Teaching Peace as if it is Everyone's Business

Lowell Ewert

Introduction

Some initial observations will put my comments into perspective. First, although I have taught peace studies courses and managed the Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS) program at Conrad Grebel University College for 17 years, I have never once taught a PACS course that was substantially similar to any course I completed as an undergraduate or graduate student. My teaching has been heavily influenced by my law school studies and my international development experiences in more than a dozen countries, and my approach is rooted in my experience in working with people trapped in the daily grind of poverty, disempowering political systems, and armed conflict.

Second, I realize that the human rights lens I use poses a dilemma for some who fear it does not give prominence to the negative impact of dominant or abusive political powers. Human rights principles designed to promote positive justice presuppose a strong state that can impose its will, using force if necessary, to mandate compliance. This dilemma is one in which the "problem" is often a strong state that applies its power in a way that harms people (usually using law to justify its actions), and simultaneously the "solution" is a strong state (using law to justify its actions). The problem and the solution appear to be the same.

A law-based approach does not shy away from the state-sanctioned use of force or violence. Instead it seeks to regulate it within lawful parameters. Integrating this approach into a peace program sponsored by a Mennonite Anabaptist pacifist constituency is not without its challenges. As an example of the perceived contradiction between Mennonite approaches to peace and a rule-of-law approach, I recall being scolded by a passionate PACS supporter after my first public community presentation as a PACS faculty member for not being Mennonite enough. I had just finished delivering comments in which I argued that because the law of war can be useful to protect civilians caught in armed conflict, pacifists at a minimum should demand

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that all warring parties adhere to it. I was cornered by a deeply concerned constituent of Conrad Grebel and accused of justifying war and violence, and supporting the just war tradition. "I don't understand why Grebel hired someone like you in the first place as we are pacifists and against all wars," she declared, missing the point of my comments.

Third, I do not believe that peace studies is a discipline for which the parameters of discourse are clear. Every sector of society contributes daily to peace in ways that most disciplines don't critique and analyze. Engineering, computer science, chemistry, community health, or mathematics, to name just a few disciplines, can all have a profound impact on advancing the notion of peace broadly defined. Peace studies is therefore one of the most practical areas of study, as it applies to everyone, every day, no matter their occupation or academic pursuits. The daily newspaper can be the peace studies course reader, as virtually every article has a peace subtext.

As such, successful peace studies instructors can be generalists concerned about the broad architecture of peace as opposed to specialists in one narrow aspect of the peace construction business. I fall into the first category. In my teaching I emphasize educating students about a way of thinking and asking questions as being more valuable than knowledge of specific facts that they can find by a quick google search. Not all students are comfortable with this approach, and indeed a student walked out of a first class session after I said "there is no right answer, but there are better ways of thinking." The student was concerned about not being able to perform well on the exam and earn a good grade.

I don't recount this personal perspective to suggest that it is possible to teach peace even if one is not qualified to do so, or that a law and rights framework is inconsistent with a Mennonite pacifist approach to peace. Rather, these factors help explain how I have gone about conceptualizing, developing, and teaching peace courses in a way that has generally been well received by students. Below I will fill out the framework by identifying four key elements of my approach.

