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Cheryl Lynn Duckworth

Nova Southeastern University, cheryl.duckworth@nova.edu

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History, Memory and Peace Education (DRAFT-Please do not forward)

History's Hardest Questions in the Classroom

By Cheryl Lynn Duckworth, Ph.D.

~An enemy is someone whose story we have not heard” ~ Gene Knudsen-Hoffman

Most of the literature and curriculum on peace education, very reasonably, addresses developing communication skills, cross-cultural skills, listening, compromise and peer mediation (Jones and Compton 2002; Lantieri and Patti 1996). These basic building blocks include engaging learning communities in dialogue about tolerance, stereotypes and discrimination. Teaching Tolerance and Facing History and Ourselves are excellent examples of such curriculum creating space for history's hardest questions in the classroom. Much of the original literature articulates the case for including peace education (often called conflict resolution education) in public school curriculum. As the literature on peace education has matured, key works have been defining its history, pedagogical and philosophical foundations, institutional challenges and community impacts (Ndura and Amster 2009; Bajaj 2008, Harris and Morrison 2003, Montessori 1972). Evaluative literature has begun to assess educational outcomes for students, although there remains an urgent need for this in the field (Duckworth, Allen and Williams, 2012). The literature on “critical” peace education holds a broader view of the field of peace education in that it explicitly looks to foreground issues of power inequalities, engaging students in challenging and transforming systems of oppression that impact them. Beckerman's (2011) work on the role of peace education in addressing especially ethnic conflict offers key insights; he dwells on the difficulties of transforming deeply ingrained historical narratives. So too does McGlynn, et al's edition (2009) on the role of peace education especially in conflict and post-conflict environments. Lynn Davies (2004) also examines the role of education in environments currently experiencing violent conflict or immediately post-conflict. She is particularly interested in the role educational systems and curriculum play in shaping identities and reproducing conflicts, and argues for hybridity in our views of diversity and difference if schools

are to be able to contribute to a peace culture. Cole (2007) and contributors, in *Teaching the Violent Past*, focus specifically on the role of history text books and history education in the aftermath of violent conflict. Her volume's case studies of teaching the aftermath of the "dirty war" in Guatemala, as well as the comparison of history textbooks from India and Pakistan, are fascinating in their demonstration of state ideological manipulation to ensure that a certain version of history is the one that becomes official record and thus handed down. Here is a key mechanism of the trans-generational transmission of historical trauma.

Clearly many peace educators wish to be able to do more than foster enhanced communication or cultural skills (as worthwhile as that is), but further wish to interrupt macro-historical drivers of violence. I believe the literature and curriculum on peace education can be usefully advanced by drawing on the growing literature on what is often called historical or collective memory. An important area of interest in broader field of conflict resolution, such scholars seek to understand the role of the "heavy hand of history" in conflict. They seek in particular to understand how groups which have been subject to some historical trauma, such as perhaps a civil war, a genocide, slavery, or the Holocaust, survive and process such horrific suffering—not just as individuals but as a collective and as a culture. What are the impacts of historical trauma and what survival strategies can we observe? How do impacted groups understand these experiences? Of vital importance is understanding what history and memory scholars call "trans-generational trauma", which seeks to understand how groups who have experienced historical trauma, consciously or no, pass this legacy on to their progeny (Volkan 1998). Through what identifiable processes, mechanisms and institutions is a culture-sharing group's collective memory of a violent trauma inherited by the next generation? Conflicts driven by historical memory often feature clear "conflict narratives" which tell the story of a particular group's experience and which often serve to justify the group's actions during the conflict. Typically they present the enemy group as wholly to blame, and often feature enemy images which, at especially high levels of conflict escalation, dehumanize and demonize the "other". As Cobb writes, "Marginalization is the consequence of de-legitimization in narrative" (cited in Cheldelin p. 103). In such contexts critical peace educators can be a part of the overall peace system by facilitating critical awareness of such narratives and open space for students to participate in dialogues which can move a community (and thus a society) towards narrative transformation. Narrative transformation, to simplify considerably, is the shared re-imagining of

the past in order to create a sustainable, secure future. It entails re-humanizing the “other” and acknowledgement of one’s own complicity in the violence, as we can see from the graphic model below. This seems to be a developing, central theme of the literature which engages this nexus between peace education and historical memory.

