

*Peace Education in Lebanon:
Case Study in the University Context*

Pamela Chrabieh, American University in Dubai, UAE

The Asian Conference on Education 2015
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Peace Education encompasses a diversity of pedagogical approaches within formal curricula in schools and universities and non-formal education projects implemented by local, regional and international organizations. It aims to cultivate the knowledge and practices of a culture of peace. In Lebanon, this culture is mainly promoted by non-governmental organizations and engaged intellectuals and artists since the late 1990s. Also, grassroots student dialogue clubs have flourished in a number of secondary schools. However, in the university context, it is considered to be a rare phenomenon. This paper introduces first to the issue of Peace Education in Lebanon. It then presents the conceptual characteristics and examples of applications of a Peace Education approach I developed and adopted in my classrooms from 2007 till 2014 in three universities with 3000 students of different religious, cultural, social-economic and political backgrounds. In conclusion, it identifies the positive changes the various class activities yielded in students' perceptions and relations, and the obstacles that this approach faced in a context of local and regional physical and psychological wars.

Keywords: Lebanon, Southwestern Asia, Youth, War Memory, Peace Education.

iafor

The International Academic Forum

www.iafor.org

Introduction

(...) The teacher who walks in the shadow of the temple, among his followers, gives not of his wisdom but rather of his faith and his lovingness.

If he is indeed wise he does not bid you enter the house of his wisdom, but rather leads you to the threshold of your own mind.

(Gibran Khalil Gibran, *The Prophet*, 1923)

I started to be interested in the war and peace issues when I left Lebanon, my home country, to pursue my studies at the University of Montreal (Canada) in the late 1990s. While living abroad, I learned that once the war grabs hold of you, it never loses its grip. It shapes the emotions, thoughts, attitudes and behaviors. It becomes part of the individual and collective identity. Therefore, tackling the issues of war and peace is first, to me, a personal struggle and catharsis, incarnated in my pedagogical approach, my artistic work and virtual/physical activism.

As I see it, confronting the culture of war in its past and current dynamics, and especially the psychosocial aspect of the war or the war of traumas and wounded identities within the Lebanese society, is necessary for breaking the war vicious cycle. Sadly, the Lebanese State encourages forgetfulness (1991 Amnesty Law), and major political parties disseminate conflictual narratives in schools, universities and through different media channels. A national memory is inexistent, and the common history book's last chapter ends at 1943, when Lebanon became independent from the French Mandate. Peace Education is usually promoted by non-governmental organizations such as interreligious groups, as well as by artists, online activists and international organizations like the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). Few interreligious research centers were established by universities such as the St Josef University in Beirut or Balamand University. However, there is a fear among many historians and educators that because no consensus about a common writing of the history of the contemporary period has been reached and taught in formal settings, and no official curriculum including Peace Education has been implemented in schools and universities, the new generations are doomed to repeat the past.

Indeed, in this context where these generations are inheriting the experiences of war as still living memories, and are molding/converting this remembrance into some form of fixed historical and existential knowledge, the cycle of war can be perpetuated. The moment of transmission is important to dwell on, because it is a moment of genuine hope and possibility, but also a moment of real danger, with the past posing a threat to future stability. More than ever, encouraging and expanding both non-formal/popular and formal Peace Education in Lebanon by cultivating the knowledge and practices of a culture of peace seems crucial.

About my Peace Education Approach

I have been teaching in Canadian and Lebanese universities – and lately Emirati – for the last twelve years while developing my own Peace Education approach. There are numerous United Nations declarations on the importance of Peace Education as the means to bring about a culture of peace, and many peace researchers such as Betty Reardon (1988) and Douglas Roche (2014a, 2014b) emphasize the importance of

Peace Education as a right to preserve and global peace studies as a way to reduce the threats of war. Conflict resolution training, democracy education and human rights education are the most common variations of Peace Education, but new approaches are emerging and calling into question some of the theoretical foundations of the previously mentioned models. I recently discovered Hossein Danesh's approach, the founder and president of the International Education for Peace Institute, and found it similar to mine. In his Integrative Theory of Peace, peace is understood as a psychological, political, moral and spiritual reality. According to Danesh, the majority of people and societies – and certainly in war zones - hold conflict-based worldviews, subdivided in two main categories: the survival-based worldview and the identity-based worldview. Danesh argues that it is through the acquisition of a more integrative Unity-based worldview that human capacity to mitigate conflict, to create unity in the context of diversity, and establish a sustainable culture of peace, is increased – be it at home, at school and university, and in the international community.