Framework for Teaching Peace Studies

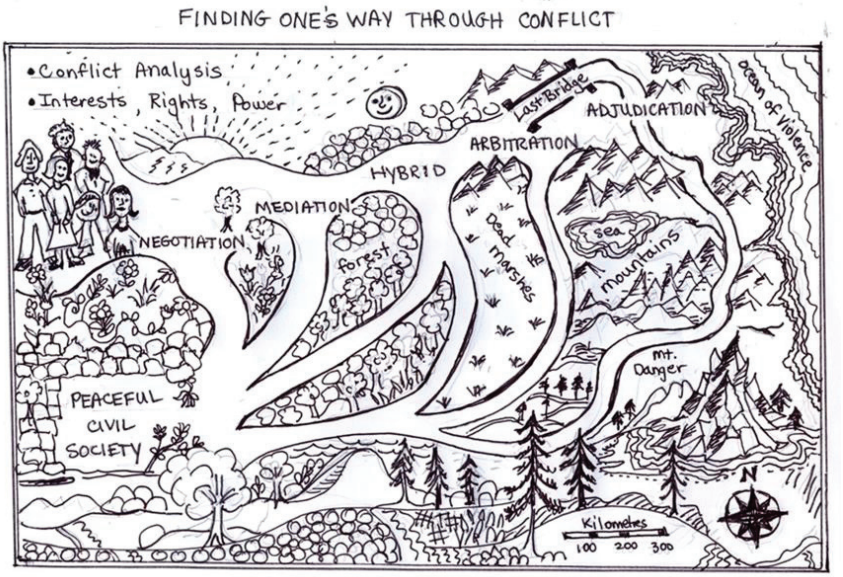
Visualization of Peace

In April 2007, I started on a journey that has dramatically improved

my connection with students and raised my course evaluations. I was a participant in a week-long seminar run by the University of Waterloo Centre for Teaching Excellence. We were challenged by an exercise calling on us to draw a picture that described an entire course we taught. Using words within the picture was permitted, though employing fewer words and a more illustrative picture was promoted as having more impact. "If you can draw it, you can teach it," we were told. I can't draw and have no artistic sensibility, but I managed to explain enough of what I visualized so that someone else could draw what I "saw." The impact of pictorial concept maps on me and my teaching was profound. While I had always felt that my course outlines made sense and led logically from one principle to another, visualizing the totality of a course in terms of a drawing or "concept map" worked so well that I now regularly use such drawings to let students know when we are transitioning from one module to another, and how new topics build on and complement the stages just finished.

"Where you stand determines what you see," and the visual map helps students gain a better sense of where they are standing on the path through the course materials. It also forces me keep the course focused on the end goal and to clarify how each module or principle contributes to the overall journey. Although very difficult at times to create, I have regularly used drawings as concept maps in five courses: Promoting Peace in Perilous Times; Fair Trade; Human Rights and Business; Peace-Building, Human Rights and Civil Society; and Conflict Resolution. The only reason I haven't used a concept map for all my courses is that I've been unable to conceptualize all of them in visual form. In theory, however, every course should be "draw-able."

The most successful concept map has been one I prepared for an introductory conflict resolution course. This map, shown on the following page**,** illustrates how people can find their way through interpersonal conflict. The words in the top left corner, where the group is standing and waiting to begin the process of going through a conflict, identify some (but not all) of the underlying core values supporting the course. This section represents more than one-third of the entire course content. Once the foundational principles are reviewed, the class then begins a comparative analysis of the most common conflict resolution principles used for interpersonal conflict



in Canada today—negotiation, mediation, various hybrids, arbitration, and resort to the formal legal system. Each successful path is shown to be a longer journey through more difficult terrain, a less traveled road with more obstacles and risks. However, the alternative to these five processes is also shown. If none of the processes is effective, the "ocean of violence" is a very likely outcome, making the return to a peaceful civil society far less likely.

Students are challenged by the map to visualize the practical reality that it is almost, but not always, quickest, easiest, most efficient, and best to take the shorter route through conflict. What was missing from the map, the students and I later discovered, was a warm cleansing shower (to be placed in the bottom left of the drawing). This addition would represent the notions of forgiveness and apology that enable people just completing the difficult journey through conflict to be refreshed and truly restored.

This very practical, and not theoretical, illustration of the course has been so successfully received that students have sometimes submitted a version of the map on exams when asked to recommend the best conflict resolution approach for resolving a hypothetical conflict. An additional unexpected benefit is that the map has assisted sessional instructors

teaching the course to offer consistent, almost interchangeable versions of it. All instructors follow the same map, even if their individual perspectives, experiences, approaches, and stories may substantially differ. The concept map has become the visual brand for the course.

