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CHAPTER 6

EDUCATION FOR INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING

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EDUCATION FOR INTERNATIONAL UNDERSTANDING BY JOE CAMILLERI

Of all the problems that face mankind in this dangerous and unpredictable twentieth century, the problem of violence is by far the most urgent, by far the most deadly and by far the most likely to threaten the very survival of the human race. Violence has caused untold human and material destruction in the past, but only in this century have we seen entire nations involved in such mutually destructive slaughtering matches that even the most narrowly bellicose among them have withdrawn from the conflict shaken and aghast. Man in the past has fought savagely and without restraint, but only in this century have vast conscripted armies been flung blindly against each other in gross impersonal carnage. In the past civilians have been massacred, cities sacked and burnt, populations starved by siege and blockade, but only in recent years have weapons been designed solely with a view to destroying an entire nation or inducing its surrender by the terror of total annihilation.

Our age is defined by the kind of event, from Auschwitz to Vietnam, whose depth of evil is matched only by the blindness and self-righteousness of the ideology which gave rise to it. To understand the reality of our age is to enter into the darkness of the world of man, to see the suffering as neither victim nor executioner, without surrendering the hope and strength so vital to the creation of a new world. Perhaps the single event which revealed the essence of our age of destruction took place at Hiroshima. At Hiroshima,

the sheer enormity of murder was perhaps exceeded by the prior events of Auschwitz, Buchenwald, Dresden and Tokyo. But Hiroshima was a significant break in human history, in so far as it revealed for the first time "man's moral capacity for global self-destruction".

It is the ever increasing possibility that man will commit "his final act of murder", implicit in the spiralling nuclear arms race of the last three and a half decades, which compels the most profound reappraisal of prevailing attitudes and values.

One of the most disturbing characteristics of our time is, indeed, the widespread resignation to man's possible extinction. No doubt, as a result of their socialisation, many people seem to look upon war in much the same way as they look upon their death: as something one has to postpone without really hoping to evade or overcome it. War is accepted as a kind of fate, as a law of human nature. Armaments, military structures and military values are accepted as a natural part of the human environment, as an unconquerable hereditary trait, and not as a dubious makeshift to be made superfluous as quickly as possible. We tend to become so accustomed to this makeshift that we hesitate to engage in serious attempts to curb violence and resolve conflict, and we look upon the exertions of peace activists and of peace movements generally as utopian daydreaming. But if we reflect carefully, we shall see that what these people are indulging in is not realism but capitulation, not humility but indifference, not hope but despair. For, war today can no longer be idealised; it can no longer be rationalised. The gains of military engagement are now uncertain, improbable, irrelevant. The losses resulting from violence, the waste of resources, the human suffering, the moral degradation are horrendous as they are irrefutable. Clearly what is in question is our understanding of the human condition. In this fundamental sense, "education for international understanding" may be considered crucial to the very survival of the human species. Learning about the world in which we live can no longer be regarded as a means to an end; it is an end in itself. In the words of Warren Wagar, "one of the great objectives of a humanised social order must be the making of a race of skilled and... knowing human beings: fully realised persons, who understand their condition, and who can contribute to the further enlightenment of the species. To know is to be a man — *homo sapiens*". A more convivial world order requires then a process of learning which defines what is good and beautiful, what is right and just, which imparts a system of values as the basis for a world civilisation.

The Pedagogical Process

If the learning process is to open up new possibilities for peace and justice in human relations, then the means used must be compatible with the end. In other words, the learning process must exclude both physical and structural violence; it must do away with the highly vertical division of labor which expresses itself in one-way communication. It must permit horizontal interaction in which both teacher and student participate from a position of equality. A liberating pedagogy must take a form which is itself liberating. If the teaching or learning experience consists essentially of a monologue, a clear system of dominance ensues, which fails to enrich either teacher or student and contradicts the search for real understanding. For this reason, it is simply not enough or even desirable to get peace education into the traditional media or educational institutions, whether primary, secondary or tertiary. The question is not merely one of including certain international issues or concerns into the school, college or university curriculum, but of finding a method of communication which is in keeping with the content of the message. It is hardly satisfactory or gratifying, for example, to be raising questions about human rights in the context of a centralised school system which exercises almost dictatorial powers over the curricula and ignores the interests and demands of younger generations.