Peace Education's main goal is therefore, beyond a basic teaching about how conflicts get started and the effects of violence and common nonviolent alternatives, the focus on the healthy development and maturation of human consciousness through assisting students with examining and transforming their worldviews, while learning about peace practices in the classroom (the micro level) – and linking these practices to the macro level (community/society). Simply put, it is learning about peace by doing peace inside the classroom and beyond. In my classrooms, by 'doing Peace' I mean that students learn to develop cultural/religious awareness and communication strategies in an intercultural/interreligious/inter-gender/inter-political/inter-social-economical setting. They learn to deconstruct stereotypes and construct alternative narratives. They learn to reflect on the subjectivity of their own identity patterns, to step outside boundaries and discover the fluidity of cultural/religious frontiers. They learn to share responsibility for the act of learning while using all their senses. They learn to understand and experience unity in human diversity through dialogue.

Examples of Applications

Fieldtrips, rally papers, visual art workshops, outdoor agoras, meditation sessions, virtual dialogue platforms, storytelling/storysharing, collaborative learning sessions, documentaries/movies screening, as well as singing, dancing, cooking and eating... A variety of applications, along with lectures and conferences, readings and essay writings. There is no single recipe which can be used in all cases and contexts. In that sense, applications were and are always re-invented.

During storytelling/storysharing sessions for instance, I tell my students my own war stories to serve as anticipatory sets, to capture their attention and increase their interest, to facilitate discussion and as a way for making abstract and conceptual content more understandable. Students are then invited to share their own stories orally, in writing, and with digital assignments using a variety of multimedia. Stories range from personal tales to the recounting of historical events.

Also, Learning through food has become an essential component of all my courses since 2004 – in Canada, Lebanon and recently at the American University in Dubai. When we – my students and I - cook, eat and drink unfamiliar types of food, we have a visceral experience of foreignness brought into our bodies and minds, which contributes to the process of familiarization, thus opens the door for dialogue, the

recognition of differences, mutual respect and the search for a common ground - for what unites in the diversity of stories. Food is a life force and a good meal fosters a strong connection between individuals, a convivial relation beyond mere coexistence. When we gather to share the physicality of the food and the cultural/religious knowledge that accompanies the praxis of eating, we share bits and pieces of our belongings, our historical legacies, and our glocal (global/local) identities.

My Research – Data Collection and Analysis Methodology

I have closely studied the initiatives and visions of many peace activists in Lebanon from 2001 till 2007 and published a book about the subject (Chrabieh 2008). When I started teaching in Lebanon in 2007, I expanded my research to include high school students (Chrabieh 2009) then university students. From 2007 till 2014, I taught approximately 3000 undergraduate and graduate students at three different universities: St Josef University in Beirut, Notre Dame University and Holy Spirit University (USEK). Courses ranged from Introduction to “World religions” and “Religions of the Middle East” to “Religious arts, peace and violence”, “Theology of Dialogue”, “Religion and Politics: War and Peace in Lebanon”, etc.

My latest qualitative research targeted 500 of these students and I presented its progressive results in various conferences: Oxford-UK, Balamand-Lebanon, Istanbul-Turkey, Dubai-UAE and lately Rome-Italy. Two academic articles will soon be published, one in English in Europe, and another one in Arabic in Lebanon. Online publications are also available for further information. The main objectives of this research were the following:

- 1- Assess my pedagogical approach.
- 2- Further understand the challenges facing Peace Education in the university context.
- 3- Provide valuable insight on the advantages and difficulties of teaching and learning about war and peace in a country marked by a continuous flux of physical and psychological wars.
- 4- Identify the representations of war and visions and peace of university students (students’ worldviews), often neglected in academic studies and policy-making reports.