Structural Issues Matter

Visualizing peace in the absence of examining the structural systems that support it is unlikely to lead to sustainable long-term peace as broadly envisioned. The "hard" structural legal and normative aspect of peace must be seamlessly combined with the "soft" relational side. If it is not, neither the hard nor the soft objectives will be met. Peace will not result. The late Louis Henkin, a leading scholar of international law, has made an analogous contention about the impact of human rights on religion:

> Human rights are not a complete, alternative ideology, but rights are a *floor*, necessary to make other values—including religion—flourish. Human rights not only protect religion, but have come to serve religious ethics in respects and contexts where religion itself has proved insufficient. Human rights are, at least, a supplemental "theology" for pluralistic, urban, and secular societies.[1]

In my teaching I attempt to illustrate and integrate the co-dependent relationship of rigid rules and flexible discretion in two ways.

First, I compare the co-dependence between hard structural and soft relational attributes of peace to the situation of a family living through a cold Canadian winter. The structural aspects of their house—its foundation, walls, doors, windows, roof, and floor—are mostly rigid and difficult to change. These aspects can be metaphorically compared to international law or national constitutional law. The interior walls, which are more movable, can be compared to provincial, state, or municipal law, usually far more adaptable in a remodeling effort. The rigid structure protects occupants of the house from the figurative wind of persecution, the hail of discrimination, the cold rain or snow of disempowerment, and the arbitrariness of having no protection from burglars or thieves. It also provides necessary boundaries

[1] Louis Henkin, *The Age of Rights* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1990), 186-87.

and barriers for the residents to express their unique individuality.

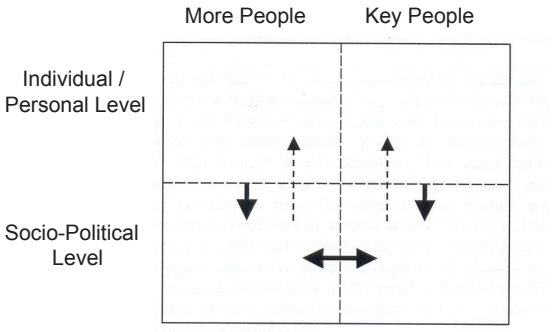
Without a house, or with a house that is severely damaged, no matter how much the occupants may appreciate or interact respectfully with each other, it will be difficult for them to form genuine community and develop their full potential when they are shivering in minus 20 degree weather, pelted with snow or frozen rain pellets, or afraid for their personal safety because there are no locked doors. Conversely, the structure of the house by itself is no guarantee that occupants will genuinely love, respect, care for, value, or want to form community with each other. Even within the best constructed house, life lacks the manifestation of dignity and peace if the soft relational attributes are absent. Genuine respect for the dignity of the person requires an affirmation of both the structural and relational aspects of peace.

This understanding of the structural (standards) and relational (peace theory) aspects of Fair Trade, business, civil society, disasters, disabilities, vocations, and much more is the key to how I can effectively teach my courses. The house analogy illustrates how structural and relational aspects, which are present in every single topic, can be understood synergistically. It also offers a compelling picture of how peace theology and peace practice can lead to a common outcome.

Second, and closely related, I examine how structures can be used to "build" peace. For this understanding, I am indebted to the findings of the Reflecting on Peace Practice (RPP) research project undertaken about a decade ago by the Collaborative for Development Action to answer this question: Why has so much peace work been done for so long, by so many people, with so much funding, with so little apparent impact? It was framed in response to a sense that decades of peace-related work sponsored by international and local agencies should have had more impact and more solid gains than were evident.

This project spanned a three-year period and involved discussions with more than two hundred local, national, and international agencies involved in some kind of peacemaking activity. It was the most comprehensive study of its kind. Researchers found that the various peace activities could be divided into two distinct strategies or theories, illustrated by the diagram at right, of who needs to be engaged for the achievement of peace. One group believed it was essential to engage *as many people as possible* for peace to

be viable. The other group aimed more at *a small number of key people* or groups of people: gatekeepers, political leaders, warlords. In spite of the great variety of activities, all could be mapped in a simple four-cell matrix.[2]



The RPP project also found that all programs typically work at either the individual/personal level or the socio/political level. Some projects or interventions would move to another cell eventually, and some were located in the boundaries between cells, but many stayed in one cell. One of the most interesting and perhaps sobering findings was that any project that begins and remains in just one quadrant will not be doing enough to effect significant change in "peace writ large," the bigger peace beyond the immediate goals of individual programs. And the authors concluded, among other things, that a much greater effect will be realized if the work in one quadrant can be transferred to other quadrants. The size of the arrows in the diagram suggests how important it is for development practitioners to attempt make linkages between their work and that occurring in other quadrants.