Another important dimension of the pedagogical process is the need to integrate theory and practice. Education for international understanding is unlikely to achieve a great deal if it is confined to abstract concepts or academic formulations which fragment the real world and fail to touch people's lives. Clearly, what is required is a problem-

solving, action-oriented approach which overcomes the polarisation between theoreticians and practitioners, and challenges students and teachers to examine critically the situation in which they live, and grapple with real human conditions in real contexts.

Here, we are immediately confronted with a major problem which is peculiar to the more privileged sections of affluent industrial societies, where "education for international understanding", at least in a formal or institutional sense, is likely to be most fashionable. To the extent that greater awareness of the nature and origins of international conflict are likely to require some analysis of the structures of dominance within and across national boundaries, those involved in the learning process may well have to recognise that they themselves are oppressors. On the other hand, their natural inclination might be to think that they are doing reasonably well and that the problems of the world are other people's business, perhaps the business of governments or idealists. They themselves are too busy developing their professional skills, establishing their homes, rising up the social and economic ladder, to be concerned with the fact that their lifestyles and consumption patterns may be contributing directly to the deprivation of others or to the degradation of the environment. If society, nationally and internationally, is characterised by dominance and inequality, how are those who benefit directly or indirectly from such dominance and inequality to be made aware of their part in such oppression? How are they to be conscientised? As Ivan Illich has pointed out, the present schooling of the middle classes is designed to do the opposite, to preserve the status quo, to train elites which will perpetuate the dominant interests and values of society.

In the case of the exploited rural masses of the Third World, Paolo Freire has developed a strategy for conscientisation (outlined in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and several other works) which does away with the conventional "banking" theory of education. Instead of the one-way flow of information from the "educated" to the "uneducated", Freire argues that people should be helped to appreciate the reality of their own situation in their own terms, in the framework of a critical dialogue conducted in small discussion groups. The new consciousness will enable people to break out of their own passivity and engage in action to transform themselves and world around them. How is such a pedagogy of liberation inspired by the unique Latin American experience to be applied to the comfortable, conformist, consumer society? While it is plainly in the interests of the oppressed to be liberated, how can those who benefit from oppression be persuaded to end the system of dominance on which it thrives?

The first part of the answer lies in the fact that even the most privileged sections of technological society are to some extent oppressed and de-humanised by existing social structures, by international rivalries, by the arms race, by the nuclear threat, by the military-industrial complex. To this extent, the end of the system of dominance and exploitation is also in their interest, although in this instance the process of conscientisation is likely to prove difficult and even painful. What is entailed is a drastic shift in values and attitudes which is bound to carry a degree of danger for the participant as much as for the system. The experience, however, is likely to be personally rewarding and strategically valuable as a lesson in the exercise of freedom.

How, then, is this educative process to develop? It can take numerous forms and operate through diverse institutions. A few examples drawn from Johan Galtung's classification will suffice to convey the wide range of available options.

1. **Programmed Teaching** — This is an excellent device (equally valid for self-instruction or a class course) which makes use of the written or spoken word to diagnose concrete situations (from family problems to the great problems of the contemporary world) and invites the reader or listener to respond by filling out the picture and offering proposals for action.
2. **Peace or Development Games** — Here the intention is to develop various forms of role playing, assisting the participant to identify with particular actors and situations and to formulate responses which maximise co-operative behaviour.

