dangerous stereotypes and conformity to intolerant behavior. The overriding challenge to education for our new millennium is surely to be found in this struggle to educate our children for a culture that truly values peace rather than war, compassion instead of hate, and respect rather than intolerance. In the remainder of this address I want to sketch out some of the ingredients that, I believe, are needed in order to teach our young people about the meaning and importance for peace and peace-making. Let me reiterate, educating our children for peace should be seen as no *add-on* to the more important educational tasks of schools. In a world that is filled with ever more menacing threats to life and the continued existence of the planet itself, peace education needs to be seen as something that is, more than ever, essential to all individual physical, social and spiritual survival.

### *1. Where you stand depends on where you sit*

For most of my life I have had a passionate involvement in Zionism and in Israel. As a young Jew growing up in England, I was always acutely concerned with the fate of the country. However secure and comfortable life in England was for me, and other Jews, there, I always felt the shadow of Jewish history around me. I carried that suspicion that Jews were never really secure even in a land that seemed peaceful and democratic. German Jews too, had believed that ‘it couldn’t happen here’ — that a country that has made such great contributions to human knowledge and culture could not possibly become a vast ‘killing field’ for Jews. History, I had believed, made it quite clear that wherever Jews lived and settled, they were always in some threat of their lives and their freedom. Sometimes this threat went underground, but sooner or later it was bound to reappear bringing with it torment, fear, and pain. While my parents were born in England, this never freed them from the sense of being ‘strangers in the land’. The children of immigrants they could never quite see the land of their birth as a place where they truly felt at home. This sense of being alien was, in some degree, passed onto their children. At each Passover *seder* — the ritual meal that celebrated the ancient escape from Egyptian slavery, we would speak the words, “Next Year in Jerusalem.” Whether or not we really intended to leave for Jerusalem in the coming year, the words signified our sense that we really belonged to another place, and that place was Israel. While we, like most Jewish families, did not feel the immediate demand to pack our things and move to this new country, Israel represented for us, and for most Jews, a place that offered security from threats, and potential threats, of a dangerous world. Only a few years after the end of the holocaust which has destroyed a third of the Jewish people, Israel’s establishment in 1948 seemed like a miracle of redemption that offered hope and opportunity to the thousands of disciplined Jews. While my belief in the need for a Jewish state that could offer Jews safety and sanctuary in a hostile world remained, I later came to hear of a very different saga of suffering and humiliation. I learned that there was a people who, as a result of the establishment of the Jewish state, had lost their homes and land. I also learned that, from the Arab viewpoint, the establishment of Israel was no miracle, but a disaster that evoked shame and humiliation. Jews, from this standpoint, were not seen as returning to a land that had been party of their prayers and hope for two millennia, but the latest wave of European settlers come to dispossess Arabs of their land and inheritance. I learned that far from the land being empty when Jews came

to farm and establish their settlements, there was already a Palestinian people living and working there who were dispossessed by the settlers. The creation of the State of Israel made thousands of these Palestinians second class citizens in their own land. And following the six-day war, several million Palestinians found themselves living under a military occupation. This occupation would continue for the next four decades, creating an endless circle of hate and enmity as Palestinians resisted the occupation that deprived them of political, civil and economic rights and freedom. The occupation made everyday living a nightmare of land expropriations and loss of property, military invasions, and road blocks that made travel to schools, work and hospitals difficult, even impossible. This transformation in my thinking, it is important to say, was a difficult process, requiring me to have my original beliefs and understanding challenged and tested. Most of all it required me to step out from my own secure point of view and attempt to see the world from a very different—indeed opposite—vantage point.

Of course, the conflicting viewpoints of what is happening in this small, but troubled area of the world, turns every event and dimension of the situation there into a struggle over which version to believe<sup>(3)</sup>. There is a basic issue of who is the victim in this struggle; Palestinians who are deprived of the elementary rights to national self-determination, or Jews who want nothing more than a safe and secure homeland. For Jews the wars and battles that have been fought against Arabs represent the struggle for survival in a region that for a long time refused even to recognize their legitimate presence. For Palestinians there has been a parallel process of denying their presence, their losses, and claims to land and property. For each side, the actions of the other represent a brutal and insensitive demonstration of human behavior. And on each side there are parallel forces that claim that God, or national right, is on their side, promising them sole ownership of the territory<sup>(4)</sup>.

