

**International Institute on Peace Education 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary  
United Nations Headquarters, New York**

**Closing Plenary Session  
Friday August 10, 2007**

**“Cooperation and Community: Learning to Learn Together”**

**Tony Jenkins, IIPE Global Coordinator**

I would like to talk this morning a bit on the general side about cooperation and community as essential attributes of any strategy for change via peace education.

Let me begin by identifying what I see as an essential problem. Discussions regarding responses and policies related to violence, security and peace typically take place at the highest levels. These discussions exclude the grassroots and their communities whose participation is necessary and crucial for ensuring equitable outcomes to local and global decision-making. Important peace work is taking place on the ground, yet grassroots organizations and educators from conflict zones and developing nation-states work with very limited resources and have few adequate training opportunities. Educators also have limited opportunities to learn, share and strategize with counterparts in other national or world regions, despite the fact that issues related to peace and human security, by their very nature, cross borders and reach into all communities. There is an urgent need to create opportunities for serious and sustained dialogue among frontline educators working on these crucial issues.

My hope, through the work that we are presently engaged in, is to foster the space and imagination for peace education learning communities to emerge at all levels of the social order.

I think this is very possible – we only need only a bit of imagination, strategy, and courage to make it possible.

I want to talk with you this morning about two things – cooperation and community.

These two simple values concepts are the guiding principles that inform the approach we take to our work and the education we design and deliver.

I'd like to begin by framing these concepts a bit and then describe to you how these principles manifest themselves and how they might contribute to a broader strategy for social change through education.

For starters - when I talk about peace education I'm really talking about education for social transformation.

And by transformation I mean deep change affecting ways of thinking, worldviews, values, behaviors, relationships, and social structures.

We seek to nurture the types of changes in thinking that will help learners to understand, confront, resist, transform and ultimately eliminate violence in all of its multiple forms.

Such changes, we hope, may inspire learners to actively pursue the transformation of the present culture of violence through considerations of alternatives. This is part of the process we will engage in later today as we begin thinking more concretely about future possibilities.

These past few days we have begun illuminating and assessing possibilities for overcoming various forms of violence. Acknowledging the futility of violence and recognizing the practicality of alternatives is the central change that must take place as part of a process of transformation toward a culture of peace.

Our good friend Betty Reardon describes the transformation that must occur as:

“a change in the human consciousness and in human society of a dimension far greater than any other that has taken place since the emergence of human settlements.”<sup>1</sup>

We know of course that such transformations cannot be forced, mandated, or dictated. The peace community has been shouting at the world for years. Shouting at the world might get our voices heard – but it doesn’t guarantee that anyone will actually listen.

As educators we can strive to be active agents in this transformative process by nurturing capacities of critical thinking and cooperation. Nurturing these capacities is essential for fostering the autonomously arrived at knowledge and skills necessary for the possible engagement of learners with society.

- These essential capacities of critical thinking and cooperation enable students to reflect upon reality and possibilities for action at the individual level;
- They enable students to critically engage and analyze existing knowledge;
- And most significantly nurturing these capacities significantly increases the possibilities for student engagement with their communities and society at large.

On Wednesday morning I talked about how the IIPE is built upon the principle of learning with and from one another and how this simple idea in so many ways is foreign to our experience.

I believe we have a long way to go in learning to learn together. By this I don’t mean sitting in the same space, conference or classroom together. Even cows and sheep know how to do that.

- What I mean is that we need to learn how to deeply listen to one another;
- to put aside our own ideas for a minute and consider another persons perspective;
- to slow down, quiet our minds and remind ourselves that we don’t know everything;
- and, to as frequently as possible, remind ourselves that we are part of a bigger living system and as such we are dependent upon each-other for our collective survival.

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<sup>1</sup> Reardon. Comprehensive Peace Education, x.

If I could make one simple point it might be this: Learning how to learn together is essential for social transformation.

I believe that social transformation is a process that has little possibility for success unless it is pursued and sustained cooperatively and communally.

We can do this in subtle ways. In preparing to have this conference hosted at the UN I spent a lot of time thinking about the general format of meetings and discussions held here. The typical scenario isn't all that different from this one. Let me share a brief story to illustrate. I was here not long ago at a conference – I won't say what one. During a presentation the person seated to my right immediately dozed off. Now, this is perfectly acceptable behavior when one is tired. However, at the end workshop, when Q&A began it was as if some alarm went off. This person shot up and was the first with a question. This person didn't listen to – or hardly hear – anything the presenter said. This person came with an agenda but was not prepared to learn.

We can easily challenge the way we encounter each other in spaces and meetings such as this. Janet set the stage for shifting this pattern on Wednesday by asking us to form small groups and collectively prepare questions for the panel. This simple shift in process gives everyone the opportunity to share some of their thoughts and get feedback from others. It also requires some group processing to collectively arrive at a shared question.

We've also been asking you to think differently about your questions. We have a great group of genius panelists who may indeed have all the answers to the world's problems. However, we hope that as you develop your questions you might think about them as questions for the community.