Students’ religious, social and political identities were diverse: 25% Muslims, 40% Christians, 7% Druze and 28% ‘Other’ (other religious movements/ non-official sectarian branches, non-religious affiliations – agnostics, atheists...); 30% March 8 political alliance, 35% March 14 political alliance and 25% Independent¹; 25% upper social-economic class and 75% middle-class.

¹ March 8 and March 14 constitute the two major political alliances, both including various political parties and sectarian branches. March 8 is closer to the Syrian regime, and March 14 openly opposes it.

Two applications were used as data generating platforms for identifying students' worldviews:

- 1) Storytelling/storysharing sessions on war memory where my students were invited to share their oral, written and digital-format accounts of the war in Lebanon within a process of reciprocity (Gintis H., Henrich J., Bowles S., Boyd R. & Fehr E. 2008; Maiter S., Simich L., Jacobson N. & Wise J. 2008) – at least three sessions during the semester. Reciprocity is crucial to create a safe environment, promote trust and establish a cooperative relationship, thus to have a greater potential to yield more accurate data.
- 2) Art workshops on Peace where my students were asked to express visually their visions of Peace in Lebanon by the end of the semester – at least two sessions were required.
- 3)

Furthermore, I used my Participant Observation notes, where descriptions of groups' dynamics, students' comments and behaviors are gathered, through my own observations and participation. Participant Observation provides the researcher with ways to check for nonverbal expression of feelings; grasp how participants communicate with each other; shows the researcher what the students deem to be important in manners, leadership, politics, social interaction and taboos; provides several advantages including the access to 'backstage cultures'; provides the researcher with a source of questions to be addressed with participants; enables the researcher to collect both quantitative and qualitative data through surveys and interviews; allows to check definitions of terms that participants use in activities, and to develop a holistic understanding of the phenomena under study (DeMunck & Sobo 1998; Marshall & Rossman 1995).

I usually study what is happening and why during my classrooms' activities, sort out the regular from the irregular, look for variations and exceptions, seek similar opportunities for observation and plan systematic observation of those events/behaviors. I learned to start with a descriptive observation – in which one observes anything and everything – and evolve to a focused and selective observation. My research had to take several years to maximize the efficiency of the field experience, minimize the researcher bias, and facilitate replication or verification. A primary consideration in my research study is to conduct it in an ethical manner, letting my students know that one of my purposes for observing is to document their activities. I also preserve the anonymity of my students in the final write-up and field-notes to prevent their identification, unless they agree on revealing their identity.

For the data analysis, I used Narrative Analysis, a qualitative methodology employed as a tool for analysis in the fields of cognitive science, organizational studies, knowledge theory, sociology and education studies, among others. My approach is functional, where narratives are viewed as the ways in which individuals construct and make sense of reality as well as the ways in which meanings are created and shared; and the focus is on the interpretations of events related in the narratives by the individuals telling the story. I look for patterns, themes, and regularities as well as contrasts, paradoxes, and irregularities.

Also, for the analysis of my field notes, I index and cross-reference information, organize symbols, construct a coding system, summarize, and start writing, using exact quotes when possible, pseudonyms to protect confidentiality, providing

descriptions without inferring meaning, including relevant background information to situate the activities, and separating my assumptions from what I observed.