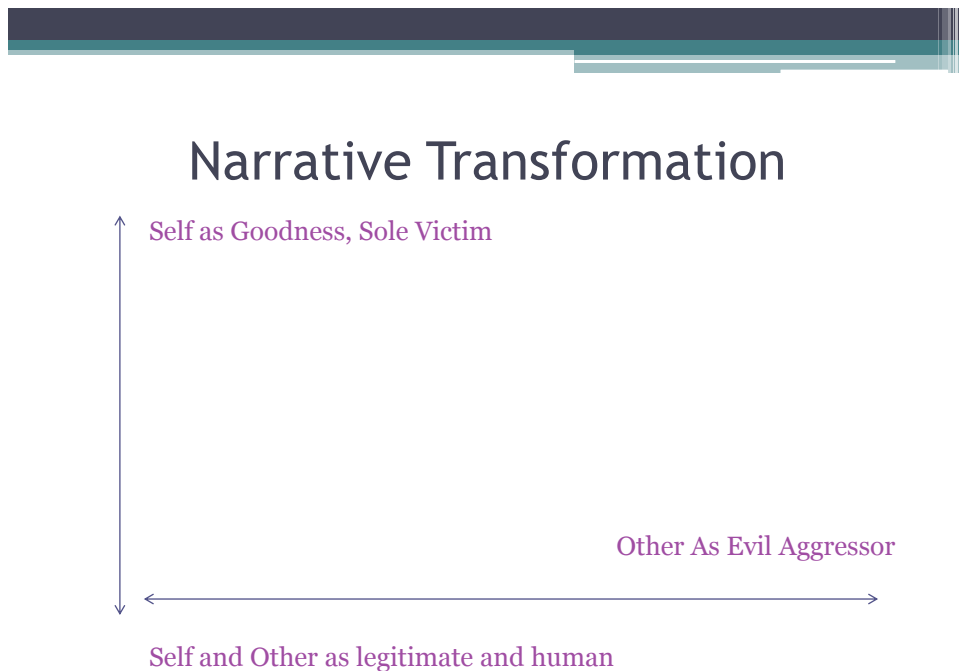


Figure 1: The Dynamics of Narrative Transformation

The relevance of historical memory and trans-generational trauma for peace education then is compelling but in comparison to the wider literature on peace education, the literature which explores this must deepen. Scholars such as Beckerman (2009, 2012) and Zembylas (2008, 2012) have contributed strong theoretical work based in their personal and research experience of divided Cyprus and Israel. Still, there remains a need for far more case studies, geographical expansion and for literature that speaks directly to teachers and educational leaders in addition to more purely theoretical literature. Committed as I am to the scholarship of engagement (see Duckworth and Kelley forthcoming 2012), I hope to offer concrete and “actionable” thoughts on what classroom teachers worldwide might actually do in their learning communities.

If the cycle of what Volkan calls “chosen traumas” (1998) is not transformed, very likely the conflict parties will continue to be trapped in a cycle of grief, enmity and violence. Helping to interrupt such cycles is admittedly a rather audacious goal for peace educators, but given the primacy of schools to group—especially national—identity formation, schools, teachers and curriculum must be a part of the peace building system if conflicts characterized by historical trauma and memory are to be transformed. This basic premise of peace education is widely accepted (at least in the peace education community) but there remains a need for more clarity on exactly how students and educators can impact larger peace and conflict systems. What specific pedagogical and methodological approaches can we identify for teachers in such contexts? There remains also a need for better articulation of the role of peace education in conflict resolution to those who are not in the peace education community, whose conception of security can be limited to Track I (government) activities such as formal peace talks and disarmament. Such roles are obviously crucial but limited; this approach rests on a definition of security that defines such in solely state-centric terms. My focus here is more broad and, in my view, transformative. I conceive of security in more humanistic terms; human security is concerned with the security of individuals and local communities. It goes beyond state security to assert that we have achieved security if families can safely and reliably access food and water, if girls can go to school without suffering an acid attack, or if boys can walk to school without being conscripted into a child army. The notion of human security understands that unless families and communities are secure, the state is not secure.