A shocking revelation was that programs focused at the individual/personal level "will have no discernible effect" on peace![3] That is, when peacemakers worked only at the individual/personal level, whether they

[2] Mary B. Anderson and Lara Olson, *Confronting War: Critical Lessons for Peace Practitioners*, (Cambridge, MA: Collaborative for Development Action, 2003), 48.

[3] *Reflecting on Peace Practice: Participant Training Manual* (Cambridge, MA: Collaborative for Development Action, 2013), 11, www.cdacollaborative.org/media/94317/rpp-i-participant-training-manual.pdf, accessed June 8, 2014.

focused on more people or key people, their peacemaking effort had a limited long-term impact on the broader peace. This finding has profoundly influenced all my teaching, as it identifies the key to creating sustainable long-term peace. In contrast to the house analogy discussed above, describing the equilibrium that should exist between structure and relationships, the more people/key people diagram explains how to create this equilibrium.

As an illustration, consider Fair Trade, which was designed to represent a new kind of relationship between the producer and consumer. The principles and institutions of Fair Trade (socio-political) have since concretized relational and soft attributes (individual and personal) into more formal standards. If this development had not occurred, the RPP theory correctly hypothesizes that Fair Trade would eventually fade away. Instead, because it now also functions in the bottom two quadrants of the diagram, Fair Trade is growing dramatically each year, even attracting multinational proponents.

Peace studies educators can apply the same reasoning to classes on business and peace. It is nice and good for individual businesses to respect human rights (individual and personal), but the gains will likely be lost unless these singular actions are codified and solidified into a form such as the United Nations Global Compact or other standards forged by activists and civil society actors to solidify the principles (socio-political). Collectively, these standards create structure. When I look for them, I find such standards functioning at the socio-political level in almost everything I teach. As a result, the RPP diagram is at the core of all my classes, and I use it to challenge students to seek opportunities to "harden" relational processes of peace into standards that sustain peace.

Peace as Broadly Owned

My approach to peace studies has given me the freedom to develop new courses that approach peace broadly. In 1998, when I developed a course on Human Rights, Peace and Business, I was aware of only two other similar courses, both offered by US law schools, on this topic. This course emphasized global corporate standards, both legal and normative, that were prodding the economic community to be more responsive to peace concerns. It predated, but has subsequently built on, the energy created by the ten UN

Global Compact principles, established in 2002 to promote global business adherence to human rights and to labor, environment and anti-corruption tenets.

A course on Fair Trade I developed in 2008 was the only term-long course on this emerging area of commerce I could find in North America at the time. While many peace studies, business, or economics courses offered a module or two on Fair Trade within an existing course, they did not devote an entire term to delving deeply into the history, practice, or detailed operational aspects of this phenomenon. A significant aspect of my course was an analysis and discussion of the standards that motivate, guide and regulate the Fair Trade industry.

I am currently developing two courses that will follow a similar approach. One is entitled Peace is Everyone's Business, and the other is named Peace and Disability. The first will explore how nearly every Faculty and discipline at the University of Waterloo can and should contribute to peace, helping students strengthen the connection between peace and their chosen profession. This course will examine how standards and norms impacting the notions of justice, rights, and suffering, as well as occupations related to accountancy,[4] business, health,[5] engineering, and disaster response all contribute to peace. As an example of how the course will be framed, it

[4] Accountants contribute to peace by creating mechanisms and rules facilitating commerce and trade. Sometimes the trade that they make more possible causes harm. Often, however, good accountants, guided by good accounting practices, are an important foundation stone on which peace is built. Good accountants justly "enforce" law, ensuring that taxes are paid, minimum wage standards are followed and benefits paid, and government or other officials are not bribed. One difference (not the only one) between Nigeria or the Congo and Canada is the absence in these African countries of both a fully competent system of business accounting and the political will to enforce just rules of trade and commerce. Corruption, cheating, and fraud are endemic, siphoning off billions of dollars of resources that would otherwise transform people's lives. If peace means having the basic necessities of life met, for the people of Nigeria and the Congo it means in part having good accountants following generally accepted accounting practices. The kleptocracy of the Viktor Yanukovych regime in Ukraine is an additional example of how failed accounting practices, or timid accountants, allowed a leader to ruin a nation financially, potentially leading to violent internal or international conflict.