I have taken this brief excursion through this seemingly endless, and often deadly, dispute between these two, long-suffering peoples, because it illustrates well what makes human conflict so difficult to resolve. In the many talks and discussions I have been involved in over the years that have to do with this conflict, I am struck, again and again, by how angry and frustrated people become that others cannot see the world as they do. 'Why can't you stop and listen to what I have to say—and you will see that I am right and you are wrong!' In teaching about peace we have to start by recognizing that in most disputes each party is convinced that their position is the one and only one that makes

sense and is morally justified. However difficult is the process, peace starts through a process that must affirm the right of each side to be heard, and their thoughts, feelings, and arguments to be treated with attention and respect. More than this, however absurd or even heinous the other side's position appears to be, peace education requires us to listen to it with an attitude of humility. One must believe that there is something important to be learned here about the anguish and frustration, hopes and dreams of other human beings who may inhabit a world, and a history, quite different from one's own. One must start by acknowledging that one's own perspective is a story that might occlude, distort, or silence the experience of the other. There is wisdom to the notion that one's enemy may often be someone whose story you have not yet truly heard. Peace education means that one must learn what it means to listen to the other's story even when it contradicts our most cherished beliefs.

A culture of peace does not mean a world without differences. On the contrary, to educate for peace means to take very seriously the way that our different social positions in the world—who we are, how we live, who we identify with, what has been our experience—produce very different understandings of reality. It is an extraordinary consequence of what we sometimes refer to as 'post-positivist' philosophy, that we can now recognize how reality is much more about the way people *perceive* things, rather than being about something that exists in an objective state, that can be ascertained by human beings through means that are unsullied by passion, prejudices and preconceived assumptions. The *truth* of our situation cannot easily be separated from the way that people make sense of it. People's capacity to discern what is going on is always shaped and limited by the place from which they view the world, and this place is likely to be one where they have important emotional, ideological or material interests at stake. With this in mind, it becomes very difficult to talk about eliciting 'just the facts', as if the facts can be extricated from the passionate investments that we have in seeing and making sense of our experience in a particular way. To teach peace means, in the first place, educating our students to recognize the need to hear the stories or narratives that *each side* tells about what this conflict is, in their eyes, truly about. We must learn to view the 'truths' that emerge as not mutually exclusive, but as an additive process in which the conflicting views deepen our understanding, and widen our perspective, on the *whole* reality.

When we ask students in a classroom to deal with matters of significance to them—racism, homosexuality, religion, capital punishment, that and matters of politics, even gang or clique loyalties, as well as the more personal things that divide people, we must expect that the arguments are not really about the facts, but about how people make sense of things in their world, and the emotional investments that they have in defining issues in a particular way. In a certain sense we could say that their lives depend on how things are defined or given meaning. That is why it is always easier for teachers to stay away from the contentious issues (usually anything that has to do with politics, religion or sex—the things that usually interest us most!). Sadly when, as educators, we do this, we not only make education a bland, uninteresting business, we also deprive young people of the opportunity of learning the difficult art of listening, and the crucially important capacity to search for understanding among diverse points of view.

