Importing Peace Education from Belfast: A Prosocial Approach to School Improvement in the US

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Abstract

This paper presents the results and experiences of one school within a unique university/K-12 school district partnership that approached school reform through a framework of peace education. Faced with the challenge of improving academic achievement in a district with a history of five years failing to meet Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) as defined by the No Child Left Behind Act, university faculty collaborated with elementary school teachers to implement principles of peace education that have been successfully applied at Oldwood Integrated Primary School in Belfast, Northern Ireland. As two university faculty involved in the project, we present challenges, theoretical perspectives, and the model that guided our initiative, the process, and results of social change in teaching practice.

Background

All too often, schools respond to the pressure to improve academic achievement according to narrowly defined standards and measures by imposing rigid curricula and coercive practice. In contrast, Oldwood Integrated Primary School (IPS) in Belfast, Northern Ireland is faced with this same pressure but exemplifies educational practice based on principles of peace education, creating a safe, supportive learning environment where students are academically successful and socially engaged. Faced with the challenge of improving academic achievement in a K-5 Midwestern U.S. urban elementary school with a history of five years failing to meet AYP (Annual Yearly Progress) and a climate characterized by conflict and mistrust, a unique K-12/university partnership was formed. As in many school districts throughout the United States, the district faced many challenges including high drop-out rates, poverty, and violence, while being held accountable for meeting demanding standards without adequate funding (CEPI,
This paper presents the experiences of three classrooms in one school within that district where teachers approached school reform by studying and applying principles of peace education. In this paper, we present challenges, theoretical perspectives, and the model that guided our initiative along with the process, obstacles, and results of these efforts.

One key element of reform is involvement of parents, guardians, and other community members (Baldwin, 2000; Mussoline & Shouse, 2001). The partnership was designed to create a context in which everyone had voice and opportunities both to participate in meaningful ways and in reform efforts that were responsive to the needs of the students and community. It was imperative to acknowledge the interwoven nature of our past, current position, and future direction. Within this history, there is an institutional context as well as community citizenry.

During initial meetings, it became apparent that challenges in the district went beyond poor test scores. Again and again, participants repeated the following needs: improving communication, developing positive family-school-community relationships, reducing violence, addressing issues of race and making respect possible through mutual understanding of cultural and social class differences, and creating a shared vision for the district.

**Theoretical Framework**

Current work in the pedagogy of peace education (Carter, 2005; Gervais, 2004; Harris, 1998, 2004; Stomfay-Stitz, 1993; 2001) has revealed that there are a number of academic and social variables which interact with each other to create non-violent peaceful environments fostering learning and enhancing school improvement efforts. Although various stakeholders held opposing views about the source of problems, they were in agreement when identifying their concerns for student success, school safety, communication, diversity, and responsible citizenry. This included improvement of understanding of one another, our cultures, religion, and values to enrich shared experiences amongst the entire school community (NICIE, 2005). Goals included affirming that children should prepare to take responsibility for their lives, developing self-confidence and self-respect, learning to use and trust non-violent methods of conflict resolution, and to be helped to be open in social relations despite difference in creed, culture, race, class, gender, or ability.

With the expressed concerns in mind, we collectively agreed that our work to improve academic achievement—in a district where a climate of conflict, fear, and distrust impedes any cohesive effort for effective change—should begin by implementing structures that would facilitate transformation of the culture. With the understanding that academic endeavors support the foundation of our society producing responsible global citizens, our work was built on the dynamics of freedom providing a stable foundation for community support and growth and in this case, also engaged academic growth. Although the urgency of the need to improve academic achievement and meet AYP (Annual Yearly Progress) was the impetus for forming our partnership, we recognized the opportunity to consider larger purposes and act on our shared beliefs that the mission of education is much more than teaching to pass tests. That is, while gaining academic knowledge is important, "We should want more from our academic efforts than adequate academic achievement, and we will not achieve even that meager success unless our children believe that they themselves are cared for and learn to care for others" (Noddings, 1995, p. 675).