Because of the violent and protracted nature of conflicts characterized by historical memory and trans-generational trauma, such conflicts are notoriously difficult to resolve. I will aim here to identify what peace educators might be able to use from the literature on “history and memory” and how bringing these two literatures into a conversation with one another can perhaps further empower peace educators to handle history’s hardest questions in the classroom. Our field has been seeking and implementing ways to move beyond simply teaching peer mediation to realize a larger social and political impact to transform conflicts and the systems of structural violence which drive them (Davies 2004, Zembylas 2008, Harris and Morrison 2003, Duckworth in Duckworth and Kelley, forthcoming 2012). Drawing on several essential insights from the literature on history and memory might well be a way forward. Given the largely theoretical focus of much of the current literature, I will include a perhaps more curriculum-

focused discussion below, including oral histories and Elise Boulding's notion of the "200 year present" as a means of helping students (and teachers) begin the challenging work of narrative transformation in the classroom.

Schools are of the State

One key insight that I believe to be under-theorized and under-recognized is the reality that schools and school systems are instruments of the state (unless we are speaking of private schools, which are often still subject to state testing and curriculum requirements). This reality bluntly means that in some conflict contexts, we may need to look beyond schools as a venue for critical peace education. To the extent that the literatures on historical memory and on peace education have linked at least by implication, a sizeable amount of peace education literature has examined how history is taught (or not) in especially middle and secondary grades. Korostelina (2008) examined the content of history textbooks in China, Taiwan, and the Koreas, analyzing their presentation of historical conflicts and the resulting impact on student ethno-national identity. Cole (2007) edited a useful volume whose contributors discuss textbook content and curriculum censorship. Numerous works have examined a critical view of history and the importance of exposing students to subaltern narratives, examining alternatives to the dominant national narrative and the importance fostering a student view of herself as a powerful actor in history (e.g., Zinn 2005). Some curriculum, such as Oxfam International's, encourages students to examine the systems creating and entrenching global inequality; their lesson plans on underdevelopment, trade and debt come to mind. Yet, especially in the U.S., significant barriers remain to a critical engagement with history, peace and conflict for every young person. One barrier is rather a paradox: public education is essential for racial, social, gender and economic justice, yet like any other bureaucracy, self-preservation is too often any bureaucracy's highest priority. That is, public schools are part of an overall government system which has its own interests and power foremost in mind. Nowhere is this reality more clear than when teaching the history of a conflict, especially a conflict to which the government in question has been a party. Conflicts which are characterized by historical memory are often incredibly resistant to resolution precisely because of the entrenched power interests which seek to reproduce their own narrative of the conflict. Typically this involves silencing or at least delegitimizing opposing

narratives. Stamped with the social, cultural power of officialdom and backed by the economic and military power of the state, alternative voices more often than not struggle to be heard.

This is a common enough observation; what is not as often articulated is the resulting need for peace educators to seek venues other than public schools to create and protect spaces for critical dialogue around peace, justice, conflict and reconciliation. A clear drawback to this suggestion is that the compulsory aspect of public schooling (where such laws apply) would be lost; some teachers and students could fall through the proverbial cracks. This means that the facilitators and designs of such “off site” peace education dialogues would need to be more mindful than ever of the relevance and visibility of their program. Also, in some contexts where conflict remains active, perhaps even violent, protecting space for opposing views and dialogues around peace and justice will likely be seen as a direct attack on the regime. Work in such contexts, of course, is inescapably subversive and dangerous. Yet where and to the extent possible, development of community-based, intergenerational curriculum for venues outside the formal school system can create space not available in public schools whose mandated standards and curriculum have not (yet) reformed to make critical peace education possible. I am reminded here of Azar Nafisi’s secret literature class for women in Iran, as she relates in her memoir *Reading Lolita in Tehran*. Such venues might include community centers, museums, libraries, workplaces, houses of worship or youth development organizations. Peace educators might also consider home-schooling, if other venues are not available (Boulding 2000, pg 139-160). Organizations such as UNICEF, UNESO and the International Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) seem like natural fits as well where public schools are not able to serve as sites for critical peace education.