It should be clear from what I have said, that even the willingness to listen to the other's story is insufficient. To really hear the other side's frustration and suffering requires us not merely to take to mind what is being said, but to *take it to heart*. We must develop the capacity for *compassionate attentiveness* to the words of the other. We have to teach what it means to really listen to the words of others without the immediate intervention of our own beliefs and assumptions. This means confronting the distorted images of the 'other' that turn, for example, all Muslims or Arabs into bloodthirsty and cruel killers (the perennial villains of Hollywood films). These often only serve to defend us from having to seriously engage the experience of the other, and block our ability to 'walk in the shoes' of someone else. Such a process means developing those human characteristics of empathy and sensitivity towards the other. Among boys, in particular, a great deal of research has shown just how contrary these characteristics are to so much that currently shapes masculine identity<sup>(5)</sup>. A virulent masculinity has insinuated itself into some of the most influential areas of popular culture. This hyper masculinity emphasizes emotional invulnerability, and an aggressive individualism. The latter also feeds it a go-it-alone, warrior kind of mentality (manifested in a swaggering, chauvinistic, kind of politics), that is the very opposite of the kind of emotional sensitivity and empathic openness that anti-violence education demands. Such education requires the space and support for developing identities in which emotional expression, and compassion for the feelings of others, are neither suppressed nor reviled.

## 2. *First Justice, then Peace*

Violent conflict, wars, riots, and insurgencies, even terrorism, are almost always, in some way, related to the imposition of injustice on individuals or collectivities. To teach peace as something more than sentimental kitsch is to help students see how inseparable is the dream of peace from constructing a more just world. Social injustice, which means the systematic devaluing of human worth, and the restriction of the opportunities for living full and free lives among a particular group of people, inevitably brings frustration, resentment, and anger. It is the almost certain catalyst for rage and violent reaction. Without clearly recognizing the consequences of creating a society, and a world, that devalues and thwarts the opportunities for so many human beings, our students cannot begin to unravel the reasons for much of the violence that surrounds us. Obviously, this is especially important given the threat of terrorism that we now all face. Clearly those who perpetrate terrorist acts must be brought to justice for their crimes against humanity. However, we must also consider the difficult question of what are the sources of this terrorism—why is there so much anger in the world that can be harnessed by those preaching hate, violence, and destruction. For students this question should be of crucial importance as they are educated into becoming citizens who can engage some of the most critical questions of our time. Our students surely need to analyze the global conditions that spawn the rage that has become terrorism. This will certainly mean that they confront the reality of the wretched circumstances in which so many human beings presently live. They will need to recognize the terrible inequalities that pervade our world, and to understand how those of us living in generally privileged societies benefit from the labor of those who work in the underdeveloped countries that supply so many of the things that maintain our high standard of living. As a matter of both morality and social awareness, it is important that young people know that a half of the world's population now lives on less than 2 dollars a day; and that 1.3 billion people must get by on less than one dollar a day. Or that 4 billion people do not have enough food to eat, and 40,000 children die each day from the inability to purchase basic medications or having access to clean water<sup>(6)</sup>. We must find ways to ensure that our students acquire some sense of the hopelessness, deprivation and misery in which so many people live today. A critically aware citizenship makes it vital that our children know something of the scale of social injustice in the world. They need to understand that

where so many grow up without hope or real possibility for living decent lives, we must expect a growing fury directed at those who have, in comparison, so much. Our students need to understand that such injustice begets anger, which in turn can become terror or some other violent manifestation. Perhaps the most difficult issue that we must confront with our students is the fact that, for many people around the world, there exists a new kind of *empire*—one that dominates through economic, cultural, and increasingly, military power—that is centered, here, in the United States<sup>(7)</sup>. This empire is viewed as one that exploits and manipulates the poorest, most vulnerable countries on earth, and whose primary beneficiaries are powerful corporations whose prerogatives and investments are protected by the government through the use of political and military power. If we are to understand the roots of anger in the world, especially that directed at our own country, we will, as teachers, have to honestly explore the way in which we relate to people and countries in other parts of the world. We will, for example, need to examine the extent to which our government (regardless of which political party was in power) has supported undemocratic or repressive regimes in order to protect what gets referred to as our national interests, without concern for the human consequences of their activities<sup>(8)</sup>. We will need to question the ways our national security state undermines democracy with its secrecy and lack of public accountability. And the extraordinary extent to which our human, intellectual, and material resources are diverted to military uses—far out of proportion to any other country in the world (now estimated to be around 500 billion dollars, about as much that is spent by all the other countries combined), as well as the presence of US military bases in so many countries with their imperial presence that is so sure to create local hostility and resentment. We will have to address also the way that powerful corporations operate so as to maintain, and exacerbate, the gross inequities of wealth and living standards in the world; how the ‘religion’ of free trade has left millions of people without an adequate means of livelihood, and countries without the means to educate or ensure the health of their young people<sup>(9)</sup>. At the same time, I know from conversations with teachers, that raising such issues, with their critical social and political implications, can often be to put one’s career on the line. These are not easy times to help students think in ways that challenge the politics and economics of privilege, the harmful uses of power, and their relationship to war, terrorism, and violence.