Indeed, we may actually interfere with learning when we focus on narrowly defined learning goals and neglect to meet the basic psychological and physical needs of students. Along
with challenging and engaging curriculum, caring relationships as well as positive social and academic interactions are necessary to make learning and development possible (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Comer, 2001; Klem & Connell, 2004; Resnick et al., 1997). Supportive relationships and a sense of community within the school foster positive outcomes with improved attitudes and achievement, along with fewer at-risk behaviors (e.g., Elias, M.J., Bruene-Butler, L., Blum, L. Schuyler, T., 2000). Research in neuroscience has informed our understanding of the physiological effects of stress that negatively impact learning and behavior, providing an additional basis for promoting safe and nurturing learning environments (Hannaford, 2002; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

Furthermore, as educators, we are entrusted with the whole student and that trust compels us to craft the educational experience in such a way that each student is valued and values others, so that each is allowed to reach full potential while developing a sense of justice (Featherstone, 1988; Meier, 1996; Noddings, 1995). We believed that we have a responsibility to prepare students to participate fully as citizens in a global society.

As we considered the structure in which to shape our efforts to change practice, we had pause to consider what Perrone (1990, p. 4) terms the large purposes in our teaching by asking, “What do we most want our students to come to understand as a result of their schooling?” We might also ask, “What type of a world do we prepare them to live in or shape?” Surely, academic learning is important, but it is equally important that students along with teachers are able to participate, critique, and create. With our charge to improve academic performance, we recognized the opportunity to consider our large purposes and act on our beliefs that the mission of education is much more than teaching to pass tests. As educators, we have a responsibility to prepare students to participate fully as citizens in a democracy through civic engagement. Even as we seek to prepare students to meet AYP (Annual Yearly Progress), we have the opportunity to model and teach with peace and justice.

Peace education encompasses processes and philosophy that promote awareness of peace as a possibility and teaching strategies for creating a culture of non-violence (Harris, 2000). Within the pedagogy of peace education, the needs articulated by the district and our own beliefs about the large purpose of education were addressed: equity, non-violent problem solving, cooperation, communication, critical and creative thinking, self-knowledge, mutual understanding, and respect (Carter, 2005; Gervais, 2004; Harris, 1988, 2004; Stomfay-Stitz, 1993; 2001). Grounding educational practice on those principles would allow the district to become more safe and supportive, thus fostering learning and making school improvement efforts possible. While peace education addresses a broad range of issues, disciplines, and practice, we began by focusing on strategies including Circle Time (Mosley, 2004) and conflict transformation to foster relationships and problem identification and solving in order to develop positive learning communities and engaged citizenry (e.g., Comer & Haynes, 1998; Celliti, 1998; Epstein & Sanders, 1998; Ooka Pang, 2001; Watson, 2004).

Oldwood Integrated Primary School in Belfast, Northern Ireland was a model for our work (Pickett, 2006). Located in a society with deeply engrained social divisions (O’Connor, 2002), Oldwood is an exemplar of the Integrated Education movement in Northern Ireland (NICIE, 2001, 2005). Founded on a vision shared by families and educators of a school where all children are valued and individual needs are met, while cross-sector understanding and respect is fostered; Oldwood has an ethos of respect for self and others, tolerance and appreciation for diversity, and successful learning. Educational practice is child-centered, and discipline is non-punitive and democratic.
We explored the foundations of practice at the Oldwood through observation, conversations, interviews, and review of school documents and literature related to integrated education. Several categories emerged: mind-body-spirit connections, democratic leadership, teacher empowerment, positive interactions, approaches to non-violence, holistic, anti-bias curriculum (NICIE, 2002), and inclusive environments. Strategies that support these foundations include the Circle Time Model (Mosley, 2004), Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU), structural support for reflective teaching and innovation, teaching strategies for communication and non-violent methods of addressing problems, meaningful family involvement, community collaboratives, and habits of acknowledging social as well as academic accomplishments of students and adults. In the past ten years, Oldwood has developed comprehensive programs resulting in academic success and an ethos of peaceful practice.

At the start of our collaboration at Holiday Elementary, we encountered quite a different atmosphere. Holiday, a small urban school in the midwestern United States, is located in a neighborhood characterized by high rates of poverty, crime, and violence. Ninety five percent of students are African American; the remaining 5% are a mix of Native American, European American, and Latino students, while 99% of teachers are European American. Although most teachers demonstrated care and commitment toward their students, a history of animosity between administration, teachers, and staff resulted in a climate of distrust, resentment, and disrespect that impeded efforts to improve educational practice. Our work began with the daunting task of creating a shared vision among groups who openly expressed distaste for working together. Before we could come together with a shared vision, we needed safe forums to begin healing and develop mutual understanding, respect, and trust.