War and Peace: Students' Worldviews

40% of the 500 students - all born in the 1990s - were not able to tell stories of the past. They knew very little of most of Lebanon's history. Many of these students' parents were not affiliated to political parties, or they were ex-militia who never raised the war subject at home. According to these students, they "never experienced the wars in Lebanon". However, while 30% preferred following the blank page approach, believing the prospects of ending conflict were bleak, or the wait and see approach, saying that to be Lebanese is to be in a constant state of wait, by the end of the course, 70% were seeking ways to cope with the memory of past violence in order not to repeat it, and to work on healing wounds. According to one of my students, the healing process is important: "If parents do not talk about the past, it does not mean that they did not communicate to their children a chronic fear, even if the original threat does not exist anymore. This fear leads to a culture of silence and makes people unable to handle any new conflict. My father is constantly watchful. I think he does not like to show us - my sisters and I - his weakness or he does not want to burden us with his anxiety (...). We should be dealing with ours fears". Another student stated the following: "There are unfinished business passed on to our generation and the next generations through different forms of communication and silence. What kind of legacy are our parents, leaders and educators giving us when they show us that life is about resentment or the ostrich attitude?"

60% of the students told stories about how their parents experienced physical war during the 1970s and 1980s. Few shared what they have seen or felt during the summer 2006 combats. Stories of bombings, shelters, every day survival tips, death in family... "My father taught me the basics of shooting guns when I was a child. He never clearly explained why he thought it was important for me to be trained, until the events of May 7, 2008 (when inter-sectarian clashes in Beirut occurred). He told me then 'Do you see why I taught you how to fight?'. This is what I call the micro level of inherited war memories or micro trans-generational narratives.

As for the macro level of inherited war memories or macro trans-generational narratives: at least 70% of these students associated with a certain collective narrative. According to the pro-Kataeb Party students, the starting point of the war in Lebanon is the presence of Palestinians "who wanted to expand beyond the refugee camps, thus attacking Christians and the Lebanese State". For the pro-Leftists students, "the right-wing Maronite Christians held great power and did not want to share it with others, thus creating social and political inequalities". Other students named the State of Israel and Syria to be "the only responsible forces at the basis of wars in Lebanon and their continuous 'fuel'". Some blamed colonial powers such as Great Britain and France following the end of First World War and the dismantlement of the Ottoman Empire. Others blamed the Ottomans, then the Turks, or the Cold War between the United States and the USSR. Also, some students described the wars in Lebanon to be only "civil wars" and in particular "Muslim-Christian conflicts".

Furthermore, historical events were made to fit the individual narratives, by being added to or excluded from the narratives. For example, when students were asked

about the massacre of Palestinian civilians which occurred in Sabra and Chatila refugee camps in 1982, many acknowledged the Israeli responsibility while dismissing the right-wing Christian Lebanese Forces'. When they were asked about the conflicts in Mount Lebanon between Christian Maronites and Druze, those who identified themselves as being Maronites only recalled the massacres of Christians by Druze. Similarly, anti-Hezbollah students failed to acknowledge the numerous Israeli invasions and occupations of Southern Lebanon.

Contradicting and often mutually exclusive collective memories appeared to hold a tight grip on most of students' identities, sense of purpose and beliefs. Each side had its way of describing its identity, whereby intergroup differentiation was highlighted and stereotypes and prejudices used to re-affirm positive distinctiveness. Typical beliefs were, for example, that "'we' are right but 'they' are wrong"; "'we' are the victims while 'they' are the aggressors"; "'we' were using self-defense tactics while 'they' were radicals". It did not matter much whether the stories were based on historical facts or not. More important was that a student who had a certain cultural-political-social background interpreted the war in Lebanon as the "other's betrayal".

During the storytelling/storysharing sessions, many students acknowledged the painful memories of the "other side" in order to break the psychological aspect of war trapping them. Most of them were able to know who they are, what they are suffering for, who are the despised others. When they accepted others' narratives, it did not mean they agreed with them or that they had abandoned their own narratives. It meant they acknowledged the existence of a diversity of narratives. In my opinion, this is a first step in a process of building a common memory.

