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**Peace Education in the Philippines:
My Journey as a Peace Educator and Some Lessons Learned***

by Loreta Navarro-Castro**
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Abstract

In this essay I discuss the development of Peace Education in the Philippines. I also discuss my journey as a peace educator and organizer of peace education. I conclude with lessons that I learned in my work that may be useful for others interested in Peace Education and Advocacy.

“The task of building the earth is the responsibility of us all.”
- Patricia & Gerald Mische

Introduction

One cannot underestimate the influence that a conference or workshop can have on a participant. In 1979, a two-week institute organized by Gerald and Patricia Mische, founders of the Global Education Associates (GEA), was a turning point in my life. I had been a teacher for 10 years when this awakening happened. The experience made me see the importance of educating the educators. I realized how a new vision of education—one that is holistic, human and ecological—could be built from the ground up, by introducing pre-service and in-service teachers as well as school administrators to the learning content and processes that comprise peace education. Upon my return from that Institute, Dr. Lourdes R. Quisumbing, then my school president, concurrently the founding president of the Philippine Council for Peace and Global Education, invited me to share my experience with Miriam College (then called Maryknoll College).

Establishing Peace Education at the College. Hence in the 1980s, the school started its peace education thrust by infusing peace and global perspectives into subject areas. In 1988, a three-unit college level course entitled “Introduction to Peace Studies” was introduced in the curriculum of the International Studies Department. This initial course has evolved into a whole academic minor program called Peace Studies, with a good number of students and with many of its graduates working in civil society organizations (CSOs), and in government agencies such as the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP). Another curricular milestone is the inclusion of a three-unit Peace Education course in the Teacher Education curriculum. In 2020, more curriculum integration of peace into the required general/core curriculum is expected and there are plans to offer a Certificate Program in Peace and Conflict Resolution Education in January 2021. The latter can lead to a Master in Education degree if the student wishes to continue.

Zone of Peace. In 1991, Miriam College committed itself to being a Zone of Peace. In its “Declaration of Miriam College as a Zone of Peace,” the community pledged that it would promote caring relationships; nonviolent conflict resolution, and cooperation instead of aggressive competition; a simple lifestyle; and peace action/activities on social concerns. It was also in the 1990s when the “Whole School Approach” to peace education was embraced. This means that the school has been attempting to infuse the ideas, perspectives and values of peace in

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the various aspects of the school's life—curriculum; teaching- learning processes; student development programs such as education sessions on conflict resolution, peer mediation, and challenging prejudice and bullying; faculty and staff development programming; development of materials; organizational structures and policies, including a restorative student discipline policy; and its socio-political actions. It is an approach that Miriam College has tried to share with other academic institutions in the country during talks and workshops, believing that this is the way to be effective, so that the transformation we are seeking happens not only in the classroom but also in the whole school and even beyond.

Writing a Textbook. A challenge in the 1990s was the lack of instructional materials. This was the time when I attempted to write a textbook entitled *Tungo sa Isang Mapayapang Mundo* (Towards a Peaceful World) for Grade 7 Social Studies. It was soon adopted by other schools as either as a textbook or reference book. In 2008, my colleague, Jasmin Nario-Galace and I worked on a book addressed more to educators entitled *Peace Education: A Pathway to a Culture of Peace* (2008, 2010, 2019). We have used this as our basic material for our teaching and training work and this book is now on its third edition (see the book review by Pat Mische in this issue of the JSE for a link to the *Peace Education.... ebook*).

Establishing the Center for Peace Education. In 1997, the Center for Peace Education (CPE) was formally established at Miriam College, as a natural development in the evolution of the school's peace education efforts. I was its founding director and I continue to work for the CPE to this day. Although based in a college, the CPE's mission is much bigger than just serving Miriam College. Hence, the CPE has the following goals: to institutionalize and strengthen the peace education thrust of Miriam College through faculty training; curriculum and materials development; research and student development programs; helping to promote the culture of peace in the larger society by sharing Miriam College's inspiration, knowledge, and experience with other groups and educational institutions, including those that are underserved; and to network and develop partnerships with peace-oriented groups and with all people of goodwill towards advocating for and building a culture of peace.

The establishment of the CPE enabled a more systematic training of Miriam College faculty and students. Faculty members were given either an orientation or an updating workshop on Peace Education before the start of a new school year. The students received conflict resolution skills training and selected student leaders received peer mediation training.

The Peace Education Network. Recognizing the need to be more organized in our education work and advocacy as peace educators, I initiated the first meeting of the Peace Educators Network (PEN) and was its coordinator until March 2013. Those who joined were people who identified themselves as peace educators or were keenly interested in promoting education for peace and nonviolence in either the school system or through the community-based or alternative learning systems.