While more “developed” nations pride themselves on the diversity and sophistication of their curriculum, the recent backlash against peace education in U.S. states such as Arizona and Texas speaks of an urgent need to reclaim critical space in the classroom (Reyes 2010, Paulson 2010). Stunning as it is to acknowledge, the very idea of “multi-cultural” curriculum has been or is in the process of being made illegal! In 2010, Paulson reported, “The slave trade would be renamed the ‘Atlantic triangular trade,’ American ‘imperialism’ changed to ‘expansionism’, and all references to ‘capitalism’ have been replaced with ‘free enterprise’” (Paulson Online). Critical peace educators will naturally recognize this as a classic teachable moment; we should

invite our students into the dialogue about why the backlash against peace education has accelerated. The conflict here is clearly over such large historical traumas as slavery, official American treatment of our first peoples and how we should best understand the legacy of colonialism. We can pose in our classrooms critical “essential questions” such as what context might explain the desire to make multi-cultural curriculum illegal and why it is seen as a threat at this particular historical moment. We can invite students to explore previous models of nonviolent social change and how they can apply such models (Duckworth in Duckworth and Kelly 2012). We can invite them (for U.S. educators) to reflect on and articulate their own understanding of American history and what it means to be American; what sort of values and beliefs does this imply? How have we ended up in at least two wars during their lifetimes and what do they think of this? Yet no one should pretend that such dangerous dialogues will not encounter resistance. In querying some of my graduate students as to how teachers in today’s public school classrooms should handle the backlash against the very idea of multi-cultural education (let alone a critical peace education), I heard the reply that teachers should simply refuse to comply with state mandates. I would suggest that this is naïve, especially given the current political and economic context in which teachers can so easily be dismissed from their jobs for mere insubordination. A plan that hopes for such heroics will, I fear, not gain much traction. This context of a clear backlash against peace education is another reason that I believe one way forward, as we continue to organize and advocate together to mainstream critical peace education in each and every classroom worldwide, is expanding intentionally to other venues as well.

Imagining and developing critical peace education beyond the traditional public school classroom offers other advantages as well. When rebuilding communities after a conflict, or when working to prevent a conflict to begin with, facilitating the development of cross-cutting community ties can often prove effective. As conflict groups form and dynamics of contention and hostility escalate, polarization of the entire community can occur as conflict group leaders demand that community members choose a side (d’Estrée in Cheldelin 2008). When communities are segregated or merely unfamiliar with one another, this polarization can escalate even more rapidly. The less diverse a community is—that is, the fewer cross-cutting community ties it enjoys—the more rapidly it can be mobilized into a conflict. Conflict groups can form

around a number of events or drivers, but very commonly, particularly violent and protracted conflicts involve elements of worldview, culture and identity. Aspects of identity such as ethnicity, religion and nationality are often prominent in such conflicts. Hence if communities form what have been called “cross-cutting ties” across the barriers of ethnicity and other identity-shapers, they are less likely to experience highly escalated, protracted violent conflict. Social, political, business and other relationships which integrate or cut across identity groups, even if only in a limited manner, can both prevent and de-escalate conflicts because potential recruits have exposure to “the Other” which can make dehumanizing them more difficult. Also, given that we know identity groups help satisfy our human need for belonging and community, if one has meaningful ties to a number of communities (which are possible conflict groups), one is not quite so threatened by the idea of being ostracized from one particular group for “betrayal”. Similarly, one is logically less likely to perceive threats to begin with. Especially in contexts where large-scale historical violence or oppression has resulted in chosen traumas and thoroughly dehumanized perceptions of the other conflict party, beginning to (re)build cross-cutting community ties across numerous identity lines is an important aspect of post-conflict social reconstruction and of the prevention of future conflict.

All of this brings us back to the classroom. I have just suggested considering alternative venues for critical peace education where necessary. Another possibility is re-imagining schools as community centers. In my observation, in many marginalized or developing communities, schools already serve this function in many practical respects. (Local meetings and community town halls would sometimes be held at the nearby school, based on my experience in Paraguay and Zimbabwe.) Envisioning schools as community centers would empower critical peace educators and their students in a number of ways. As I described above, reality in many post-conflict environments (and frankly far too many democracies) is that public schools are simply too beholden to the state, or to a particular political regime, to reliably provide students with the critical space needed to truly challenge government orthodoxy. This is even more true regarding government conduct or policy making around issues of war and security. Thus the need for private (non-profit) spaces or perhaps even alternative public spaces for critical peace education. States are almost inevitably implicated in the infliction of mass trauma in large-scale socio-political conflicts, and so again, alternative spaces become necessary. In addition, setting schools as centers of community life, if designed and implemented strategically, can increase a

student's exposure to a number of diverse ways of thinking, looking and being. While I do not unproblematically accept the "contact hypothesis" which argues that contact with unfamiliar groups makes us less likely to stereotype them, gaining more factual, three-dimensional views of especially those groups which whom one has historically been in conflict is essential for de-escalation, preventing future conflict and for the narrative transformation which is our ultimate goal in conflicts driven by traumatized collective memory.

