

Peace Education and Peace Politics

Education in the Era of Neoliberalism

Werner Wintersteiner

1. Politics, Culture, and Education

Peace Education is a social criticism applied to Education. It criticizes those political decisions in education which instead of Peace promote violence inside a given society as well as between societies. Besides this, Peace Education develops political concepts of education aimed at creating the premises for a cultural and pedagogical work for peace.

Education has always been a political battleground since it is here that the debates about which objectives or certitudes of society have to prevail. Which values do we pass on to future generations? On what model are we to base the educational subjects and contents we are to teach? It is not just chance that in Austria, a country very fearful of conflict, the education system has been entrenched in the constitution, so that any modifications are only possible through a two-thirds majority vote in parliament, demonstrating the fear parties have of the influence of political foes in education. And it is not just chance either that the imposition of a neoliberal economy all over Europe should result in a neoliberal policy in education – as we have seen in the Lisbon Process, in international studies such as PISA, and the complete orientation of the educational system on measurable results, efficiency and on an increase in performance.

But we shall talk of this later. Let's now consider the structural change in society which running parallel to the cultural turn in the social sciences gives new and fundamental importance to culture as a factor in individual and social life. As the French sociologist Alain Tourraine sustains, cultural questions have acquired so much importance that sociological thinking should organize itself round this new paradigm (Tourraine 2005).

According to Tourraine, substituting a "handing on" society by a personal acquisitive society gives prominence to the Cultural, that is the conscious work on the sense and the aim of our activities. Tourraine considers the often quoted loss of reference points of ties, values and traditions, also as a freedom and a possibility of reaching a "democratic individualism", or a "democratic subjectivity". Tourraine holds that no subject would be able to affirm his own

subjectivity unless the right to subjectivity is recognized and with it the rights of the others and therefore of human rights for all.

The concept of a Culture of Peace, for some time now promoted by UNO and UNESCO and many of those dedicated to the study of peace sciences, reflects this change and thus opens up new possibilities for the work on peace. A Culture of Peace does not involve just Art, Literature and Philosophy, but it proceeds from a concept having a wider reach, bringing to mind that of *Cultural Studies* which bring to the fore the culture of everyday life. This new meaning of Culture also modifies the relation between Peace Politics and Peace Education, the latter being considered as an essential element of the Culture of Peace. Education must not be understood only as an aspect of socialization, that is adapting oneself to a particular society or culture, but as the creation of presuppositions, in order to be able to define one's own life and therefore be able to contribute towards the change and the renewal of society.

Peace Education is in no way a substitute for Peace Politics but a very necessary complement or better still, a long term, inalienable and long lasting method for bringing about a social change in the sense of Peace. Or, in Maria Montessori's words: "Establishing lasting peace is the work of education; all politics can do is keep us out of war."

2. Education between War and Peace

What do these considerations mean to Peace Education in concrete terms? It would be very easy to reduce it to just its didactic component. However, the first task of Peace Education is, from a peace political point of view, the whole gamut of teaching and education, verifying the way in which it contributes to war and violence or supports peace. On this basis one must develop fundamental criteria for organizing the educational system in the sense of Peace Politics.

The great importance the education sector has in perpetuating social violence and war is generally hugely underestimated. In response to this fact, in an appeal by the Global Campaign for Peace Education, a project of *The Hague Appeal for Peace*, we hear:

In order to combat the culture for violence pervading our society, the future generation deserves a radically different education – one which does not glorify war, but which educates for peace, for freedom from violence and for international collaboration. (The Hague Appeal for Peace 1999).

The English educationalist Lynn Davies has the same argument, analysing the didactic programmes from Europe and the world over, under the profile of the effect they have in generating violence:

Up to when we do not give due attention to schools, and how and what youngsters (and adults) are learning, the spiral of violence and destruction will go on developing. (Davis 2005, 24) Lynn Davies indicates four points which better express the link between school and violence:

- The education system reproduces the social divisions in the class, as much in its organization as in the way knowledge is imparted.
- The education system reproduces the hierarchy of gender, and the dominant models of masculinity and femininity.
- The system promotes – through its own relationship with minorities – an essentialist identity instead of building an open relationship with “alterity”, with difference.
- Structural (and also direct, corporal punishment) violence is used in schools by the fostering of a competitive mentality and the soliciting of attainment, because of the neoliberal policy in education.