3. **Audio-visual Aids** — Slides, films, video cassettes can all help to present concepts, empirical data and situation descriptions, while at the same time providing an opportunity for feedback. Another method of disseminating critical material is through television programs, or the TV university, although here it is crucial to supplement the medium with other devices to enable the viewers to become active participants rather than silent spectators in the learning process.
4. **Individual Research** — Any educational method must sooner or later lead the individual to carry out his own investigation and reflection. Any student can acquire information on defence or trade or aid policies, and form his own judgment about them.
5. **Group Research** — Research organised in teams can facilitate a more co-operative approach which facilitates dialogue while at the same time highlighting the problems in achieving a peace structure within the group.
6. **Drama** — Either as a public or private enterprise, drama can be used with great effect to depict diverse societies, nationalities and ideologies, and to portray the dynamics of conflict and peace.
7. **Summer Schools, Camps** — Provided they are imaginatively organised, such projects can provide an informative and enriching experience.
8. **Universities of Peace, Institutes of Development, Colleges of the Environment** — These are specialised institutions which attempt to escape from the traditional straitjacket universities by focusing inter-disciplinary insights on particular problems and by creating channels of transnational communication. Their great merit is that they expose participants to a variety of cultural and ideological cross pressures which modify national loyalties and undermine national stereotypes.

Quite apart from these less conventional initiatives, it may also be possible to inject world order issues into existing institutions of learning, particularly in colleges and universities. It should not be too difficult, for example, to arrange an informal meeting with interested students, teachers (and perhaps members of the local community) to discuss the problem of war and peace from an educational point of view. Following one or more such meetings, which may include the showing of a relevant film, one or more members of staff may be willing to introduce a course on peace, perhaps on an interdisciplinary basis, thereby combining the insights of economics, politics, philosophy, sociology, psychology, biology. The content of any proposed program of Peace Studies, World Order Studies or Development Studies should be clearly formulated and extensively discussed. The purpose and effectiveness of such a course, either in terms of future professional opportunities or relevance to the educational institution and the community at large, should be clearly spelt out and be open to regular review. Such courses would presumably be an invaluable aid not only to future teachers of international studies, but to teachers generally, all of whom share the basic responsibility of providing their students with a great appreciation of the present perilous course of world affairs. A good case can be made in other words for including the issues of security disarmament, development, human rights, as an integral part of teacher education.

The Content of Education

While the medium and the methodology are crucial to the success of education understood as conscientisation, the content of the learning process is of course vitally important. Theoretically at least, the subject of "international understanding" is limitless as it can encompass any aspect of human conduct in any part of the world. For our purposes, however, it may be fruitful to divide the area into four parts under the headings: Development, Conflict, Peace, Future.

Development — The concept of development is particularly useful for it immediately raises the question of human needs and values (for example, not only the basic need for food, clothing and shelter, but other less tangible but equally important aspirations relating to education, work, leisure environmental quality, community life, personal and group autonomy, political participation, etc.) and the degree to which they are fulfilled

by existing institutional arrangements within both national and international society. In other words, development values are crucial to an understanding of the way societies are organised, but also to a coherent vision of a more humane and peaceful world order.

Conflict — Within almost every society there are conflicts of values, goals and interests. However, these conflicts do not usually give rise to physical violence either because society operates under a general consensus as to basic goals and values, or because of an authoritarian system of law enforcement. Physical violence (war) however, is both tolerated and at times even encouraged in relations between States. Here, it is important to determine the factors which lead to international conflict and war. To what extent do certain vested interests benefit from the expectation of and preparation for war? In what way are feelings of "national" insecurity, "national" pride, "national" animosity deliberately manipulated by sectional interests which stand to gain from high and rising levels of military spending? How can, we explain the origins and development of the cold war between east and west? What are the psychological, diplomatic and strategic factors maintaining the momentum of the nuclear arms race? What are the pressures which sustain the arms trade? What of regional conflicts? How important are the factors of history, geography, culture, ideology? To what extent does great power intervention provoke or accentuate local tensions and conflicts? In grappling with any of these questions, a serious inquirer will need to consider critically not only the attitudes, actions and policies of far-away countries, but also the conduct of his own country, its military alignments, its involvement in regional and global conflicts.

Nor can a discussion of international conflict be confined to military policies. Attention must also be given to economic rivalries, unequal access to the world's resources, and various forms of economic exploitation. The whole phenomenon of underdevelopment which affects the majority of Third World countries must be brought under close scrutiny, and with it the factors of racism, colonialism, neo-colonialism and corporate transnationalism.