The PEN became active in writing joint letters, statements and appeals addressing issues on education. For example, the PEN appealed to the Education Secretary urging the then Department of Education, Culture and Sports (DECS) to “undertake a more systematic teacher orientation and human resource development for peace education and a more systematic utilization of peace education materials such as the modules co-produced by the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process (OPAPP) and DECS.” In 2003, the DECS and OPAPP conducted a nationwide launching of the revised peace education modules. It was accompanied by a series of basic orientation trainings where Jasmin Narlo-Galace and I provided the orientation on peace education. The PEN also sent appeals in connection with the internal conflicts in Mindanao, calling for a ceasefire and resumption of the peace talks each time they were stalled. One PEN statement was against the return of the mandatory Reserved Officers Training Corps (ROTC), which certain members of Congress were proposing at one time.

During the resurgence of war between government forces and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in February 2003 that resulted in hundreds of thousands of evacuees, PEN members engaged in fund-raising for the internally displaced war victims.

Connections with Muslims. Soon after the war of 2003, PEN joined the Mindanao Solidarity Network (MSN). The MSN is a group of Metro-Manila based groups that work in solidarity with Mindanao peace advocates. PEN members have also cooperated among themselves in the conduct of multilateral and bilateral peace education efforts such as the conduct of youth conferences and faculty workshops in PEN member-schools. In 2009, the PEN had a conference on “Good Practices in Peace Education” to celebrate PEN’s 10th anniversary.

In August 2004, the CPE launched, with the help of Balay Rehabilitation Center (a PEN member), a Twinning Project with the theme “Building Bridges of Understanding and Peace” between the Miriam College’s Grade 7 and high school students and students of Rajah Muda High School (RMHS), a public high school in Pikit, Cotabato attended by Muslim students. The project’s overarching goal is to challenge prejudice and to build understanding and solidarity between the two youth groups, through exchange of letters, the publication of joint newsletters and joint training workshops. The teachers involved in the project have also held joint seminars.

In June 2012, I did an assessment of the effects of the project, using content analysis of the themes of the reflection- essays that the student-participants have contributed to their joint newsletter. The findings showed that the theme mentioned most is “aversion to war.” This is followed by the students’ realization of their “role in building peace, including raising the awareness of others,” and their conviction that “despite their differences, Muslims and Christians can be united and can help each other in promoting peace.” Another theme, “Friendship can be created despite diversity” was a belief mentioned by many participants. The subsequent group actions by the student-participants after their return to their school communities have shown that they have undertaken activities relevant to their own contexts.

In the case of the RMHS students, one of their most significant initiatives a few years into the Twinning Project is the establishment of a Peace Club called “Suara No Kalilintad,” a name in their native *Maguindanaon* language that can be translated as “Voices of Peace.” In the case of

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the MC students, they organized short re-echoing seminars for their fellow students. A distinctive activity to which they contribute very actively every year is the annual celebration of the Mindanao Week of Peace/Mindanao Solidarity Week. The regular features of said week are awareness-raising activities and fund-raising to help their twin school, the RMHS, as well as to help Mindanao and peace-related causes. This assessment indicates that there have been positive effects of the project on the participants' beliefs and attitudes as well as on actions they have taken as a group.

The Growth of Peace Education. In 2006, a significant peace education policy framework was signed by then President Arroyo, Executive Order 570. It was entitled "Institutionalizing Peace Education in Basic Education and Teacher Education." I was invited to be a member of the technical working group (TWG) for E.O. 570 to work on the implementing guidelines addressed mainly to the Department of Education and the Commission on Higher Education, the two main agencies tasked to implement the order. This E.O. 570 was welcomed as a hopeful sign because it provided us with a policy framework. However, a challenge that goes with it is the realization that there could be a big difference between having an Executive Order and having it implemented evenly and widely.

From 2007 to 2010, I organized four Peace Education workshops for eight Southeast Asian countries in collaboration with the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC). These workshops were facilitated by Jasmin Narlo-Galace and me. The participants were formal educators, community-based educators and curriculum officers of ministries of education.

Beginning in 2010, the CPE focused on conducting training workshops for teacher-educators or faculty of Colleges of Education in the Philippines. To date we have conducted ten such workshops with teams coming from various parts of the country. The latest one was with the faculty teams from 11 colleges of education of the Mindanao State University System and a few other colleges. We view this as a strategic move because of the multiplier effect inasmuch as teacher-educators teach hundreds of pre-service or prospective teachers each year. In a monitoring survey that was conducted with two batches of participants at least six months after their training, the results showed that all the respondent teams were able to integrate peace education themes in various subjects in their Teacher Education curriculum.

I have also cooperated mainly with two leaders in interfaith peace-building work, Fr. Sebastiano D'Ambra of the Silsilah Dialogue Movement and Marites Guingona-Africa of the Peacemakers' Circle. Together in a group called Uniharmony Partners, we have organized events to mark the UN-declared World Interfaith Harmony Week every first week of February since 2013.