Reclaim the Affective Domain

I once had a middle school student ask me why so many students always cried in my class; her question was prompted by a new round of journal sharing in my critical literacy class. The girls' entries were often honest and emotional and indeed, the tears would flow. As a critical peace educator, I was determined that I would guard space for the critical literacy, emotional lives and creative expression of my students. For me this student's comment was a powerful reminder of the importance of the "affective domain", or the role of emotion in deep, transformative learning, in any peace education classroom. Arguably this is even more true of a critical peace education classroom which wishes to be a part of exposing, interrupting and transforming large, historically entrenched cycles of violence. The affective domain is especially relevant to curriculum and pedagogy related to conflicts driven by historical memory because of the deep, often trans-generational trauma that typically characterizes protracted social conflicts. (See as well Zembylas (2008) for a strong discussion of this.) The implications for peace educators teaching about conflicts involving serious historical trauma are several. One, if peace educators are going to be able to address some of history's hardest questions in the classroom, we must be prepared to facilitate incredibly personal and painful dialogues with students whose families may well have been on opposing sides of a violent conflict. In my experience and observation, little in our formal training as educators prepares us for this demand. Teachers who themselves may have experienced loss or trauma due to a violent conflict must give explicit attention to their own mental health and healing. To foster this, school systems must be intentional about creating space for what are sometimes called professional learning communities. As the name suggests, these are communities of educators which are partially excused from teaching and other duties regularly to collaboratively problem solve, create integrated, interdisciplinary curriculum, and offer one another professional development in a

particular area of expertise and similar activities. Of course in communities that have been impacted by violent conflict, and therefore are still processing the collective memory, trauma healing, community building and analysis of the drivers of the conflict, as well as possibilities for resolution, will need to be central objectives of such school communities. Of course, these goals must be embraced by the local community as well; schools are never separate from their communities.

Idealistic as it may sound, classrooms in post-conflict societies can possibly be spaces for what Elise Boulding referred to as the “200 year present”—the collective visioning of where a community wishes to be several generations from now (Boulding 2000, 163). She suggested that if we as a community are mindful of the “200 year present”, this consciousness can contribute to a peace culture by enhancing awareness of future consequences resulting from present actions. This too is the affective domain, especially in the context of a society that has been violently divided. These sorts of “future visioning” exercises invite students into a space of potential healing and dialogue about critical challenges and controversies their people face. They can hear the experiences and perspectives of students which might be radically different from their own, and have their own basic needs, legitimacy and humanity affirmed. Future visioning is also an essential for “reclaiming the critical”, which I will explore a bit more soon. More briefly here, just as “futuring” exercises can build empathy, community and invite a student’s emotional life into the classroom, they can also be a pedagogy which invites students to build essential skills for critical participation in a democracy, such as collaboration, setting collective priorities and problem-solving in diverse contexts. The awareness of one’s duty and right to participate, as basic as it sounds, must be explicitly cultivated in young people. This is especially true of societies that are working to rebuild not just infrastructure but trust and the social contract post-conflict—what I earlier termed “social reconstruction”.

Ultimately the most genuine, sustainable means of resolving conflicts characterized by historical memory is narrative transformation. Massive historical traumas, such as slavery, genocide or civil war, are often “legitimized” by dominant cultural narratives that seek to justify the unfolding violence (Campbell in Duckworth and Kelley 2012). Narrative transformation, I would argue, cannot truly be possible without careful attention to the manner in which textbooks tell the story of a particular conflict, and the literature on historical narratives in peace education