It would be a great mistake to think that this criticism refers solely to third world countries or to totalitarian regimes. The unbridled competition between the so called autonomous schools; the allowing, forbidden up to some years ago, of commercial advertising in state schools, the even more blatant diffusion of the idea of education as a means of increasing one’s market value – all of these factors contain elements of violence.

Yet another point is the politics of identity promoted by schools; as can be seen for example in the so called *scholastic question* in Carinzia. In spite of the clear dispositions found in its written Constitution, the Austrian state has always done its barest indispensable minimum in order to make it possible for its ethnic minorities, mostly Slovenes in Carinzia, to have lessons in their mother tongue. Quite often one has to go to court in order to have rights, which should be taken for granted, respected. Obviously the concept of Austria as a multilingual and multicultural nation leaves much to be desired. The fact that in Carinzia, and in part of Stiria, there is a Slovene ethnic group, that there are Croats and Hungarians in Burgenland, or Rom or Sinti, just to mention some of the minorities recognised by the state, has absolutely no relevance in the Austrian School system outside the areas where these minorities are found. Very little is seen of it, if at all, in school syllabuses, in teaching material for the formation

and updating of teachers, in the everyday school culture. How else can one interpret the fact that in its statement of programme (2000), the Austrian government refers to immigrants' children, to their linguistic education, their scholastic career, and to other questions important to their future, not under the heading of integration, of democracy or of the cohabitation of cultures, but under that of internal security? What sort of message does this send out? What sort of threat is understood? What political praxis needs justification?

One can also posit similar questions with reference to Friuli Venezia Giulia. How are ethnic minorities and immigrants integrated into society? To what extent is Italy presented as a multi-ethnic country in schools? For example, which school syllabus includes the great poet from Trieste Boris Pahor? Is he left out because of his anti-fascism? Or is it because he is Slovene?

But let us also examine the educational policy of the E.U. As far as we can see, it seems that Education is expected to contribute in making Europe the most powerful Economy in the world. This only seems to be a re-evaluation of Education. In fact, the so-called Lisbon Process reduces Education which, according to a famous maxim by Hartmut von Hentig, should make human beings stronger and things clearer, from being a formative course to an economic utility (cfr Hentig 2003). In a society elbowing its way through, increasing the individual's market value is given more importance than to solidarity and to reciprocal respect.

With this as a base no space is left for Peace Education. However this is precisely what is needed today in our schools, as affirmed by the above-mentioned English educationalist Lynn Davies:

The first thing to do is this: put at the top of the education policy the questions of war and of conflict. These subjects must have precedence over the profit question, the teaching standard or of access to education. Therefore my thesis is that indepth democratization of schools and orientating them towards Peace and cooperation could really raise the quality of education and its standards (Davies 2005, 26).

These reflections should lead us to think of school in a new way, and to face all the problems existing nowadays through the new paradigm of Peace Education.

3. Peace Education

3.1 The link between the Personal and the Political

In the narrow sense of the word Peace Education, one can ideally distinguish two philosophies, two basic concepts.