[5] Master of Public Health workers or their equivalents are often the first people targeted during a civil war, as their diagnosis of root causes can expose evil and be seen as threatening abusive powers. Good peace work requires health workers.

will examine the common toilet as one of the greatest "peace inventions" of all time.[6]

The second course aims to expand the disability discussion from one that focuses on health, rights, and access to services to one that employs a peace lens including reference to eugenics, ugly laws (laws discriminating against people of "unsightly or disgusting" appearance), disabilities, mercy killing, assisted suicide, autonomy, and the impact of global conflict on the disabled. This course will build on the notion articulated by Christian Blind Mission Canada, that "a person's impairment is really not the biggest barrier they face. The attitudes and prejudices around them are much more limiting than not being able to see or hear or walk."[7] Framed this way, disability is far more a peace issue than a health issue.

The point of my discussion here is to highlight an aspect of teaching peace that I find most fulfilling, namely finding how to emphasize the practical manifestation of peace. I believe I am most effective when my teaching minimizes the use of the word "peace." This approach forces me to be less ideological and more applied. It eliminates relying on code words that often substitute for substance. It changes the discussion from whether I am "for peace" (often merely a political or theological question) to one requiring me to articulate the emphasis I place on toilets, generally accepted accounting principles, health care workers, or lending practices directed towards the business sector. This approach describes the outcome of peace in ways students can readily understand, since it relates specifically to their

[6] If peace is defined to affirm the dignity of people and improve their quality of life, toilets are easily one of the most important drivers of peace. For example, over one billion people defecate in the open, making it inevitable for contamination to spread from person to person. UNICEF estimates that one gram of human feces can contain up to 10,000 viruses, 1 million bacteria, 1,000 parasite cysts, and 100 parasite eggs. One sanitation specialist has further suggested that people living without sanitation in their homes or community may ingest up to 10 grams of fecal matter per day. Also, open defecation creates enormous safety risks for women, the elderly, and the disabled. Rose George estimates that 80 percent of the world's illnesses are caused by fecal matter (see Rose George, *The Big Necessity: The Unmentionable World of Human Waste and Why it Matters* [New York: Metropolitan Books, 2008].) Proper sanitation has increased life expectancy by an average of twenty years. By all these indicators, toilets are a crucial prerequisite for peace.

[7] Christian Blind Mission, www.cbmcanada.org/ourwork.htm, accessed December 6, 2013.

chosen vocation or avocation, and it dramatically ratchets up the relevance of my classes for those not majoring in peace studies.

Assignments Matter

Encouraging the application of peace to almost every aspect of life also demands allowing students the freedom to pursue assignments that build on their expression and view of peace. This freedom may result in unusual projects for which I was never prepared in graduate school to grade. For example, in a course dealing with how civil society may be impacted by the confluence of peak oil, global pandemics, global economic collapse, climate change, and natural disasters, my co-instructor and I gave students the option to pursue a skill they thought they might need in order to survive in turbulent times.

One student came to class with a salad he had picked on his way to the university that evening, complete with all sorts of edible plants that nearly everyone thought were weeds and were going to waste, which he shared with his hungry classmates. Several students made preserves, medicinal tinctures, or baked goods demonstrating sustainable simplicity. Others knitted or crocheted items of clothing. Another took the three-liter plastic bags in which milk is sold in Ontario and wove them into a mat that a person can sleep and keep dry on, as earthquake victims have done in Haiti. One student created a piece of art depicting peace, while several others created three to ten minute video reports.