It is easy to ask a question and place the responsibility on the expert to find or provide the answer. This is a pattern of learning we are familiar with. However, I think finding the answers to the questions we are asking is the responsibility of the community. In the case that we can't find those answers it then becomes our collective responsibility to ask more questions.

So, let me give some examples from our work to demonstrate a bit more how we manifest these principles of community and cooperation. Presently our time is spent coordinating three *interrelated* global initiatives - the IIPE, the CIPE, and the Global Campaign for Peace Education.

With each initiative coming to understand how a community can work, learn and grow together to affect change on an issue of common concern is perhaps the primary learning objective.

I think of each of these initiatives as comprising a unique learning community. We utilize a learning community model both for the benefits of learning from and with each other and for the political and action possibilities.

Again – I have a quote from this woman Betty Reardon. She describes the idea of a learning community quite nicely.

“A learning community is built upon the base of common concern and is developed through mutual respect, attentive listening and vigorous participation. ...Participants are engaged with each other in a common engagement with the issues intended to devise proposals to engage the larger community in addressing the social problems of concern.”<sup>2</sup>

One of the intended political outcomes of learning in community is to foster community values and practices, such as sharing, participation and fellowship. This is in direct contrast to typical political and learning processes that fragment and divide, rather than bring people together.

As most of you know the IIPE is intentionally designed this way. It is a learning experience rooted in community values and processes. We emphasize that every participants' experience, knowledge, and the questions they bring are equally relevant. As a community experience it is extremely important that we recognize that we all have something to contribute and that we all have something to learn from one another. There are no experts who drop in, give us the answers, and then disappear. These processes are shared by all of our initiatives.

The IIPE, however, is limited in what it can achieve. As an international learning community it has been successful in creating space for the exchange and learning of diverse international perspectives. In so doing it has been effective in broadening the theoretical scope and practical applications of peace education.

But – as Betty reminds us with her zoom lens analysis, we need to think globally and also act locally. Two years ago we began to conceive of a way to translate the IIPE experience into a more sustainable, localized forum in which local educators and concerned citizens could learn with and from each other toward the possibility of effecting change locally.

From this sprang the CIPE. CIPEs are envisioned as self-sustaining learning communities, able to support and learn from and with each other, with the goal of addressing and transforming local experiences of violence through learning and education. These local experiences are then further contextualized by relating them to larger and often systemic issues of violence that affect the entirety of the human community. CIPEs warmly wrap together the best of the IIPE – community and cooperation – into a package more suitable to support its constituents and promote social transformation directed toward the reduction and elimination of all forms of direct and indirect violence.

The first CIPEs are now being organized by former hosts and participants of the IIPE, with assistance and cooperation from the IIPE Coordinators in their local communities. Each CIPE program is unique, designed to address locally relevant issues and concerns, drawing upon local human resources, enlisting the cooperation of local institutions, and conducted in the local language.

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<sup>2</sup> Reardon, Betty (2006) *Freedom of Religion and Belief: An Essential Human Rights – a Learning Manual*. New York: Peoples Movement for Human Rights Education (PDHRE). p.18

The very first CIPE will in fact be held later this month in Bogota, Colombia – hosted by Amada Benavides of the Schools of Peace Foundation. Soon there after a CIPE will be held in Peru hosted by Betty Evans... and not long after that CIPEs in Hungary (Eva Nagy), the Philippines (Loreta Castro), and India (Asha Hans and Leban Serto).

Let me take one quick moment to describe the Hague Appeal for Peace Global Campaign for Peace Education. We began coordinating this initiative in January of this year. We see the GCPE as a global learning community in which participants are working and learning collaboratively to facilitate the introduction of peace and human rights education into all educational institutions.

An initiative of individual educators and education NGOs committed to peace, the campaign is conducted through a global network of education associations, and regional, national and local task forces of citizens and educators who will lobby and inform ministries of education and teacher education institutions about the methods and materials that now exist to practice peace education in all learning environments. The goal of campaign is to assure that all educational systems throughout the world will educate for a culture of peace.

Finally, we've been seeking to tie together these three initiatives together through a virtual learning community – the “Peace Education Online Community.” The Peace Education Online Community is introduced in your program on page \_\_\_\_\_. It was also introduced on Wednesday in the networking session.

We call on you to contribute to this virtual learning community by sharing the questions that we have generated together this week.

Let me quickly conclude:

The vision of the IPE, CIPE, and GCPE are built upon the possibilities elicited through transformative learning and learning in community. The transformations we seek don't happen by accident – they come through participation in intentionally designed learning opportunities that enable learners to see themselves as empowered and engaged participants in the communities of which they are members. There are many obstacles that impede the possibilities for the necessary preparation of educators who are desperately seeking the knowledge and skills to teach for peace in their communities. The CIPE, IPE and GCPE seek to address these problems through fostering communities of learners working toward the realization of their collective potential in working toward a common purpose. When fully effective we see these communities forming into regional and eventually global learning communities, preparing future learners with the knowledge, skills and capacities to engage in transforming the structural, cultural, political, and educational obstacles to peace at all levels of human interaction.

Thank you.