Local and International Networks. I have endeavored to link with networks locally and globally. As former CPE Executive Director (November 1997–March 2013), I have been active in various local networks such as the PEN; the Philippine Council for Peace and Global Education; Waging Peace Philippines; and the Mindanao Solidarity Network. It is mainly through these local peace

networks that I have worked for the promotion of peace education and the ongoing peace processes between government and non- state armed groups. Because of the connections that have been built, the CPE was able to propose to the Bangsamoro Transition Commission that the integration of peace education be included in the draft Bangsamoro Organic Law that was ratified in early 2019.

As for international networks, I continue to be active in the Global Campaign for Peace Education and the Peace Education Working Group of the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), as well as with Pax Christi International (PCI). In 2013, I became a volunteer campaigner for the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), which received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2017 for having led global civil society efforts that culminated in the negotiation of a Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons by 122 states in July 2017. It was a euphoric moment! Efforts are continuing toward this Treaty's ratification so it can enter into force. I serve in the steering committee of the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative (CNI), a project of Pax Christi International. The CNI has co-organized two conferences in Rome and came out with an "An Appeal to the Catholic Church to Recommit to the Centrality of Gospel Nonviolence," which is now beginning to be part of the discourse within Church circles.

Conclusion: Lessons Learned from my Journey

I have learned that it is important to begin with at least two important questions: What is my preferred future, my vision? Why is this my vision? Our answer to these questions will serve as a beacon that will guide us.

It is also helpful to read the signs of the times correctly. There are many crises, threats and negative signs in our world today but we have to read the positive signs too, such as the nonviolent social movements and people who persevere in the struggle and bring hope and encouragement to us. We have to see both signs so we do not become paralyzed to inaction by either despair or complacency.

I also found out that I had to begin with myself, and it is alright to begin with small steady steps. I had to re-examine my own beliefs, attitudes and behaviors; are they in keeping with what I want to "preach"? Gandhi reminded us: "Be the change that you want to see in the world." At the beginning, I experimented by first infusing into my own teaching the new ideas I was reading about and learning about. I tried to adjust as I learned more, including from my own students, and sought to be an "edu-learner."

Within my school community, one of the first steps I took was to find my kindred spirits. We became the core of a widening circle of peace advocates in my school. We became a support group to each other, studied and reflected together, as well as cooperated in mounting activities or position statements that supported peace and justice.

We took a holistic approach; there is a powerful nexus that links head, heart and will. In our teaching let us be mindful of engaging not only the mind (increased understanding) but also the heart (valuing, increasing empathy, etc.) and encourage the will to action. The "Whole School Approach" was mentioned earlier and it helps in building a peaceable community beyond the classroom.

One other important lesson I learned is to think of peace education as an important element in a comprehensive approach to peacebuilding. Promote peace education in the larger society

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especially with strategic groups (policy-makers, teacher-educators) as a way to build a peace constituency, especially including women & youth, in a deliberate and systematic way. Connect with as many actors as possible, horizontally (other Civil Society Organizations) and vertically (government agencies) to increase effectiveness. Advocate policy frameworks to catalyze the changes that need to happen. Be prepared to contribute to policy implementation. Often the government agencies tasked to do the work have too many other urgent concerns and need civil society support.

I have found that we get better results when we collaborate with regional and international peace actors/networks to strengthen both local efforts and the wider peace movement.

And finally, I realized the importance of constantly nourishing courage and hope in others and in myself. Peace work requires us to have the courage to continuously struggle against unpeaceful ways of thinking, doing and relating with others, which need to change. Peace work is a work in progress and does not seem to end; we need patience and perseverance. Despite the challenges we meet, we need to continue journeying toward our vision of peace.

In his poem “What is Hope?” Rubem Alves says: “Let us plant dates even though we who plant them will never eat them. We must live by the love of what we will never see. This is the secret discipline....” We work for peace even if we may not see it fully realized in our lifetime.

In my journey, I have been inspired by this secret discipline, which I believe is also a human and spiritual vocation, and by the nonviolence of Jesus and many peace heroes. Martin Luther King, Jr. left us these words of encouragement: “The believer in nonviolence has deep faith in the future...For he knows that in his struggle for justice, he has cosmic companionship...some creative force that works for universal wholeness.”

*This essay is an adaptation of Loreta N. Castro, (2017), *Three Decades of Peace Education – My Story*. In *Three Decades of Peace Education in the Philippines: Stories of Hope and Challenges* T. Swee-Hin, V. Cawagas, J. N. Galace (eds.), A. K. M. Dinglasan, (asst. ed.), Quezon City, Philippines: Center for Peace Education, Miriam College & World Council for Curriculum and Instruction, Philippines Chapter, pp. 39-44

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