**Methods/Modes of inquiry**

Researchers in the two contexts engaged in contrastive/comparative forms of inquiry and action research methods (Reason, 2001). The various forms of data collection included interviews, participant observation, and collection and analysis of student success indicators. A contrast/comparative perspective grounded in anthropological inquiry was used to analyze the data for patterns, domains, coding, constructs and triangulation. Multiple forms of analysis (e.g., document analysis for longitudinal change, adoption or rejection of peace education practices, analysis of student achievement variables, interview responses for patterns of similarity and or difference) were used to ensure reliability and validity of findings (e.g., Atkinson & Hammersley, 1995 and Clifford & Marcus, 1986). Changes noted over time were considered important across these case studies, so beginning and concluding documents and practices were given particular attention for the purposes of assessing the degree to which peace education principles and empowering practices were adopted or refused.

Beginning with the initial formal/informal meetings and exchanges, action research informed all phases of our partnership. These gatherings allowed members of the experimental classrooms to construct understandings, define problems, and generate solutions. Regular meetings throughout the study allowed a continuous cycle of reflection, identification of problems, generation and implementation of solutions.

Care was taken to construct two unifying lines of inquiry across the two contexts. Researchers specifically were interested in exploring the ways that peace education principles could be integrated into a learning community to construct a shared vision, reduce violence, improve communication, improve relationships, address issues of race, and foster respect.
Researchers also examined the effects of peace education principles on learning and engagement in these contexts (e.g., student achievement, attendance rates, and referral rates). Indeed, we were joining together for the purpose of finding solutions to specific problems that had been identified by stakeholders in the school community. The new forms of understanding that would result from the reflective process are as important as the practical outcomes. As they were supported by the network of community members, parents, guardians, educators, and students, the teachers would be empowered by constructing and applying their knowledge to solve problems (Anderson, Herr, & Nihlen, 1994).

The core questions guiding this study were as follows:
1) Will the practices that have been used successfully in Northern Ireland to promote self-esteem and positive relationships in classrooms work in a Midwestern elementary school?
2) Will making positive relationships the focus of classroom practice impact student learning and engagement?
3) Will our collaboration enhance teacher autonomy and efficacy?

Data Sources and Analysis

Data were collected over the course of the first year of the partnership and triangulated through a combination of methods to ensure integrity of findings and to gain perspectives of teachers, students, and researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Applying a Soft Systems Methodology to organize thinking, the underlying philosophical basics are interpretative, focusing on participatory qualitative issues. This study used a combination of data collection methods: 1) field notes, 2) anecdotal records (self-reflections, dialogues, stories), 3) teacher records and reflections, 4) participant observation, 5) notes from teacher study groups, 6) journaling, and 7) informal interviews. As a collective, different committees met regularly throughout the academic as well as calendar year to address the guiding questions:
1) Will the practices that have been used in Northern Ireland promote self-esteem and positive relationships?
2) Will making positive relationships the focus of classroom practice impact student learning and engagement?
3) Will our collaboration enhance teacher autonomy and efficacy?

Hubbard and Power (1993) describe the process of analysis as "seeing and then seeing again" (p. 99). It is a process by which the mass of data is categorized and reconstructed in order to bring structure and meaning to the whole. Data were analyzed according to steps described by Glaser and Strauss (1967) in the constant comparative method by first identifying categories and concepts and continuing to refine and categorize as new data was collected. As categories emerged and grew, larger themes or frameworks were tested to develop emergent theories, which were continuously tested against new data.

Formal/informal meetings, meetings of the whole committee, and the entire education faculties, workshops, dinners, as well as one-on-one agendas provided volumes and volumes of data. Daily individual checkpoints provided accountability to the adherence or lack of peaceful means. Regular debriefing occurred during meetings with teachers and administrators; these debriefing sessions served as opportunities to member check during the process of analysis. University faculty met on a weekly basis to discuss data and accuracy of interpretations and
judgments about data were evaluated. Finally, members of a partner university served as outside observers who discussed data, asked questions, and offered alternative explanations.

