

Spring 2004

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Recommended Citation

Talbert, Tony (2004) "Give Peace a Chance...In Our Social Education Classrooms - Discovering Alternatives to Violence Through a Unity Triangle," *Journal of Pedagogy, Pluralism, and Practice*: Vol. 2 : Iss. 4 , Article 4.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lesley.edu/jppp/vol2/iss4/4>

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Give Peace A Chance. . .In Our Social Education Classrooms: Discovering Alternatives To Violence Through A Unity Triangle

Tony L. Talbert

Is It Really Violence When It's Promoting Democracy?

Why shouldn't militaristic language and descriptions of the battles of the American Revolution, the War of 1812, the Western Indian Campaigns, and the Civil War serve as symbolic vocabulary of democratic prowess through conquest for our Social Education students? What's wrong with the tales of the storming of San Juan Hill, the overpowering of Iowa Jima, the campaign of Normandy, the battle for Pork Chop Hill and the seizing of Panama as the context in which our Social Education students embrace the concept of America's dominance on the world stage? Is there any inherent wrong in depicting the bombing of Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Saigon, and Iraq as justifiable acts to protect American lives and promote the principles of democracy to the men, women and children beyond the American shores? Why shouldn't the scope and sequence of our Social Education curricula, textbooks and media resources be organized around the images, descriptions, depictions, legends, lies and cherished myths of American military dominance and conquest of the west and beyond? Isn't this our heritage? It's not really violence when it is promoting democracy, is it?

Violence Is Just A Page Away

Each day we lament the fact that our children are fed daily doses of violence through television, theater, video game and music video images and descriptions. Parents, educators, legislators and concerned citizens across this nation meet on a regular basis to discuss and design ways to insulate children and teenagers from the violence that threatens the safety of our homes, schools and communities.

In our attempts to attach blame and seek answers to the complex questions surrounding violence, we do not hesitate to cry for censorship of violent images and content pedaled to our children and teenagers by the media producers of the television, film, music and video industries. We demand that our civil and criminal courts exact justice from those who promote and perpetrate

the violence in our schools, communities and world. With frantic reaction to violence we enact zero-tolerance rules, establish safe school zones, erect metal detectors, eliminate Internet access and enumerate a litany of rules that effectively censor and/or suspend the democratic principles of free expression through standardized dress and curriculum.

In some cases, instead of seeking to attach blame, schools and communities have responded proactively to threats and incidences of violence by creating conflict resolution, mediation and violence prevention programs. These programs typically include training in empathy skills, anger management, conflict resolution, peer mediation, cooperative games, and social skills (Cunningham, 1995).

Yet, while we act and react to the most overt examples of violence in our schools, communities, homes and world, Social Education students are exposed to violence wrapped in the victorious descriptions and glorified images of conquest, warfare and coup d'etats. What is the source of these violent depictions? Who is the purveyor of this material? All one must do to find the answers to these questions is to survey the pages of print, examine the grainy and glossy photographs and peruse the bold titles in the typical Social Education textbooks, curricula and educational media resources that occupy a prominent place in Social Education classrooms across America.

While the glorification of war is not a new phenomenon in American Social Education textbooks and curricula, the irony that educators, parents and concerned citizens continue to seek external influences for the causes of violence while ignoring the images, depictions and glorification of violence in Social Education textbooks cannot go unchallenged. Social Education curricula, textbooks and media resources are organized along a war-centric scope and sequence that provides descriptions of America's involvement in both domestic and international warfare and conflict. Militaristic imagery and language of American domestic and international conquests are organized around the three central themes of (1) land; (2) enemy; and (3) hero (Sheety, 1999). For every thousand pages published on the causes of wars there is less than one page directly on the causes of peace (Blainey, 1988).

Some of the most striking examples of militaristic images and glorification of armed conquest, with little discussion of the human cost and alternative peace initiatives, are regularly found occupying United States' public school fourth through twelfth grade Social Education classrooms. While many of the Social Education textbooks, curricula and media resources present some condemnations of dictators and megalomaniac tyrants, there are few examples of how U.S. foreign policy supported the regimes of these undemocratic leaders. More important, there are seldom discussions, images or description of Oliver La Farge, William R. Lingo, Ralph

B. Guinness, David Starr Jordan and William C. Carr all prominent characters and leaders in peace movements who challenged involvement in supporting these dictators, revolutions, coup d'etats and armed conflicts.