- *Education for peacefulness.* In this case the objective is the creation of pacifist humankind, so to say a new human being, the “Noble Man” so dear to 19th century writers, not least to Bertha von Suttner. At the heart of this idea lies the fact that there can be no social change without those involved in that change, being themselves changed in turn. To this end, it is absolutely necessary to continuously work on one’s own character. On the other hand, problems arise when one tries to create peace loving human beings through educational, medical (vide “Clockwork Orange”), genetical or other methods, in such a way as to make disputes, struggle and war unnecessary. This is not only an ideal impossible to realize, but also deeply apolitical and dangerous, which negates conflict as a basic element in human cohabitation. The objective must not be the creation of a pacifist mankind but that of structures within which inevitable conflicts are tackled in the most peaceable and constructive way possible.
- *Education for peace makers.* This is my definition of forming the capacities to work for peace. The aim is to get the students in the position of building a critical awareness and to rebel against the war system. Obviously this does not come about without an intense auto-criticism of one’s own impulses of violence and one’s relation to conflict, and does not work without a strengthening of character. Its difference from the first position however remains quite clear. Peace Education does not mean educating to make us peaceful, gentle and afraid of conflict; instead it strengthens our will and the ability to actively oppose all conditions leading to hostility. Rebellion, the readiness to challenge and to knowingly and correctly confront conflicts, are therefore all qualities boosted by educating for peace skills. The political connotation is not contradictory to a personal approach. Again, according to Alain Touraine, radical subjectivism is a form of resistance by whoever is his own master, and is only possible when this right is given to all. Therefore subjectivism means, at one and the same time, the acknowledgement of reason and of human rights, and this democratic subjectivity is precisely the form assumed by the Political. “The Personal is Political!” This classic slogan from the

feminist movement summarizes this kind of dialectic. Perhaps at the time it was not as appropriate as it is today.

3.2 The link between the themes of Peace Education and the general programme of a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence

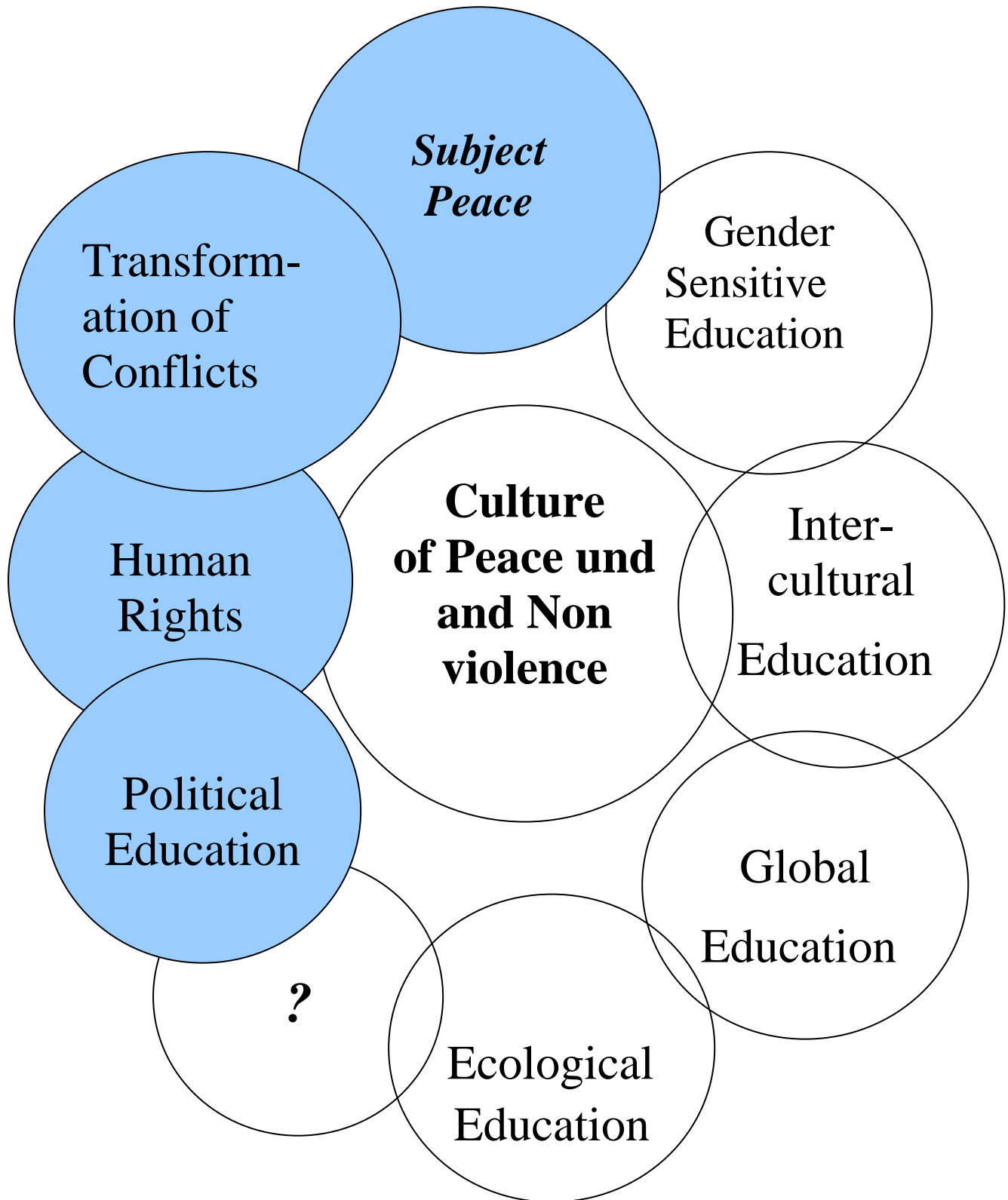
Peace Education does not end with its methodology. Essentially it entails the transmission of content and ideas. The following scheme shows the political spheres where it assumes relevance. The subjects have not been chosen at random but concern fundamental challenges set by our modern world.