is developing a strong exploration of the content of history textbooks (Korostelina 2008, Cole 2007, Spink 2005, Zembylas 2008). As this literature relates, these textbooks typically present the official government view of the conflict. Reformers have struggled in too many contexts to achieve real curriculum reform gains in highly politicized post-conflict contexts. Given all we know regarding how central schools are to shaping our identities, both as individuals as members of potential conflict groups, it is clear that peace and security more broadly are not possible without such reforms. At the same time, scholarship on peace education and historical memory has also worked to move beyond the textbook, giving careful attention to larger issues of pedagogy and epistemology. In addition to preserving classroom space for the affective domain, “futuring” with students can also open critical dialogical space to identify and challenge these hegemonic conflictual narratives so often codified in history textbooks. Humans, and perhaps especially young people, are natural storytellers and so classrooms can also be a useful space for telling a new story—replacing old narratives of violence, division and enemy images with new collective narratives of shared humanity and superordinate goals. Replacing prior, destructive narratives with a new one in which all parties are viewed as human and legitimate actors, where all have the “right to have rights” is the essence of narrative transformation (Cobb in Cheldelin 2008) and in oppressive contexts, this work is inherently subversive.

This visioning of the future can be woven into traditional subjects, such as languages, science or social studies, but it could also be given a dedicated space of its own. This seems preferable. Visioning of the future and the encouragement of creativity and imagination are essential to creating the confident and innovative adults most societies would wish to have. In post-conflict societies still grappling with the trans-generational transmission of trauma related to a conflict, such space becomes even more essential. I am reminded of the work of educators like Augusto Boal here, consider to be the founder of the “theatre of the oppressed” (1993). When we are invited (or even gently pushed) out of the perhaps safer spaces of distant intellect, we connect with those in the classroom learning community and build empathy. Empathy, another central theme in the literature on historical memory and peace education, is essential to re-humanizing former combatants to one another, as dehumanization in the context of a highly-escalated, violent historical conflict is almost certain to have taken place. Rebuilding community in such a context is essential to future security and to long-term processes of political and social development for any society. Today’s students, of course, are tomorrow’s leaders. For these

reasons, creating and protecting space for the affective domain is vital for peace educators implementing their curriculum in the context of collective violence and the cycles of historical memory and trans-generational trauma which such collective violence ignites. My central argument throughout this work is that critical peace education must be a part of any attempt to transform conflicts driven by collective memories of historical trauma; this is why the growing conversation between the literatures on “history and memory” and peace education must deepen. One step further, I hope to usefully identify several concrete ways in which classroom educators can be a part of interrupting the cycle of trans-generational trauma and collective violence. Reclaiming the affective domain, especially through “future visioning”, is one such technique. We turn next to oral histories in the classroom, which I suggest can be a way for peace educators to “reclaim the critical”.

Reclaim the Critical: Oral History

A noticeable feature of the literature on historical memory has been the use and importance of oral histories for the reclaiming memory by a community that has suffered trauma, oppression or marginalization. As Cobb notes (2008), one of the results of an oppressor’s hegemonic narrative is often to render the other party invisible, or at least illegitimate. Recovering lost or suppressed collective memories of mass trauma is a vital beginning to social healing and towards justice for the victims. Roberts (2002), for example, writes that oral history “gives a voice to those who do not leave accounts or have biographers” (24). If oral history is to indeed interrupt cycles of injustice and the resulting violence, the importance of this ability to give voice to those previously silenced cannot be overstated. Roberts (2002) further argues that, “there is a need for a much more conscious history in which the ordinary members of the public are part of the production of their own histories” (102). With respect to post-conflict situations, “Oral history”, Roberts observes, “can have a “complex role...in the processes of ‘truth and reconciliation’ between communities-the difficulties of ‘coming to terms’ with the legacies of the past where, for instance, there are competing claims (for land and resources) and past crimes need to be recognized” (110).

In her compelling edition, *Memory and Totalitarianism*, Passerini (2005) argues that in the process of recovery from totalitarian regimes (or other mass violence), reclaiming colonized memory in the Habermasian sense is vital. Further, this cannot take place without pluralistic