As for the students' Peace visions, there are those who portrayed Peace as the elimination, deportation or destruction of the other, perceived as an enemy, while backing their vision on a particular perception of Lebanon's past. According to one of my students: "Two people with their own different beliefs and perspectives concerning life, and life goals, can never unify and become one in a same country, especially if one people dominate the other by the use of force (i.e. Muslims and Christians)". Other students thought Peace is achieved when sectarianism as a social-political system and attitude is abolished, or even religions. However, a large part of the artistic work showed students had positive attitudes toward others. Positive war memories were being shared in the classroom, especially stories of interreligious/inter-sectarian dialogue and conviviality. A student argued that peace comes with "the acceptance of the fact that I am a rock among many other rocks, here to stay, but nonetheless working in harmony with other rocks to allow the structure to stand". Another student associated the idea of being Lebanese with "living in a plural society and respecting the opinion of others".

In fact, at least 65% of students saw Peace as "harmonious relations between Lebanese", whether interreligious/inter-sectarian or inter-human. It was clear in their artistic work, interventions in class and written assignments. One of the students drew a musical key with the caption "we are all part of the symphony!" Another student used a famous juice ad slogan. He drew a carton can of juice, and then added all the different denominations which form Lebanon as if they were the main ingredients, with the slogan "There is a little bit of Lebanon in all fruits!" Definitely, art workshops and storytelling/storysharing sessions helped many students creating

shared spaces where they could understand each other's beliefs and practices, and feel the paths and waste of war. A desire and commitment to end war and work for Peace was instilled.

My Approach Assessment: Students' Feedback

Along with the results of my qualitative research, the universities' quantitative evaluations of my courses and the class examinations, anonymous qualitative mid-semester and end-of-semester evaluations by students were administered and analyzed in order to assess my approach. Below is a summary of students' feedback:

At least 60% stated having acquired a new and alternative knowledge in a dialogical environment that helped them gain self-confidence and often inner Peace, improve critical thinking, encourage them to cooperate, to respect each other's, to be active learners, to be independent yet in dialogue and harmony.

Storytelling/storysharing sessions were highly valued for their contribution to the yielding of positive changes in perceptions and relations on a micro level, and to revealing emotional memories, whether conflictual or convivial. These memories are passed on from generation to generation, allowing students to both relate better and distance themselves from macro historical narratives/memories. The sessions helped students discover and understand the pain endured by their family/group/community as well as the pain of others, recognize the diversity of individual and collective memories/narratives and that this diversity should be gathered to build a national memory/narrative.

According to one of my students: "Storytelling activities helped me learn more about history, and understand that it does not operate through a linear juxtaposition of facts, but through the co-presence and interpenetration of historical subjectivities". Such a mentality would contribute to the deconstruction of the current top-down approach to teaching the history of Lebanon, responsible for promoting political disempowerment. Another student mentioned the fact that my pedagogical approach helped him become "a critical thinker through a more Socratic-style mentoring where it is not about 'teaching' but 'make others think', and that because "differences of opinions were encouraged in the classroom along with the search for a common ground, students were given the ability to challenge their own rigid belief systems while being respected". A student highlighted the importance of having fieldtrips where students search for a visual/archeological/historical content (and are not guided all the time) and culinary activities where students are asked to cook, to look for information about the food and share it in the classroom, considered to be "a sustainability strategy", meaning students are encouraged to become self-sustainable.

For 15% of my students, changes occurred in their worldviews, behaviors and practices. They became Peace activists in their respective contexts and kept in touch with me via online platforms. Some are part of the 100+ authors of the Red Lips High Heels blog I founded in 2012, others are members of non-governmental organizations – local and/or international. Some established cultural clubs, produced documentaries or organized youth camps. I often receive messages where ex-students relate what they learnt in my classrooms to their current social and political engagement. According to one of them: "We did not only learn about war and Peace. We did Peace. We engaged in acts of civic responsibility in the classroom and following the course". For another one: "This is a pedagogy of engagement". And "workshops and

activities, along with the lectures, helped us transform from controlled objects to empowered agents”.