Peace — The concept of peace-making and peace-building provides an opportunity to discuss how development and a creative approach to conflict can come together in the fight against violence. A dynamic conception of peace, however, must be based on the negation of both physical and structural violence. Violence, after all, refers to any activity which violates the humanity of man, which frustrates or undermines the potential for human *development*. This broader definition of violence enables us to understand a whole range of conflicts which might otherwise be overlooked. We need to concern ourselves with the resolution of symmetrical conflicts as between the United States and the Soviet Union which threaten to unleash unlimited physical violence, but also with the asymmetrical conflicts between rich and poor, between the oppressors and the oppressed, as in Southern Africa where a privileged white minority imposes its system of domination on the exploited black majority. The reduction and eventual elimination of nuclear weapons, the demilitarisation of society, the establishment of international organisations and peace-keeping forces, the development of mediation techniques and other associative arrangements are all important peace strategies. But they must be complemented by serious efforts to grapple with structural violence on a global scale. It is here that the Third World's demand for a New International Economic Order assumes its full significance.

Future — A commitment to the future is ultimately indispensable to every educational project. The prospects for human survival will in the long run depend on our sense of responsibility towards the future. Here it is a question of analysing present trends, constructing possible scenarios, and indicating the range of options open to those who wish to construct a more just and peaceful future. The central question here is whether and how the world wide support for peace and justice can be translated into effective political action. Is it possible to foster peace-building institutions which focus attention on the structural causes rather than the symptoms of international conflict?

This brief and superficial survey of the international agenda has hopefully given some idea of the complexity of the issues but also of the urgency of creating the educational

basis for a new organic world civilisation. Clearly, the first element of any worthwhile educational strategy must be to mobilise man's intellectual, moral, aesthetic and scientific resources to advance the realisation that all nations are part of a single human family, members of a universal civilisation in the making. Such a transformation of the way we perceive the world will no doubt have to be expressed in common values, goals, symbols and loyalties. However, the purpose of this project for survival and self-realisation will prove self-defeating if it should lead to increased centralisation of power, wealth and authority. Education for international understanding does not entail propaganda on behalf of any particular blueprint for world government. Rather, it rests on the conviction that human interaction is likely to be most fruitful when it arises from autonomous political communities which do not seek to impose on others their beliefs and values by force, by threat or by discrimination.

The educational process cannot of course remain a purely academic exercise. The intellectual tasks of analysing, explaining, predicting and recommending have to be complemented with a thoroughgoing personal examination of one's own position within the social and political structures. Life-styles and concepts of personal security have to be reassessed and integrated into the larger consciousness-raising project. Education for international understanding is compatible only with the development of a new awareness of society and of one's own role within that society. This new understanding can then facilitate the search for new forms of social organisation and new lines of action in harmony with the new vision. To be truly effective, therefore, the educational experience must avoid inculcating a paralysing sense of guilt or helplessness. Rather it should instill a renewed sense of hope and collective responsibility in the creation of a new world order consistent with the balanced development of man's social and natural environment.

DISCUSSION REPORT

Approximately 50 people attended this workshop, which included six international delegates. Following the paper given by the spotlight speaker Dr J. Camilleri about two hours was devoted to group discussions which was followed by a plenary meeting to hear summaries from the groups.

The four groups operated reasonably well with almost everyone participating in discussion although a shortage of time was apparent as it was only towards the end that delegates started debating some of the fundamental issues, and in fact many were loath to wind up the discussions.

Some of the key points which emanated from the discussions were as follows —

- * Inability to understand or relate to other cultures was a significant factor impeding International Understanding. People should be encouraged to firstly understand themselves, their own origins and culture. Churches could play an important role in improving understanding because of their involvement in many cultures. Likewise education can also play a role in developing understanding of other cultures.
- * International Understanding is also impeded in Australia by resistant attitudes and vested conservative interest in this country. Changing attitudes and values are most urgent.
- * Identifying targets and problem areas to enable changes to take place is most important.
- * Changing attitudes and values towards International Understanding, development, world peace etc. must begin somewhere in the education system.
- * The media — it was generally felt that the media are not objective and there is a need to educate people to evaluate the media and the cultural bias of information flows between the "third" world and "first" world. The media both east and west reinforces polarisation.
- * Media information is not broad based.
Media monopolies are a vested interest.