dialogue. As she argues, “to be a democrat [note the lower-case ‘d’] means to consider that the main political task is to acknowledge that every person has the right to and should have the opportunity to speak and to engage in real dialogue” (4). Her volume’s case histories, spanning Europe’s devastation by totalitarian regimes in the mid-20th century, include radical feminist resistance to Franco in Spain, the near-disappearance from history of mass famine in the Soviet Union, the cultural re-victimization of Jews who returned to Holland after the Holocaust, and oral histories of surviving the Gulags. Passerini’s study notes the manner in which autocratic regimes can actively work to shape public memory to their advantage. She writes of “the attempt to eradicate aspects of the past in, for instance, the renewal of churches, new street and town names and so on. But this is to pretend that events have not taken place—it is ‘the violence of the present on memory’” (9). In some cases, this causes public memory to “go underground” (if one refuses to forget what it is too dangerous politically to remember) or can cause “feelings of guilt and complicity” as some are induced to cooperate with their own oppression (11). In such examples we can see the role of oral history in reweaving a torn social fabric and overturning the silence and invisibility of the victims. Given the need of totalitarian regimes to “...impose on the whole population the necessity of reciting what ‘has to be said’” (8), the implication of schools in the creation and reproduction of totalitarianisms becomes clear.

This is just as true for the more subtle undercurrents of totalitarianism which can co-exist inside developed democracies. If schools can be sites of conflict and oppression, schools can also be a site of nonviolent resistance (or when they cannot, we can seek other venues for critical peace education). Peace educators can engage students in post-conflict environments, in communities which have experienced collective trauma, in collecting oral histories and, where students are comfortable, sharing their own experiences for publication. As Boulding (2000) argued, inter-generational experiences and relationships are essential for building a culture of peace and yet formal schooling rarely if even offers students (or adults) such opportunities. This is especially desirable in conflict situations which often cause deep generational divisions (Passerini 2008, 11). When one remembers the relevance of trans-generational trauma to conflicts driven by historical memory, the importance of such opportunities becomes even clearer. Healing the collective trauma and reweaving the social fabric require difficult dialogues. As Passerini (2008) writes, “...reciprocal critique and collaboration are essential to the understanding of history” (14). Critical peace education seeks to foster what Passerini (2008)

calls a “democratic consciousness” (18) which is developed in post-conflict contexts (be they the collapse of totalitarian regimes, genocides, civil wars). This democratic consciousness for her, as an oral historian, and for us as critical peace educators, is to “participate in different memories, to share their differences not in any way in an attempt to demonstrate their universality but rather to insist on the diversity and plurality of memory” (18). Here is perhaps the clearest benefit of the growing dialogue between the literature on history and memory, and the literature on critical peace education. Recovering lost or forbidden memories is essential precisely because the *refusal of plurality* is the ethos behind all totalitarianisms, whether those totalitarianisms are in Europe, China, or the U.S. In this manner oppressive power groups can deny another group their very humanity—the “right to have rights”.

From a classroom educator’s more pragmatic standpoint, oral histories are a methodology simple enough that young people can learn the techniques with some training. They can strengthen the role that I discussed above of schools functioning as community centers. They are also consistent with the experiential, authentic, dialogical ethos of peace pedagogy. With such activities, students and schools are intimately engaged in analyzing historical conflict narratives and in creating a space for shaping new narratives. And given the numerous skills, such as research, writing and presentation, involved in such a project, educators (and parents!) can rest assured that students are gaining important skills they need from a curriculum.

Most importantly, in any critical peace education, activities and curriculum must be of direct and immediate relevance to students’ lives. Gathering oral histories offers students a first-hand means of learning from those involved what drove the conflict and how it impacted people. Students should also be invited to form their own views of the conflict. Exposure to a variety of views on what exactly occurred via these oral histories is one way peace educators can “reclaim the critical” in their classrooms. A critical theory approach to peace education places priority on inviting students to examine and challenge received wisdom and to grow in knowledge and awareness of power dynamics relevant to their lives. This implements one of the central, most basic insights of critical peace educators, which is that students and marginalized communities must come to experience themselves as powerful agents capable of acting in the world in their own interest. Often the dehumanizing narratives of the hegemonic group have been precisely (if not consciously) shaped to convince the marginalized group of their own inferiority and thus

their need for the power elites to remain in power. The methodology I am describing here can be a part of the justpeace (see Schirch 2005) system by challenging and transforming this dynamic.