Findings and Conclusions

During initial meetings between participating teachers and university faculty, many teachers expressed reluctance to join in partnership or engage in any type of innovative practice due to fear and distrust of administrators. At the same time, administrators verbalized support for our work together but were unable or unwilling to work directly with teachers. Relationships had deteriorated to a point of paralysis. As a result, we refocused our efforts and began with a core group of three teachers, teaching in 2nd, 4th, and 4th/5th grade classrooms. They each respected and cared deeply about their students but were concerned about animosity and violence in their classrooms. In addition, they expressed fear of the school principal and frustration with the obedience-based discipline policy (Canter & Canter, 2002) that was mandated throughout the school. Ultimately, they desperately wanted change, and in spite of seemingly insurmountable problems among the adults in the building, they were willing to join with a faculty member to develop experimental classrooms. These teachers were willing to take the risks associated with change when supported by a representative of the university but expressed doubts that they would have the autonomy to make professional decisions about their own practice. Their skepticism and the depth of distrust were illustrated by the often-heard comment, "I trust you; I'll try it, but I'm keeping your number on speed-dial for when I get written up." Nonetheless, we began our work using an action research model with a cycle of self-study, identifying problems, setting goals, researching and implementing strategies, and reflecting and assessing results. Our group met regularly during after-school hours and school holidays, problem-solving, sharing experiences, resources, and encouragement. Throughout the course of our work, faculty bridged the teacher/principal divide by communicating goals, strategies, problems, and progress.

Education for a culture of peace became a civic responsibility. It became a matter of understanding as well as resolving the conflict. Intercultural peace between different ethnic, racial, cultural, and religious groups stressed not only what we wanted to eliminate but also what we wanted to create in a positive sense (Groff, 2006). Transformative mediation became crucial in our work to produce visible, clearly defined solutions that demanded a shift in attitude of those involved in the conflict. The resistance and obstacles came in the form of hesitating, indifferent, and disapproving behavior. The teachers needed to see the practical action of school improvement/classroom management and behavior.

Peace education spans generations and global communities. Civically, our social justice heroes and sheros manifest to model change in action from poverty (Dorothy Day), solutions to violence (Gandhi), compassionate living (Jesus, Buddha), and civil rights (Dr. Martin Luther King, Sister Helen Prejean) as well as demonstrate how to negotiate and mediate conflict; how to identify and interpret the culture of a community; how to communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds; identify where cultural change is possible; and create networks. The skills we were asking our community to embody embraced cultural transformation within peacemaking.

The foremost concern was developing self-esteem, empathy, and positive relationships among students. Under the NICIE Statement of Principles, promotion of an atmosphere in which pupils will neither conceal nor flaunt their cultural identities was foundational for classroom equity. We began to explore this principle by implementing the Quality Circle Time approach
(Mosley, 2004) that has been used successfully at Oldwood IPS. Initially, teachers were intrigued with the concept of changing the classroom environment through practices that promoted self-esteem but felt hampered by a rigid school-wide discipline policy that punished children for having problems they did not know how to solve. With reassurance that the superintendent of the district endorsed the experimental status of their classrooms, they agreed to proceed. Circle Time became a joint teacher/faculty endeavor with the faculty member facilitating student groups every Friday morning for the first few weeks. Encouraged by the process, teachers began to study and plan independently. They began to hold class meetings at the start of each day. During those meetings, teachers and students played games, addressed problems, and developed "Golden Rules" to guide how they would behave toward each other, along with rewards and sanctions for behaviors. In addition, a "Golden Hour" took place each Friday with activities that were co-developed by the teachers and students. By developing the activities together, teachers reinforced the democratic nature of the classroom, nurturing student responsibility and involvement.

Circle time meetings were quite challenging in the beginning. Many children were reluctant to "say kind things to each other," and cooperative games were difficult. In the beginning, teachers found circle time difficult to facilitate. They often found themselves directing discussions and meditating sincerity of response. Students often resorted to silly responses and behaviors rather than expressing real feelings and beliefs. At times, some children were ostracized. We all wondered, "Can this possibly work?" As we continued to use the Circle Time model to promote self-esteem and mutual understanding to practice nurturing behaviors and social skills, we learned about each other. Teachers became more understanding and responsive as they came to know their students more deeply. Students became more willing to listen to each other with respect and included everyone, even though it was, at times, an effort.

Along with Circle Time meetings, teachers began to teach conflict transformation strategies to provide students with tools for solving problems without violence. The NICIE principle that children should learn to use and trust non-violent methods of resolving conflict became integral to move our learning beyond the classroom. This was particularly significant for many students who experienced high levels of violence in the community and had been instructed by parents to "hit back if anyone hits you." Rather than interpreting family instructions as simply opposing views about how conflicts should be solved, the teachers recognized parents' desires to protect their children, and thus, the need to communicate the process and accompanying steps that were in place to keep children safe to eliminate the perceived need for violent actions on the part of children.