The white sections, to the right i.e. *gender sensitive education*, *intercultural education*, *global education* are themes showing the various ways “difference” is culturally seen, lived and made use of as a means of political isolation. *Environmental education* is also placed in this category in order to underline that this is not simply an anthropological constant of our ties to the earth, but concrete cultural forms in which this relationship with nature is expressed.

The grey sections, to the left represent established principles and methods of procedure in the relation with “difference”. *Human Rights* represent the codified form of equal rights for all, without any exclusion; *education for the creative transformation of conflicts* converts this unconditioned respect of one for the other in the management of conflicts, themselves necessary and inevitable. *Political education* emphasizes the need to learn the forms of political debate, so as to be able to successfully undertake the struggle for peace. Political education also includes an education critical of the media. Which in its turn constitutes a link of conjunction between education and aesthetics.

The longterm goal of *peace* is present in each individual subject. However we have deemed it necessary to mention it again, on its own, to bring to the fore the centuries old global task of overcoming the system of war and the culture of violence. The *question mark* brings us back to the inevitable lacuna, to the incompleteness of any systemization of the scopes of Peace Education.

Scopes of Peace Education



3.3 The autonomy of Peace Education

In the meantime we need to point out the indispensability of the autonomy of education in respect to politics. Hannah Arendt emphasises how the attempt to put education and politics on one and the same level is aimed at keeping grown-ups in a state of adolescent irresponsibility and to control them politically. Besides, this also means denying children the protected space they need in order to grow and to integrate themselves into society (cfr. Arendt 1961, particularly chapter III). Therefore Peace Education takes place in a border zone between the private and the public, and is at the same time concrete action and rehearsal for action.

These principles have an influence on the practice of Peace Education. All the methods which have proved to be particularly efficient, satisfy the following four conditions:

- Up to a certain limit, all the students are allowed to take autonomous decisions.
- They have the possibility of reflecting in an independent way about their own behaviour and attitude, and to analyse them critically.
- The projects realised by the students do not simply reproduce already ingested knowledge, on the contrary it generates new knowledge, and therefore learning has an experimental character.
- The projects realised by the students give them the opportunity to transmit to the others what they themselves have learnt. It has a pedagogical-political character.

Some concrete examples:

- Drama methods, for example, *The Theatre of the Oppressed* by Boal (Boal 1982).
- Methods stimulating creativity and imagination, and for example the way future workshops open creative spaces. (cfr. Jungk/Müllert 1981).
- International meetings, such as Twinings and student exchanges and in particular great projects such as “The European Youth Academy” or the “Educating for Global Citizenship” (Global Education Award 2005).