A group of students wrote and produced a 45-minute theatrical play demonstrating the plight of persons seeking refugee status in Canada. It was subsequently refined and presented as a fundraiser for the Mennonite Coalition for Refugee Support, playing to a sold-out audience. Another student tried to learn the skill of blacksmithing, but noted dryly when showing his final project of a metal chisel that his Old Order Mennonite mentor had encouraged him not to drop out of university. One PACS student learned how to shoot, clean, and maintain a gun. Some of the projects were extraordinary, some were abject failures, but all reflected the beautiful creative energy of a diverse community of learners.

Projects like these are hard to evaluate and grade uniformly or fairly, as there is no template for comparing alternative assignments. Which project is better, a beautiful story of how a student learned to maintain and shoot a gun, or a metal chisel very badly formed in a blacksmith's forge? How does one compare a piece of art with the traditional short research paper that was also an option? To what extent do I impose my values and give a lower grade to students who select projects that I may personally not favor (dealing with guns) as opposed to projects that may have more peace appeal (weaving plastic bags that would otherwise be thrown away into a sleeping mat)? And, finally, the question students frequently ask: What are the criteria for earning a grade of A or B?

To avoid the perception of arbitrary grading, I mark alternative assignments on the basis of three separate but closely related evaluative measures. First, students who complete hands-on assignments must bring their project to class (I made an exception for the gun project!), share what they learned, and engage the class in a discussion as to why they thought their project promoted peace in some way. Students are required to explain, logically defend, and promote their perspective. Discussions that ensue are fascinating, as they open up a door into the creative and expressive side of the brain, as distinct from focusing on the logical side as academic discourse often does. The reporting component of the overall assignment grade usually encompasses roughly one-third of the mark.

Second, students must also prepare a short companion reflective paper providing some academic content, background, and rationale for their project and the scale and scope of the issue they were attempting to address, plus a succinct summary of what they learned. This paper, comprising a third of the assignment mark, can be graded much like any other research paper. Third, the balance of the grade is admittedly subjective; it is based on my perception of how much effort the student seems to have applied to the project and how much they appear to have learned from it. A very badly formed metal chisel could therefore be given a higher mark than a well prepared salad, if there seemed to be a significant investment of time, energy, and enthusiasm in the project. A well-researched salad could, however, be awarded a better mark than a painting if the research supporting the salad was thorough.

Alternative assignments such as those described above should always be optional, as some students may lack the time, resources, physical ability, or creativity to try something new. I always give students the choice of a standard academic or alternative assignment. In other words, if a particular assignment is worth 25 percent of the total course mark, those preferring to submit a standard assignment would produce an 8 to 10 page academic paper. A concern raised by evaluating academic papers alongside alternative assignments is that students pursuing the latter almost always report a far higher investment of time than if they had authored a short research paper. They have been trained to write research papers, and most can do this well, fairly quickly, and too often at the last minute. Alternative projects usually cannot be slapped together just before a looming deadline, and often require a lot more preparatory work. For reasons of fairness, it is important to validate, somehow, the additional investment that such assignments represent.

Conclusion

I don't claim that my approach to teaching peace is the best or only way to do it, but it has worked for me. It especially reflects what I experienced while working in international development for over a decade, most specifically while living in the midst of a civil war in Lebanon in the mid-1980s. The experience of being shot at, threatened, and forced to spend time in bomb shelters helped me frame a philosophy of peace that requires combining soft relational conflict resolution or transformation with the hard structural law and normative side of conflict management that uses power to coerce peace. As a result, a consistent element of all my courses is an emphasis on how law and normative structures influence peace, and how students can strengthen peace structures if they so choose. I don't understand how peace can be taught without a legal/normative foundational concept undergirding it.

A philosophical approach which assumes that responsibility for peace is shared among almost every occupation connects with the desire of students enrolled at a large secular university to find meaning in life. Engineers, scientists, computer and math specialists, and environmentalists, as well as graduates of the arts and humanities, are all integral to peace. When we look at peace in terms of how it is manifested, the connections to

peace can be made almost everywhere. Peace is not something that applies only to mediators, conflict resolution specialists, lawyers, judges, political scientists, social workers, or government officials. It is everyone's business.

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