Themes of respect and community guided curriculum and practice throughout the day. Children were helped to develop self-confidence and self-respect so that they could develop confidence and respect for others (NICIE principle six). Conflicts were no longer viewed as behaviors to be extinguished but rather as valuable opportunities to develop awareness of the issues underlying the behaviors and learn skills for resolving those issues peacefully. Over the course of the year, behavior problems became less frequent and support for each other increased. Students began to ask for Circle Time in which to solve problems, "We need Circle Time because some people are teasing and calling names." Teachers questioned whether changes in their own behavior might be contributing to the positive environment by focusing on positive student behavior, rewarding social as well as academic success, and shifting their orientation to problem-solving rather than forcing compliance. At times, they noted, "This is just so hard; our kids have so many issues, and it seems like we problem-solve all day long." But with debriefing
and reflection, they agreed that those very problems are learning opportunities; neglecting those problems makes any other kind of learning impossible.

In addition, students appeared more engaged in school; they were more productive and attentive and participated in more collaborative activities. Often, they chose to help, console, and support others in contrast to teasing and belittling others with problems. For example, during one observation, DeVon (pseudonym) submitted his homework for the first time all week, and the class spontaneously applauded. DeVon had a bright smile and readily participated in class activities.

In retrospect, participating teachers laughed and described the experimental classrooms experience as a "leap of faith," then moved on to plans for the future as they identified new problems to tackle. When we began, these same teachers expressed hopelessness and were considering career changes. Students "tattled" and complained about peers; verbal and physical fights were commonplace. Teachers later reported overhearing students reminding each other of their "Golden Rules" and trying out new conflict transformation strategies. Teachers also reported that students appeared more confident in the academic arena as well with more active participation and positive attitudes toward their work.

While behaviors and attitudes became more positive within the classroom setting, teachers noted with concern that children were often upset when they returned from lunch recess with tales of humiliation by lunchtime supervisors and fights among children. One teacher noted, "It sometimes feels like we are an island; within our classroom we care about each other and work things out, but when they go to recess, they have to deal with people who don't have the same skills." In spite of improved relationships within the classes, teachers noted that the inconsistency of expectations and experiences during lunch, recess, and "specials" was undermining the progress in the classroom. Increased participation by these teachers in the process improving conditions for learning by meeting student needs through peaceful practices, rather than by state mandated criteria, was liberating as teachers began to teach creatively, and the mantra, "We have to do this because of the MEAP" (Michigan Education Assessment Program) was replaced with creative ideas for meeting educational objectives to benefit students.

Although this process did not eliminate the need to meet AYP (Annual Yearly Progress), it was an approach based on the best interests of the students, educators, and community. The process of inquiry and reflection created a different paradigm, shifting the focus from teaching to pass the test to viewing academic achievement as the result of safe, supportive environments and meaningful curriculum.

A fourth grade girl who joined one of the classrooms mid-year wrote the following poem. She had been forced to leave her previous school because of "behavior problems." The poem is as follows:

KIRA
SMART, INTELLIGENT, GOOD, AND A HARD WORKER
DAUGHTER OF LATOIS JOHNSON
SISTER OF KAYLEY, TYRYANA, AND MYRYAN
WHO LOVES FAMILY, PIT BULLS, AND BABY SISTER
WHO FEELS NOBODY SHOULD HAVE TO GO TO SCHOOL,
THAT EVERYBODY DESERVES BOTH PARENTS,
AND MAMAS SHOULD NOT GO TO WORK FOR 16 HOURS
WHO NEEDS A REAL FATHER, EDUCATION, AND RESPECT
WHO GIVES HUGS, HELPING HANDS, AND FRIENDSHIP
WHO FEARS PRISON, TO DIE, AND FLUNKING SCHOOL
WHO SHARES LOVE, TRUST, AND SMILES
WHO WOULD LIKE TO SEE CHRIS BROWN LIVE, 50 CENT, AND FRANCHIZE BOYZ
WHO IS A RESIDENT OF -------

In the nurturing climate of her new class, she had formed friendships and was making academic progress. After a few months, there were no signs of the problem behaviors that occurred in her other school. This poem enlightened her teacher about her world, her worries, her loves, and concerns, and her dreams. Kira's poem revealed a girl who cared deeply, not the girl whose transcript described her as tough and "doesn't care about school." It also indicated a level of safety and trust she had found in her new classroom with a teacher who wanted to know and support her.