Peace is Political

Given that much of the literature on historical memory, as well as critical peace education, is so academic and theoretical, my hope here has been to grapple with the realities of classroom teachers and school administrators as they attempt to open space for reconciliation and healing in their classrooms. A “taller order” is hard to imagine. Adding to the challenges inherent in such work is the reality, as I discussed above, of the backlash against peace education, particularly when contested history is involved. I would argue that this is an opportunity for peace educators, not a barrier. Recent events make more than plain that racial reconciliation has not occurred in the US for example. Such events include the murder of Trayvon Martin, as well as the legal challenges to any sort of multi-cultural education in states such as Texas and Arizona, as I argued above. (What if critical peace educators in Florida invited students to collect oral histories of experiences with local law enforcement?) What all of this means, in my view, is that we critical peace educators cannot escape the reality that peace is political. This is true in my own context of the U.S. and even more true in environments of overt, violent conflict (Syria) or those grappling with recent, radical change (Iraq, Libya). Conflict groups engage in violence for what they consider to be valid, necessary reasons. Groups who have benefitted from the contested status quo, naturally, will not want to see their power weakened, and one can almost always follow the money to identify individuals and groups creating wealth from the conflict. For these reasons the mere statement that achieving peace is a desirable state or end to strive for is a political statement. Groups whose collective identity has been shaped around a historical trauma will likely even find the idea of peace with the enemy dangerous and offensive. At such high levels of protraction and violent escalation in a conflict, the trans-generational transmission of trauma (Volkan 1998) is common, as are enemy images of the Other. As Zembylas (2008) among others notes, this means that an essential job of teachers and students of peace education is identifying, deconstructing and reconstructing the very narrative itself that has been told about the conflict and the peoples who have engaged in it (p. 40-52). Blood has often been spilt and great trauma suffered related to these narratives which as a result have become central, even sacred, to the collective identity. They will not go quietly.

Hence again, peace is political. Those of us advocating it in schools, which we must remember are often compulsory, must be prepared for high levels of emotion and resistance, from students, colleagues, administrators and parents. One way of handling this is, as I noted above, seeking other spaces than public schools for critical peace education, but neither would I have us cede this space entirely. We must be prepared to articulate and defend the argument that a state of peace is preferable and understand that such a stance can never be political neutral. Pretensions to neutrality or “teaching the conflict” are not adequate for critical peace education goals.

Given the challenges and complexities above, I should articulate a number of cautions. If classrooms and school systems are going to succeed as spaces of reconciliation and healing of mass historical traumas, such as colonization, genocide, slavery or civil war, teachers simply must be given the support they need to work out their own struggles with trauma. This includes, if need be, counseling and social supports. Most education budgets worldwide, but especially those in post-conflict environments, make this a challenge but this support for educators is a must if programs of critical peace education are to be able to interrupt cycles of trans-generational transmission of trauma. It is also necessary ultimately to understand building a culture of peace as a “multi-track” undertaking (see Diamond and McDonald 1996). I believe we must, as critical peace educators, continue to resist views of critical peace education which have the effect of isolating schools from their community. Schools, we commonly acknowledge, are only one part of the overall peace and conflict system, yet in my observation we do not act on this understanding effectively enough. That is, we do not fully take advantage of all of the ways in which schools and their communities could connect for mutual benefit in building cultures of peace. While there is not space to fully explore this here, effective curriculum and programs might be guided by the following questions. How can teachers and students be of service to others in the community in addressing local challenges? How can communities repay this service through resources and support, offering perhaps expertise outside of education (such as trauma healing)? What role has local business, local faith communities, and local media played in the relevant historical conflicts, and what opportunities for partnership might exist for both building student skills and enhancing a community peace culture? I cannot offer definitive answers to such questions here, as the answers must be generated organically and collaboratively at the local level in a particular school system’s community, but my hope is that these questions might inspire and focus such dialogue.

As the cautions above recognize, schools and teachers alone cannot fully interrupt and transform historical, protracted cycles of violence. Yet neither can their centrality to the peace and conflict system be underestimated. This is especially true of conflicts which are highly characterized by memories of historical trauma around which group identities have formed and been handed down from one generation to the next. Along with the media, families and faith communities, schools are central shapers of human identity for most of us. This is especially true when we consider our view of history and the role of our own nation or identity group within history. Schools are where we may encounter the “other”. If well planned, they can be places of cross-cutting community ties which enable us to confront historical biases and consider critically our own role in larger conflicts. In highly polarized communities or societies, a critical peace educator’s classroom may in fact be the only space where peace and reconciliation is imagined or spoken of as a viable possibility. In spite of the significant challenges I describe here, the power of this potential is immense. As Elise Boulding memorably wrote, “People can’t work for what they can’t imagine” (2000, 29).

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