4. Summary and Prospects: from Pisa to Assisi

Peace Education is education for politics. Not for politics as it is, but as it should be. In other words, Peace Education is in opposition to politics as it is normally practised, and therefore anti-politics. It must give the students the ability to understand the war and violence system

we are living in, to ask themselves questions about what are the causes and in this way to delegitimize them. It must help them to work for the overthrow of the existing system and to develop a culture of peace.

Today however we are threatened by the danger that education be reduced to a one-sided development of skills aimed at the economic world. Even the international comparative studies of OECD, for example PISA, are used to focus on these skills. In fact the real effect PISA had, has not been the provision of exact information as of the reading and mathematical abilities of fourteen-year olds. What it really managed to obtain was the mobilisation of the media, of politicians and of specialists, and to get them interested in the standards and attainments of the scholastic system. However, missing among the standards are, for example, the social and intercultural education, global solidarity and political education. All that counts is the technical aspect of the overall preparation for entering the labour market.

Probably, in order to be able to draw attention to the “peace skills”, these would have to be “ennobled”, even through international studies. To this end I propose the setting up of an international study (for example within OECD), in order to verify youth skills in the matter of values, active solidarity, respect for human rights, peace and cosmopolitanism.

Taking a cue from the meaning of the initials PISA, I propose ASSISI – instead of Pisa, a city of navigators and warriors, let us choose the city celebrating the hero of Peace, Francis of Assisi. ASSISI stands for: Assessment of Social Intelligence, Solidarity and Internationalism. This study, ASSISI, could build standards for Social and Intercultural Education, for Peace Education and for Political Education, and verify the quality of the teaching system from this point of view. The result of this study should be the development of appropriate measures particular to each country, in order to bring every state to the highest level possible in the matter of peace skills.

Perhaps to some people this project may appear to be too utopistic, or too much of a dream. To these I would like to reply by quoting Bertha von Suttner, the first woman to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace exactly a hundred years ago:

We poor pacifists, so often called visionaries.... Describing us as such, one thinks that he is being contemptuous, as if the ability to see through the spiritual eye the outline of a future picture, is not the basis of all creative activity, be it the visionary as an artist, an engineer or a politician. (Suttner 1917, January 1913).

References

Arendt, Hannah. The Crisis in Education. In: Hannah Arendt. Between Past and Future. Six Exercises in Political Thought. New York: Viking Press, 1961, 173-196.

Boal, Augusto. Theatre of the Oppressed. New York: Theatre Communications Group. 1985.

Davies, Lynn. Erziehung zum Krieg – Erziehung zum Frieden. In: Entwicklungspolitik, Heft 1/2/Januar 2005, 24-28.

The EURED Teacher Training Programme. Curriculum of a European Peace Education Course. Klagenfurt 2002.

The Hague Appeal for Peace. The Hague Agenda for Peace and Justice for the 21st Century. UN Ref A/54/98. New York 1999.

Hentig, Hartmut von. Die Menschen stärken, die Sachen klären. Ein Plädoyer für die Wiederherstellung der Aufklärung. Stuttgart: Reclam 2003.

Jungk, Robert/Norbert R. Müllert. Future Workshops. How to Create Desirable Futures. London: Institute for Social Inventions, 1987.

Suttner, Bertha von. Der Kampf um die Vermeidung des Weltkrieges. Randglossen aus zwei Jahrzehnten zu den Zeitereignissen vor der Katastrophe (1892–1900 und 1907–1914). Hgg. von Alfred H. Fried. 2 Bde. Zürich: Orell Füßli 1917.

Touraine, Alain. Un nouveau paradigme pour comprendre le monde d’aujourd’hui. Paris : Fayard 2005.

Wintersteiner, Werner. „Hätten wir das Wort, wir bräuchten die Waffen nicht.“ Erziehung für eine „Kultur des Friedens“. Innsbruck: StudienVerlag 2001.

Wintersteiner, Werner. Lernziel Friedenskompetenz. Für eine öffentliche Debatte über bildungspolitische Grundziele. In: Entwicklungspolitik, Heft 1/2/Januar 2005, 42-45.