### 3. *The Threatened Self*

It has been said that schools are mirrors of our society. Certainly the salience of social divisions, invidious distinctions, cruel and insensitive behavior, is the inevitable price paid for a culture where so much attention is paid to hierarchy and comparing human worth. Indeed the moral economics of schools surely cannot be separated from the obsessive emphasis, in the wider culture, on winning and losing, becoming *someone* by distinguishing oneself from those who are left behind as *nobodies*<sup>(10)</sup>. The typical insecurities of adolescent identity are now appropriated and exploited to an unprecedented degree by the market, which powerfully and continually sells, not just products to young people, but the importance of fitting in and achieving acceptance. The booming adolescent market (now the largest segment of the consumer market) is nothing if not a series of markers for what it takes to be 'in' and to be 'cool'. And, by design, it is a place where such status is always insecurely held; the market ensures that what it takes to be accepted is a moving target—today's fashion, style etc. changes rapidly into what is, tomorrow, an outmoded and embarrassing mode of appearance. The powerful emotional needs of adolescents to find a sense of belonging among peers is a process made difficult for many by the competitive and judgmental ethos of youth culture and its excessive preoccupation with the right looks and behavior. Failure to meet these standards of judgment can indeed produce a damaging sense of alienation from one's fellows. The consequences of which can be a hostility that is turned inward to produce depression or suicide, or outward as anger and resentment towards classmates. The power of the marketplace to seduce the young into the most self-destructive behaviors has become all too nauseatingly evident in the campaigns run by the tobacco industry. We should also remember the kids killed on the street by other kids desperate to get their hands on a pair of Nike sneakers. These are, of course, only the more glaring examples of the relentless efforts of corporations to stimulate buying on part of children and young adolescents through advertising that emphasizes the link between product and peer acceptability.

The quest for more compassionate or empathetic relationships should not be confused with believing that one can know everything there is to know about another. Differences among human beings are permanent dimension of being human and cannot be smoothed away. We live in a world which confronts the paradox of being at once smaller and more connected, and, at the same time, where social, cultural, sexual, religious and political

differences confront us more starkly than ever in our daily lives. The issue of differences, and how we learn to live with them, is one of the most important, and vexed questions, of our time. To learn to live in a less violent world we will need to confront the deep fears and anxieties that differences among us stirs. In his brilliant essay on difference Zygmunt Bauman has described some of the contradictory ways we approach this phenomenon<sup>(11)</sup>. On the one hand, at least for more economically privileged, there are cultural differences that lend spice and variety to life-exotic lands to visit, interesting culinary experience to sample, strange spiritual traditions to try out, and so on. But for the more hard-pressed, difference comes in the feeling of being *invaded* by others who threaten one's language, job, the value of a house, the quality of a school, and so on. While the rich are tourists who can easily and safely return home from their trips, the poorer classes cannot leave behind the changing neighborhood or workplace. Acceptance of difference is certainly related to economic well-being and security, and in their absence, hate, racism, and ethnocentrism flourish.