Discussion and Conclusions

A conceptual framework was created to move an educational community in a positive and peaceful direction. Citizenry, particularly within this community, will continue to be an ongoing challenge as well as opportunity. The school curriculum and the manner in which it is delivered shall encourage the development of autonomous individuals with the capacity to think, question, and research (NICIE, 2005). The core questions guiding this study became the essence of the conceptual framework:

1) Will the practices that have been used successfully in Northern Ireland to promote self-esteem and positive relationships in classrooms work in a Midwestern elementary school?
2) Will making positive relationships the focus of classroom practice impact student learning and engagement?
3) Will our collaboration enhance teacher autonomy and efficacy?

In these "experimental" classrooms, student lives and experiences served as the foundation from which students acquired the academic knowledge and skills necessary for successful educational experience not the target of blame for a school that was unwilling to meet the needs and recognize the gifts of diverse students. The experimental classrooms have become families of sorts; they are learning to live and work together. They are learning to appreciate each other in spite of and because of their differences. Relationships and the formal curriculum are interwoven. As students learn content, they are learning how to get along together and to care for each other.

It appears that the practices and guiding principles we borrowed from Northern Ireland have had positive effects on the relationships and climate in the experimental classrooms. Furthermore, a positive supportive climate has promoted academic engagement and successful learning. According to the partner teachers, these changes were possible due to the university/school partnership, "We still have struggles, but it's so much better. You have to meet the basic needs first. But you have to have the freedom to take the first steps, and we didn't have that without the partnership. It's also a willingness to jump: Our leap of faith."
As the climates within the experimental classrooms became more positive and productive, those atmospheres stood out in contrast to the larger school environment. Virtually all of the teachers in the school have expressed a desire to implement Circle Time, NICIE core principles, teaching peace, and Education for Mutual Understanding in their classrooms, and plans are being made to develop a school-wide conflict transformation program. While there is still much work to do, we have made steps toward a shared vision of peaceful, nurturing practice in this troubled school.

**Implications and Recommendations**

Currently, teachers in public schools are under a great deal pressure to improve test scores. Teachers are encouraged to put achievement on standardized tests at the forefront of the curriculum, and the result is often neglect of the very basic human needs of students along with failure to develop the social skills, citizenry, and knowledge needed to participate in a democratic society. Political rhetoric maintains that public schools are failing and that school quality can be measured only by comparing test scores. In this social context, curriculum is vulnerable to becoming preparation for a test rather than evolving in response to student needs and interests. When educators focus solely on the content of the test, it becomes impossible to see the child. As educators, we may be so pressured to produce results in the form of higher test scores that we fail to question whose knowledge and whose reality is being represented in the test-driven curriculum. We may become distracted from issues of poverty and violence in the lives of our children and fail to address the impact of social inequity on educational achievement. When focusing on tests, we neglect to consider Freire's (1993) basic question, "In favor of whom are we teaching?"

Peace education is a movement to humanize education. Students are considered active participants in their learning, and peace education challenges them to look at their participation in the world as something connected to their daily living experience. Students, teachers, and their education are established within a context that helps them to find their voices in order to listen, to trust, and to learn more about themselves. Peace education encourages an interconnected view of the world and gives students tangible skills in managing everyday problems they encounter (Wells, 2003).

The learning community is critical in the enhancement of peace education. Peace education helps us to begin the process of examining why our communities, schools, and homes are increasingly more violent. Many families live dangerously because they do not get along (Hanh, 1991). The same can be said for our communities, schools, teachers, students, and administrators. Most current educational structures are built on foundations that do not readily promote peaceful interaction and collaboration.

The experiences of children and teachers in our experimental classrooms demonstrate that providing a safe, supportive environment in which children are able to communicate feelings and learn to care for each other improves opportunities for academic success. The improved relationships between teachers and students have resulted in increased satisfaction and engagement for both groups. These teachers teach in favor of their students.

The experiences in these classrooms show that positive climates for learning can be achieved by meeting the basic needs for connectedness and safety while academic achievement is enhanced at the same time. Among other things, peace education serves to create climates for
learning that create equity of educational opportunity. Even as we seek to prepare students academically, we have the opportunity to teach with compassion.
References