A typical example of the militaristic images and glorification of armed conflict that comprise the bulk of Social Education textbooks, curricula, and media resources can be found in the Macmillan/McGraw-Hill Social Education textbook, curricula and media series entitled, *Latin America & Canada: Adventures in Time and Place* (Banks et.al., 1998). In this Social Education series democracy movements in Latin American nations are presented as embryonic outgrowths of American largess. Most chilling is the absence of specific examples of how U.S. foreign policy supported coup de' etats over freely elected leaders in the name of "democracy building." A policy which sought to ensure the rise or maintenance of a dictator's political and social power in order to ensure geo-political and economic stability for those western political and economic entities that had invested heavily in the hopes of reaping the benefits of raw materials, cheap labor and finished products deriving from a faux democracy.

One of the most blatant examples of the Macmillan/McGraw-Hill resources' sterilized depiction of the U.S. role supporting dictators in Central America can be found in the discussion of Augusto Pinochet, the former Chilean tyrant whose U.S. supported regime perpetrated decades of terror that led to the death and disappearance of thousands of adults, children and nameless innocent victims. Pinochet is presented in a mixed bag of terms when the text offers, "Pinochet was able to rebuild Chile's economy. But he also established a brutal dictatorship. People who disagreed with him were arrested, tortured and often killed. Pinochet's dictatorship marked the end of Chile's long democratic tradition" (Banks et.al., 1998).

Strikingly, the first reference to Pinochet is his ability to rebuild the Chilean economy. While the text does offer two sentences admonishing Pinochet's dictatorial rule, there is no discussion of the U.S.'s role in supporting Pinochet's decades long assault on the democratic principles of life, liberty, justice, equality and pursuit of happiness through the torture and death of thousands of men, women and children. A study conducted by Dan Fleming analyzing 45 Social Education textbooks, grades 8-12 found that the "overall textbook coverage of U.S./Latin American relations was poor" (1984). While nearly all Social Education textbooks, curricula and media resources offer some criticism of U.S. policies, "the perspective of Latin American countries was given little mention and the cultures of the region were ignored" (Fleming, 1984).

Although Social Education textbooks, curricula and media resources are routinely filled with images and depictions of violence, warfare, armed conflict and practices that promote the subjugation of people and nations, these examples seldom conjure the visceral reaction by educators, parents and concerned community leaders as do films, television programs, video games and music lyrics that fill our airwaves and children's minds. While we may debate the comparative impact of television, film and violent video game images with the seemingly benign textbook depictions of war torn lands in times and places long forgotten, it is the constant

representation of war, conflict and violence as the pathway to our nation's rise to prowess that must certainly influence students' attitudes toward war and peace. It is the subtle and ubiquitous representation that democracy, freedom, justice and equality are the pearls of great price that could only be achieved and preserved through war.

Do Social Education textbooks and curriculum promote violent acts carried out in our schools, homes, communities and world? There is certainly not enough data to propagate such a hypothesis. However, it is incumbent upon the Social Education educator to begin the process of examining the impact of Social Education textbooks, curricula and media resources in their continuous representation of war as the solution to conflict, armed engagement as the response to disagreement and militaristic metaphors and symbols as the essence of security on the perceptions and attitudes of Social Education students toward the issues of war and peace.

Are we to eliminate the descriptions of America's past involvement in warfare, exploration, conquest and territorial protection? There is certainly credence to Liddell Hart's memorable motto, "If you want peace, understand war" (Howard, 1983). Yet, if we do not offer examples of peace, alternatives to violence and solutions to armed conflict then the cognitive power of Liddell's notion of comparing and contrasting peace and war is lost. There must be a concerted effort on the part of Social Education educators to seek alternative approaches to the militaristic democracy as presented by textbook authors, curriculum developers and media producers. We must provide equal representation in presenting the characters, concepts, events and activities of persons who challenge militarism and conquest through local, state, national and international peace movements.