There is, however, more to our anxieties about differences than this. The example of homophobia comes quickly to mind with all of its complex psychological fears and concerns about what it means to assume a *normal* human identity. *Education today, in its broadest sense, has the difficult task of ensuring the formation of a self in which identity is securely grounded and reasonably stable.* At the same time our postmodern world opens the door to identities that are fluid and flexible. It is a world in which we have the unprecedented possibility of choosing and transforming who we are and how we wish to live, our religious faith, our life-style, our sexuality, even our physical appearance. As the sociologist Anthony Giddens has argued<sup>(12)</sup>, this *reflexivity* about the self is one of the extraordinary, liberating possibilities of contemporary life. All of this means that in educating our children we must help them develop what it means to be human in ways that are neither emotionally rigid nor dogmatic. Surely when we learn to see our own identities as something that we both choose and make, we are better able to see others without the fear that they threaten some eternal and fixed way of being human. At their best (i.e. when they are not reduced to the triviality of 'ethnic festivals' and the like), multicultural curricula offer students the possibility of gaining insight into how our identities are anything but permanent and immutable—*who we are is what we are in relationship to others, and that is always changing.* Robert Jay Lifton talks about this as the *protean self*—a self that is many-sided,

flexible, and capable of change and transformation<sup>(13)</sup>. “This protean self stands in direct contrast to the closed fundamentalist or apocalyptic self.”

Sadly, the pervasive influence of the marketplace in organizing our world, fragments and privatizes our lives. It stunts our growth into the confident, autonomous, *as well* as connected, individuals that must be the goal of a culture that properly nourishes our emotional and spiritual lives. The market’s emphasis on competitive individualism ensures a culture in which self-interest and personal reward are far more significant than the sense of interdependence and connection between human beings. The experience of a world in which each of us finds meaning and purpose through our collective ties and responsibilities to one another, gives way to separation, division and envy. The overwhelming emphasis on the values of individual success and personal gain must encourage the sense of rivalry and antagonism between us. Connection and caring can flourish only to the extent that we see each other, not as opponents or rivals, but as beings whose individual lives are enhanced by the degree to which we are mutually supportive of one another. A world whose human relationships are organized around the pole of competition, not care, is a sure breeding ground for a culture of hostility. Violence is the inevitable off-spring of this environment.

More than this however, we will need to find ways to explore with our students the destructive social and psychological effects, on so many lives, of *modernity* itself. However pitiful are the real life circumstances of so many people, almost all are constantly exposed to the ‘good life’ as this is portrayed through the images of television, Hollywood movies, and advertising—images that drive home the huge discrepancies in how people live on this earth, and with it often the deep feelings of injustice and humiliation. Such images, with their emphasis on materialistic, sexual and individualistic desires, are also an assault on many people’s traditional identities and values. Modernity, in its present form, is hugely disruptive to the traditions and beliefs of millions of people. It produces a world that breaks down the bonds of communal support, replacing them with highly competitive and individualistic social relationships. In this new world the primary identity is a self insatiably hungry for more things, pleasures and experience. It is a place in which mutually supportive relationships give way to a world full of jostling individuals always pushing themselves forward so as to achieve more success and more recognition. Modernity means, for many, an increasingly transient and precarious world in which the traditional anchors of people’s lives are disrupted and dislocated by rapid economic and cultural change. In these conditions,

livelihoods are unpredictable, and frequently mean that families are uprooted or divided by the need for parents or children to move far away from their loved ones in order to provide an income for those remaining. Many migrants find themselves in new and alien environments where they feel excluded and marginalized, and sometimes humiliated. Anyone who studies the life of Mohammed Atta and the others who hijacked the planes on that September day in 2001 will recognize in them the stories of marginality and humiliation that life in a disorienting, if seductive, new culture can produce. More than almost anything else we know, it is the sense of humiliation that sets off in human beings a raging anger and a thirst for vengeance. Violence, as Robert Lifton tells us, promises to eliminate the vulnerability that is exposed by our humiliation. However, the violence perpetrated on others only succeeds in feeding the others' fears of vulnerability and maintaining the endless spiral of pain and anger. It is this endless circle of humiliation, violence and counter-violence that we can witness in conflict after conflict.