Obstacles

Peace Education in Lebanon, and especially in the university context, faces many obstacles:

- 1) The context itself makes it hard to disseminate: political turmoil, corruption, State paralysis, social-economic crisis, the war in Syria and its impact, the rise of extremism, etc.
- 2) There are prevailing misconceptions about the aims and nature of Peace Education – some perceive Peace to be an ideal and believe Lebanese should concentrate on surviving through self-defense and the use of “just violence”.
- 3) There is a diversity of definitions and applications of Peace Education in non-formal settings, where practitioners and activists function often in ivory towers. Cooperation between organizations is a rare phenomenon.
- 4) The field’s scholarship in the form of theorizing, researching and evaluating badly lags behind practice.
- 5) Peace Education in universities is usually an isolated affair. For a large-scale impact, it need to expand. There are many conditions to pursue this expansion such as funding and political will. Ultimately, Peace Education ought to be considered a public good and as such should be offered as a free service to all.
- 6) Students may continue to refuse the possibility of Peace, especially when they live in unsupportive environments. Even when they are equipped with new worldviews, they enter into a collision course with their social-political surroundings: family, neighborhood, sectarian community, political party...
- 7) Some students question the effectiveness of dialogic methods, arguing that the causes of wars in Lebanon are tangible conflicts of interests, structural causes and a struggle for power and influence.
- 8) The potential of escalation of hostility among classmates could become alarming when professors/educators are not trained or do not have experience in mediation. Until the present day, training programs in Peace Education in the university context are rather inexistent.

Conclusion

My research and students’ feedback revealed that the various applications of my pedagogical approach yielded some positive changes in perceptions and relations. These changes belong to Lebanon’s history. True that traumatic experiences may never disappear from the minds of generations of Lebanese. New wounded memories will be added to the old ones. However, I strongly believe that, as Buckminster Feller states, “To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete”. Or at least, try to contribute to the creation of alternative models through unconventional ideas and teaching techniques, and out of the box learning practices where all senses are used (holistic approach), and empathy and mutual respect are promoted and experienced. Education, as I see it, is first and foremost about learning to be and become better human beings, or learning the art of being human.

References

- Chrabieh, P. (2008). *Voix-es de paix au Liban*. Beirut: Dar al Machreq, St Josef University.
- Chrabieh, P. (2009). *La gestion de la diversité au Liban. Visions de jeunes du secondaire*. Beirut: Dar al Machreq, St Josef University.
- Danesh, H.B. (2006). Towards an integrative theory of Peace education. *Journal of Peace Education*, 3(1), 55–78.
- Danesh, H.B. (2008). Unity-Based Peace Education. In Monisha Bajaj, Ch. (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Peace Education* (pp.147-156). North Carolina: Information Age Publishing, Inc.
- DeMunck, V.C. & Sobo, E. J. (Eds.) 1998. *Using methods in the field: a practical introduction and casebook*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.
- Gintis, H., Henrich, J., Bowles, S., Boyd, R., & Fehr, E. 2008. Strong reciprocity and the roots of human morality. *Social Justice Research* 21, 241–253.
- Maiter, S., Simich, L., Jacobson, N. & Wise, J. 2008. Reciprocity: an ethic for community-based participatory action research. *Action Research* 6, 305–325.
- Marshall, C. & Rossman, G. B. 1995. *Designing qualitative research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Reardon, B. (1988). *Comprehensive Peace Education: Educating for Global Responsibility*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Roche, D. (2014a). Building Political Consensus for the Right to Peace. Michigan State University of Law, Lori E. Talsky Center for Human Rights of Women and Children:
http://roche.apirg.org/public_html/writings/documents/nuclear/Michigan%20Speech-Nov.12-14.pdf (retrieved: 15-09-2015)
- Roche D. (2014b). Action Steps for the Culture of Peace. In United Nations Level Forum on the Culture of Peace Panel, Global Citizenship as a Pathway to the Culture of Peace:
http://roche.apirg.org/public_html/writings/documents/nuclear/CultureofPeaceSpeech9sep2014.pdf (retrieved: 15-09-2015)
- Contact email: pchrabieh@aud.edu