Where there are stories and images of generals leading their men into harms way on domestic battlefields and foreign shores, there must be equally prominent descriptions and depictions of the role of conscientious objectors, scientists, political leaders and activist citizens whose collective efforts challenged the conventional wisdom of militaristic fervor during periods of war by promoting peace, social justice, democratic rights, and the responsible development and use of technology. When the names of Washington, Grant, Pershing, Patton, Westmoreland, Schwartzkoff and Powell are prominently displayed as examples of American heroism, there must be equal representation of Dr. Linus Pauling, Dorothy Day, Bella Abzug, Leo Szilard, Norman Cousins, A.J. Muste, A.J. Lelyveld, Arnold Beichman, Jane Addams, Dr. Martin Luther King, and other peace activists who challenged the military industrial complex throughout America's history.

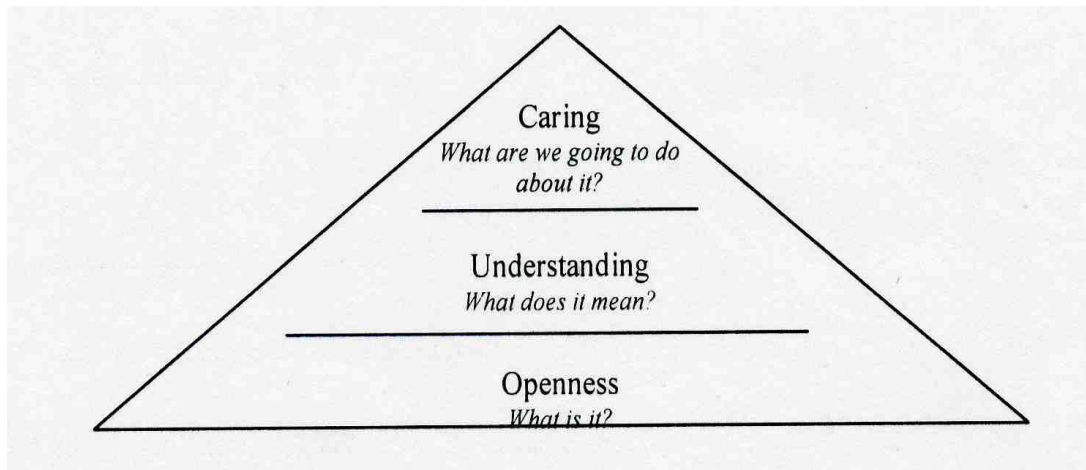
Social Education teachers, students, parents and community leaders must work to develop textbook, curriculum and media alternatives which honestly address the outcomes of war, armed conflict and violent coup d'etats. Social Education content, concepts, themes and issues that promote the advantages of peace must be incorporated by offering examples of persons, organizations, and events that worked collaboratively to ensure peaceful solutions on the local, state, national and global arenas. The glorification of violence as the only alternative to resolving conflict must be countered by images and descriptions that identify racial similarities, celebrate

cultural differences and promote human interactions that bridge the social, political, cultural and economic divide between nations and their people.

Rethinking Hiroshima Through a Unity Triangle

The Unity Triangle offers the innovative Social Education educator an opportunity to plan and implement teaching and learning activities in a way that ensures balance in the representation of human events and characters who were primary players in peace, liberation, equal rights and social justice movements in both the U.S. and around the globe. The Unity Triangle Model is comprised of three parts: (1) Openness; (2) Understanding; and, (3) Caring.

THE UNITY TRIANGLE



Openness

Openness is the foundation of the triangle. It seeks diverse content and responds to the inquiry, “What is it that comprises this concept, event, issue and/or theme?” When planning lessons with the Unity Triangle the teacher embraces the concept of openness by incorporating diverse content, perspectives and concepts that offer alternative views to the Social Education textbooks and curricula. Teaching and learning activities that foster openness of thought and expression, such as dialogue circles, discussion clusters, open inquiry utilizing divergent questions, are planned and implemented in a way that ensure all students are free to explore and express the multiple experiences and examples of how they relate to the Social Education content being studied.

Without question World War II occupies the most prominent place in Social Education textbooks, curricula and media resource materials. It is therefore no surprise that the events between 1941 and 1945 represent an important body of knowledge in which Social Education students are expected to develop in-depth knowledge, skills, attitudes and values concerning the U.S. and its relationship with the rest of the world. Social Education textbooks, curricula and media resources typically offer a litany of descriptions and images of battles, victims of warfare, conventional and atomic destruction, military personalities, citizens of Allied nations unified by the war, and the defeat of Nazi, Fascist and Imperial dictators through the collective efforts of a democratic initiative.