As difficult to grasp as all this might be, we will have to ask our students to explore this complex world in ways that seek to understand how it can produce what we can no longer ignore—the dangerous flows of alienation, exclusion, and humiliation. And we need to remember that human beings are, in all places, a *meaning hungry* species. Chris Hedges in his book on war<sup>(14)</sup> makes us aware that war offers people a powerful way to fill what are often empty and bored lives. Even with all its destruction and carnage, he says, it gives us what we all long for in life—purpose, meaning, and a reason for living. In a world where meaningful lives are, for millions of people, in short supply, it cannot be surprising that human beings are easily susceptible to the propaganda that might turn neighbors into despised enemies, working class youth into warrior heroes, and the cause of war, a struggle that pits good against evil. All of this demands that our education compels our young people to think beyond the simplistic slogans that justify any current march to war with its demonization of an enemy, and the need to inflict destruction and death on untold numbers of innocent lives. Such binary thinking—we vs. them, good vs. evil—knows no borders. It is a way of war and violence throughout human cultures.

#### ***4. B'Tselem Elohim—the infinite value of each individual***

There can be no education against violence that does not affirm the infinite and unconditional worth of each human life. In trying to answer my own students' questions about

making sense of September 11 and its aftermath, I suggested to them a number of lessons among which was the way the terrible attacks reminded us of the extraordinary value of human life. The human slaughter with its incalculable consequences in personal loss, pain and suffering confronts us with the irreplaceable preciousness of each individual life. Such a lesson, if it is to be more than sentimental cant, must, however, also confront the ways, in our personal behavior, institutions and culture, we so often fail to embody this truth. It means attending to the ways we diminish the value and dignity of those we designate as 'other' in our world. It means confronting the ways that prejudice works to *misrecognize* the intrinsic humanity of others. It also means learning to understand how such misrecognition functions to legitimate an unjust social order.

The affirmation of the infinite and unconditional value of each human life implies always being concerned with the importance of respecting the sanctity of the human body. Peace education insists that violence against the human body negates a fundamental article of faith in the sacred worth of each life. It is a faith that finds its expression in Emanuel Levinas' assertion that we see in the 'face' of every person a dimension of God. To see this is to recognize how each life places on us ethical demands to treat that life with infinite care and devotion. Each countenance must be seen in its *incommensurable particularity* - in other words, a unique beauty which cannot be replaced, substituted or reduced to another. It is the denial of this - when this face is turned into the 'other'-- that makes possible the violation, exploitation or murder of human beings. It is something we know is all too common in our world. It is clear that there is in the United States a deep sense of unease about our public culture and the way it continues to provide images of behavior that cheapen and profane any notion of the sacredness of the human body. Indeed the sense that this culture is permeated by a tasteless, exploitative vulgarity cuts across the usual fault lines of political identity. Often (and I believe unfortunately) identified as conservative voices, these insist that there needs to be a religious or moral critique of our popular culture<sup>(15)</sup>. There is a sense that television and other popular media are prepared to produce and market any cultural product that can win an audience and make a buck. It matters not whether this means shows that are sleazy in their depictions of sex, crass and sophomoric in their humor, deliberately coarse in the language used and the images projected<sup>(16)</sup>. So-called reality TV is without moral boundaries in its willingness to expose human frailty, insecurity as well as the ruthless will to win or survive at all costs.

There is also the way in which technology erodes the clear distinction between the reality of death and pain, and its simulation in video form. Two recent wars in Iraq provided images in which the real horror and pain of death, injury and mutilation caused by bombs and bullets were, somehow, absent despite the long hours of coverage. The terror and pain among the population being attacked were replaced by the breathless excitement of a spectacle. In a culture awash in graphically constructed images of torture and killing that seem to last only as long as the picture on the screen, we might expect a continuing desensitization to the real consequences of guns and other weapons of killing. And, it is important to remember, that the prime audience of these representations are the young. Twenty five children (the size of an average classroom) are killed by guns every two days in our nation. It is fair to assume that there is some connection to the callous and destructive images that fill our airwaves.