Media tend to focus on the differences between peoples rather than attempting to show the similarities between people's lives and aspirations.

The printed word is *not* absolute. People need to read "between the lines".
The media tend to reinforce our cultural bias.

- * The view was expressed that the power hungry nations both from the eastern bloc and the western bloc were those who stood to gain from a lack of International Understanding.
It was also felt that no one gained from war.
- * People need to be motivated to search for the "truth".
- * Some thought that world conflict was inevitable due to the different ideologies; however others did not think world war was an inevitable outcome of conflict because there was not a monolithic communist bloc, nor a unified western bloc.
- * Discussion of the "New International Economic Order" produced some varied conclusions -
 - It was idealistic to believe in a NIEO because the powerful do not surrender power — it must be taken from them.
 - To achieve the results of a NIEO will be an ongoing dynamic process. This means we face a dynamic peace.
 - NIEO as formulated ignores the role of grass-roots people.
 - NIEO ignores transnational corporations' political power — it is a creature of elitist government head to government head dealings.
- * Those delegates who were involved in educational institutions discussed the need for curriculum development along the themes of peace, disarmament and cultural understanding.
- * Discussion also took place about human relations training, particularly techniques of conflict resolution, however the point was raised that it is necessary to be clear in whose interest these tools are sometimes used.
- * Some governments endeavor to suppress the facts of the horrors of war, for example, Hiroshima, for political purposes. Thus younger generations are not conscious of the extreme importance of striving for peace and International Understanding, particularly in this nuclear age.

Recommendations

- * Ethnic curricula to be established and made available to schools and all community entities.
- * Public libraries to be created to satisfy the needs of ethnic groups.
- * All schools should introduce from the earliest level different language courses other than English. Other languages should be made available according to language-groups in the school vicinity.
- * All present school facilities should be open to public use, that is, adults in the community.
Different languages to be used for education programs in ethnic languages and culture.
- * The action proposals which follow were considered as having merit, in particular bilateral exchanges between young people should be encouraged but it was felt that these should extend beyond the exchanges between Australia—Japan, Australia—U.S.A. arrangements.
Efforts should be made to change attitudes via
 - The school curriculum
 - Teacher education programs
 - Submissions to parliamentary committees, to professional associations and trade unions.

Some Questions for Possible Consideration

- * What impedes International Understanding? What threatens International Understanding and therefore world peace?
- * Who stands to gain from a lack of International Understanding?
- * What are some of the fundamental causes of conflict between nations?

What effect has the arms race on International Understanding and on our daily lives and expectations?

- * What is the role of the media? Do the media perform their duty of actually and objectively informing the community of issues?
- * What is the role of institutionalised places of learning in developing International Understanding?
- * What is the role of community groups, churches, social action groups etc. in developing International Understanding?

What are the positive and negative aspects of the United Nations and its agencies in developing International Understanding?

- * What is the role of aid agencies in developing International Understanding?
- * Do bilateral exchanges of people promote International Understanding?
- * Do governments and their agencies really promote International Understanding or are they more concerned with institutionalising their power structures?
- * Is a New International Economic Order essential for peace and International Understanding?

What is the relationship to International Understanding of nationalism, chauvinism, racism and neo-colonialism?

- * Does international trade promote International Understanding?

Many of the above questions were used as guides to the group discussions and the recommendations following received fairly general endorsement.

Some Possible Action Proposals for Consideration

- * School facilities to be used for debates, seminars, teach-ins etc. on current affairs.
- * Exchange visits between communities be encouraged.
- * Access should be granted to school libraries for material which promotes international understanding and peace.
- * Preparation of peace programs for various educational levels.
- * Encouragement of activity around United Nations Day.
- * Encourage the establishment of independent peace research institutes (even if government funded) for example, SIPRI.
- * Examination of military spending. Is it useful or necessary?