Most often the text and subtext of these discussions and images are brought to a crescendo with a familiar photo and a simplistic statement describing the U.S. dropping of two atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Frequently, the focus of these descriptions of the actions during World War II center on the events that took place on August 6th, 1945 in the Japanese city of Hiroshima, typically accentuating pictures of the airplane that delivered the bomb and the city in the aftermath of the explosion. In some instances, the textbooks' authors offer brief commentary on the American and Japanese publics' surprise of such destruction caused by a single atomic weapon. However, textbook treatments of Hiroshima bombing inadequately convey this event's horrors and complexities (Kazemek, 1994). Most often the commentary of America's decision to unleash atomic destruction on the Japanese people is simplistically juxtaposed between the idea of retaliation for the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 and the justification for saving human life by avoiding a prolonged ground war in Japan. In both instances, the only alternatives are couched in militaristic terms. Democracy can only be won through an act of total annihilation.

Are there alternative viewpoints to the series of events that comprise the bombing of Nagasaki and Hiroshima? Were there persons in the U.S. and around the globe who actively engaged in discussion and protests against the use of atomic weapons? Were there alternatives to the military's and Truman's policy that swift use of an atomic weapon would bring peace?

These are the questions that form the structure of openness. For example, openness can be achieved in the teaching and learning of this event by including the description of the Hibakusha, the survivors of the Hiroshima destruction, that offer the stories of how this single act of warfare led to both the immediate and slow death of 130,000 and 150,000 people by the end of that year (Whig, 1990). In addition, the diaries of men and women who either survived or were the loved ones of those who were killed in Pearl Harbor should be read in addition to the Hibakusha descriptions. Through the comparing and contrasting of these events utilizing dialogue circles and discussion clusters, openness of exploration and expression can be achieved. Moreover, an understanding of the cause and effect relationships that promote revenge, hatred and acts of

violence can be examined as students develop their own diaries describing times when they were either the victims or the perpetrators of violence born from anger and misunderstanding.

Understanding

Understanding is the heart of the Unity Triangle. The Social Education teacher who creates an environment of openness ultimately fosters levels of understanding by allowing her or his students to elaborate on why they believe something is true or false, right or wrong, justified or unjustified. Any measure of openness fosters enhanced understanding through the pursuit of meaning found in binary opposites. The Social Education teacher facilitates learning activities that involve role play, scenario and personalized product development (e.g., diaries, essays, paintings, web pages depicting personal understanding and expression of the concept, theme and/or issue being explored) that express the students' level of understanding born from the openness of the class environment. Understanding activities empower the individual while promoting a sense of creative unity. Understanding is always supported through students being open to listening, sharing and inquiring about others' ideas, opinions and beliefs. Where openness asks, "What is it?" understanding asks, "What does it mean?"

Continuing the example of the exploration of Hiroshima, understanding can be achieved by students engaging in a scenario that places them in the situation of serving as advisors to U.S. President Harry S. Truman. Students can develop a position paper or graphic representation that offers the President alternatives to using an atomic weapon against the people of Japan. Additionally, students can participate in a panel discussion as they research and represent the diverse responses of world leaders in 1945 to the American decision to drop atomic bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima. By exploring, analyzing and representing the diverse responses of world leaders students move into the realm of understanding the cause and effect relationships and meaning of the events.

Students step outside of the one dimensional square of two bombs dropped on two cities in 1945, as presented in traditional Social Education textbooks, curricula and media resources, into the three dimensional cube which examines the multiple levels of understanding, cause and effect relationships, similar and different perceptions and the ripple effect of violence that crosses generations of time and space that comprise the events which unleashed the destructive possibilities of a nuclear age on humanity. Ultimately, understanding leads to a greater measure of caring.

Caring

The pinnacle of the Unity Triangle is caring. Caring synthesizes what we've discovered through openness and what meaning we've attached through understanding and asks, "What are we going to do about it?" Caring is an active response to the individual and collective power of a teaching and learning environment that fosters openness and promotes understanding through the cognitive and affective exploration and expression of the diverse beliefs, philosophies, principles, catalysts and emotions that comprise the Social Education.