### *5. Peace Education and the Language of Hope*

To educate young people for peace requires that we teach them to see the world as it is, but to see also the possibilities for change. As educators we must certainly help students face the realities that surround us honestly and critically, but we must also encourage creative and imaginative images of a transformed world. Put simply, we must encourage our young people to be *grounded dreamers*. Years ago the philosopher and social critic Herbert Marcuse taught us to see how a culture makes itself seemingly unchangeable by shutting down our capacity to imagine alternatives to what presently exists<sup>(17)</sup>. Social change depends on critique, but it also requires that human beings can envisage other ways to live than the ones that presently constitute our world. In my experience as a teacher I have found that there is often serious resistance to thinking that attempts to re-imagine our world and how we live our lives. It is often dismissed as wasteful utopian thinking; an exercise in the pursuit of pointless fantasies. Behind these accusations is the deep-seated despair of individuals who have been educated to reject anything which is not about navigating or surviving the present reality. Yet it is not hard to understand that to educate against violence requires that we get beyond the present violence-saturated culture to *imagine* that alternative ways of how human beings relate to one another are possible. The present culture with all of its brutality, callousness, competition and aggressiveness does not exhaust the possibilities of human existence. Without the capacity to re-envisage

our identities and lives as centered on gentleness, compassion, and loving connections the violence in this world will be not a catalyst for our transformative dreams and efforts, but simply one more dimension of a cruel world which evokes only resignation and a despairing cynicism.

The education I am advocating here is about hope - the sense that the world can be improved and problems surmounted by concerned and thinking citizens. To teach students so that they have a greater sense of possibility means to challenge cynicism, conformity or the sense of fatalism that many young people have about their world - the belief that not much can be really changed. Among other things, this involves teaching a different sense of history than the remote and anaesthetized version that students typically receive. This suggests little to them about their capacity to 'make history' by *challenging* the violence and brutality that surrounds them. It would require them to know something about how people have struggled to stop wars, find alternatives to the violent resolution of conflicts, and organized movements to end the brutal and inhuman treatment of others.

To educate for peace is intimately bound up with questions of social justice and human dignity. It must always, in some way, be connected to how people treat one another. Creating spaces where different voices can be heard does mean, sometimes, listening to words of anger, hostility and resentment. And what are needed are educational spaces where there is a commitment to the constant struggle to bridge differences, to create compassionate connections among people, in spite of the frustrations and resentments that exist, and finally to find the will and capacity to forgive others for the pain they have inflicted, and to seek reconciliation with them. Unlike the hollow institutional integration typically practiced around race or disability or language differences, where students 'co-exist' but remain largely strangers to one another, real educational communities would make possible human encounters with significant dialogue and interaction. Such places would enable individuals to learn to face and deal with issues of anger, distrust, and intolerance.

While educating for peace does seem to require continuing the effort to recognize and value our differences as human beings, I also believe that this is only half the story. Certainly justice and democracy, which are inseparable from the vision of global peace, does imply the full recognition of our living in a pluralistic world - a world of multiplicity and complex differences. Yet, I believe, that to educate for peace means also to teach about that which

*connects us* across cultural borders—our *shared* humanity. It is this underlying connection that drives the extraordinary and ever expanding movement for granting human rights throughout the world. It nurtures, too, the sense that all human life is something sacred, a matter of incalculable value. And it brings us to the radical idea that only loving communities can truly and fully honor the infinite worth and dignity of each person. Educating for peace means, I believe, teaching students to recognize this precious or sacred quality of life, and its inseparability from the loving communities that are needed to nourish and develop it.

A pedagogy for peace does not in itself produce peace, but it does encourage what is called 'immanent critique'; a deeper appreciation of the contradiction between this world of so much unnecessary suffering and insensitivity, and the ageless dream of a mutually caring and just human community. If only for the short time we are together with our students the classroom might become a place where we dream of such a world, and consider, practically, what we could do to bring it closer for all of us<sup>(18)</sup>.

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#### Endnotes

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12. Anthony Giddens. *The Transformation of Intimacy*. Stanford California: Stanford University Press, 1992.
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16. Jessica Cole Kirsch Eads. *Construction of Adolescent Girl's Sexual Identity in the Age of Reality Television*. Unpublished Ph.D Dissertation, 2004
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18. Daniel Landes and Sheryl Robbin. Tikkun