Caring is never passive. The caring student is no longer satisfied with Social Education that simply informs. The caring student is one that embraces Social Education that transforms. No longer will the flat images of Hiroshima and the sterilized descriptions and justification of atomic warfare be accepted as just another chapter to be temporarily memorized and soon forgotten.

Caring motivates the student to challenge the representation of facts in Social Education textbooks, curricula and media materials by searching for alternative viewpoints, primary documents and ethnographic depictions not represented in the text's accounting of events surrounding Hiroshima, Nagasaki or any topic of study. Caring facilitates the quest for ties that compare and contrast the decisions to use atomic weapons in 1945 to the contemporary issues that comprise today's anti-nuclear movements. The cause and effect relationships born from the delivery of a bomb on an August morning in 1945 are soon seen as the contemporary catalysts of the content, concepts, themes and issues of peace movements that have unified people across this nation and globe.

Caring bridges the gap between the abstract and the concrete by attaching personal meaning to events that take place in times, in lands and to people far away. Caring empowers the student to write, develop and produce posters, murals, films, pictorials, music, web pages, short stories, poetry, essays, editorials and a litany of personalized products that juxtaposition the student's contemporary world to the events that led to Hiroshima. Caring is the essence to the phrase, "think globally and act locally."

Caring seeks answers and solutions that offer alternatives to war, conflict and violence. Mary-Wynne Ashford's research on peace education concluded that when students seek alternatives to prevent war and violence they develop new attitudes about themselves and others (1996).

In addition, Ashford's research indicates that students who are actively seeking solutions to war and violence seemed "less likely to suffer anxiety and helplessness, and the actions of these children and youth contributed to changing public opinion about war" (1996).

Caring students challenge the notion that the scope and sequence of Social Education textbooks and curricula must follow the pathway of wars and armed conflict. It causes students to challenge the presentation of America's heritage as democracy born from war. Critical inquiry of "Why war?" and "How peace?" replace the concept that one war's end is simply a segue to the next great conflict.

Caring motivates students to look beyond the essentialists' notion that learning is achieved when facts are memorized. Caring seeks deeper cognitive and affective expression of concepts, themes and issues being studied. Peace is no longer simply freedom from war or hostility. Peace also implies a full stomach, a roof to sleep under, educational opportunities, access to medicine, and hope for the future.

Sometime They'll Give A War and Nobody Will Come

The Unity Triangle builds affective context to the cognitive information surrounding Hiroshima (or any other concept, theme or issue) by transforming the event to a level that explores the broader view of peace and war by examining the catalysts to injustice and the alternatives to revenge. No longer is war the only answer or solution to the human condition of conflict. No longer is the notion of world peace unattainable.

If the most recent horrific acts of school violence in Santee, CA, Littleton, CO, Jonesboro, AR, Pearl, MS, and a seemingly endless list of other schools and communities across this nation have taught us any thing, we know that isolation, exclusion, abandonment, bullying, apathy and despair, mixed with easy access to firearms, is the volatile mixture that has led to the violent and tragic outcome in playgrounds and classrooms throughout America. How do we help students seek solutions to conflict? How do we promote collaboration? How do we teach tolerance? How do we equip students with the skills that lead to constructive solutions?

Openness, understanding and caring are the antithetical responses to isolation, exclusion, abandonment, apathy and despair. Openness, understanding and caring are also the ingredients to powerful Social Education teaching and learning. These three elements are the vehicles that inspire the Social Education student to initiate a letter campaign or a petition drive that calls

upon local, state, national and international leaders to rebuild the homes of those who have been victims of natural or human violence and destruction; to design programs that feed the hungry and impoverished whose means of sustenance have been destroyed by domestic and international violence; to run for local, state and national elected office on a social justice platform; to organize and lead protest movements that target political and corporate leaders whose environmentally irresponsible policies, practices and production of goods endanger the lives of human and animal species across the globe; to seek peaceful solutions to the conflicts that arise from misunderstanding, intolerance, avarice and prejudice at home, in school and in society.

The Unity Triangle ensures that Social Education doesn't just inform, but it also prepares students to reform and transform the way they think, act and feel about themselves and the world around them. It inspires them to create movements that change the way Social Education is represented in the next generation of Social Education textbooks, curricula and media resources. Thinking locally and acting globally become mantras instead of mottos.

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